

The Great (Communist) Camouflage

The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power During the Civil War, by Burnett Bolloten; Foreword by Raymond Carr, *Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979. xxv + 664 pp. \$29.00.*

IN SPANISH, *historia* means both a history and a story. *The Spanish Revolution* is a history but is no story. Considering the drama of the Spanish Civil War one might have wished for an epic, a legend, a romance. But the beginning, middle, and end of Soviet chicanery do not produce a denouement beyond an autopsy. Here is no matter for a twicetold tale but the files on a war fought by Spanish soldiers whose fate was doomed in official buildings, whether in Moscow or Madrid, before Generalissimo Francisco Franco swept the whole lot away by military action. There is no wine-dark sea lapping Barcelona and the Spanish Levant, no Cid roaming the North, no clash at Roncesvalles. What we have here are the documents, the files on the files, in short, the evidence rather than the sound of battle, or the smell of burning churches, or the horror of NKVD (OGPU) jails transplanted from Russia (except for the brief sound of the "screams and moans" of the head of the "Trotskyist" POUM heard from a "Communist checa" at Alcalá de Henares).

This book is not history as literature. The subtitle makes clear why. The narrative concerns only the struggle for power on the Left. The struggle is diabolic, unnerving, wholly disillusioning, bitter and sour, undignified. It makes a mockery of the idealism of revolutionary dreamers among the disinherited, and that of the foreign fighters for a cosmic ideal. This account of Communist betrayal on a worldwide scale is in places disgusting. Mr. Burnett Bolloten's work is to document a Grand Illusion. He succeeds in his labor. It is, perhaps, only a collective portrait of one war in one country, but it mirrors the en-

tire Western World (including Russia) as it slipped into the mutual annihilation of modern civilization. Perhaps the account is so dire because the struggle was so deadly.

Bolloten's amplified classic (of its kind) was published in preliminary form as *The Great Camouflage* (in 1961 and 1968), and is a work of exhaustive scholarship. It will serve as a necessary and permanent reference book. It is not the life of a life-filled (and death-filled) cataclysm. The senses are hardly present. The imagination of a Solzhenitsyn, for instance, is never summoned. I myself sought in vain for some mention of Tomás Harris, whom I once met on Mallorca in his role as a world renowned expert on Goya prints and author of a vast *catalogue raisonné*, and whose death freed Anthony Blunt from self-imposed silence and allowed him to confess to being a Soviet agent along with Maclean and Burgess and Philby. Blunt was the "Fourth Man." Tomás Harris was the "Fifth." Blunt named Harris as their paymaster. He admitted that he would not have confessed to anything if Harris had not been killed in Mallorca. Harris was active in Spain. The half-Spanish son of a London antique dealer, he married a Spanish woman. He died on a Mallorcan road without ever having said a word on these matters. Blunt was now free to speak, he testified. I looked to see if Bolloten, a man of multilingual consultation, might have found some evidence. But Harris is not now in the index. Still, perhaps Bolloten will add some news to future editions of his ever-expanding (?) book.

The "Great Camouflage" (*El gran engaño* in the Spanish translation of the book) of Bolloten's original title is still the main theme of this amplification, for it concentrates on both the Communist attempt to conceal the nature of the social revolution that swept Spain before the Communist Party existed in any strength and the Communists' attempt to conceal their effective takeover of the Spanish Republic. This book proves once and for all that the army and government which Franco defeated was not republican but Communist, fiercely directed by and answerable to Moscow.

So much did the Stalinists dominate the Spanish Republic that Moscow-style trials were attempted in Spain against so-called Trotskyites, who were properly anti-Stalin Marxists, and against the anarcho-syndicalists, who had guided or inspired the social revolution. In fact, the Russian-run party imposed its own complex of diseases on Spain. And in the end the Russian malaise brought down the Republic from within while Franco broke it down from without. (Bolloten refers to Franco's counter-revolutionary uprising as exactly that, an "uprising," an "insurrection," or a "military rebellion," throughout.)

In tracing the Communist dragooning of a social revolution which was not theirs, Bolloten documents the paradoxes of Red practice. Even as they re-directed the revolution down their own road, they betrayed the Spanish Republic in the interests of Soviet foreign policy. Though the Russians sent military aid to the Republic to counteract the early and quick help given Franco's military force by Germany and Italy, the Soviets sent their aid relatively late (and with strings attached)—because Stalin was giving preference to building the eventual Hitler-Stalin pact which stunned the world not long after. Bolloten is the first to set the record amply straight and in this respect represents an advance on such historians as Hugh Thomas, whose major contribution at the time of his *The Spanish Civil War* (1961 and 1965) was his use of the German archives. Preliminary hesitancy on many points are rendered certainties by further work on the files; Bolloten also makes up for the short-sighted negligence shown by those who first handled the captured German archives after World War II.

Bolloten is able to draw conclusions regarding such controversial leading characters and conspirators as Walter Krivitsky and Alexander Orlov. Typically, early American intelligence was unequipped to make much of these exotics, men outside its ordinary understanding. Krivitsky, a major figure in the Comintern and the GPU in Europe, defected in the course of the Spanish War, and was never clearly

placed nor comprehended by Western organisms, up to his "mysterious suicide" in Washington, D.C. in 1941, — or even up to this day.

The author presents the first succinct yet fully evidenced account of the chaotic "May Days" of 1937 in Barcelona, known confusedly to thousands of readers of George Orwell. In that year in that city the Communist-controlled police and Civil Guard (the latter renamed, after reorganization, the National Republican Guard, whose top general had found no paradox in joining the Communist Party, though his corps had always been thought of as a legendary "Cossack"-like force against civil disobedience) violently suppressed the so-called "Trotskyites" of the POUM party and the anarcho-syndicalists. These are the May days about which Orwell writes so dramatically in his *Homage to Catalonia* (amply cited by Bolloten), a vivid book which reveals the treachery of the Communist-led police, but a book of which no reader could make any sense (no more than could the author) regarding the reason or un-reason of the events. In amazement and confusion Orwell himself witnessed the repression. His book is a masterpiece of reporting; for all that, his senses were often in suspension, for he somehow never managed to *see* the sea, in the port of Barcelona (a few blocks down the street, at the foot of the central Ramblas, from where he was reporting): a negative feat difficult to accomplish in maritime Barcelona. (Orwell also never managed to see or touch or smell the magnificent Gothic cathedral, and confused its very existence with the architect Gaudi's startling and imaginative Templo de la Sagrada Familia, which he regretted the Anarchists had not succeeded in blowing up, though they had tried: it was built by Catalan master craftsmen.)

A cavil not entirely captious is the omission from serious consideration of all the great minds of Spain at the time. The two most important Spaniards of the century, Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno, are not in the index. They were old-fashioned liberals (considered elitist and obscurantist reac-

tionaries by modern liberals) and fathers of the democratic Republic; when they endured what they saw in real life, one went into exile, the other died. There is no index entry for Pérez de Ayala or Américo Castro, though both were ambassadors, in London and Berlin, for the Republic, one an excellent novelist and the other the historian of the bizarre assimilation of the Jews into the Spanish bloodstream after the official expulsion. The Nobel laureate and poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, though he was arrested by Red militia in Madrid while functioning for the Republic, is not indexed. Not even the publicist for the Right, the half-English intellectual Maeztu, is in the index. Only the politicians are not given short-shrift (there is one sentence, *en passant*, cited from another book, Frank Sedwick's on Azaña: "many founders of the Republic and intellectuals like Marañón [also not in the index], Pérez de Ayala, Ortega y Gasset...either had left Spain already [October 1936] or were soon to make their exit.>"). It is also true that, unlike other European Communist Parties, the Spanish Communist Party could never count on the country's great figures in arts and letters, or among academics. If it had counted on them, they would presumably have figured in the present book.

The pivotal role in the Communist Party's takeover of the Spanish Republic played by Alvarez del Vayo, erstwhile editorial-staff member of the *Nation* (New York)—during which service he denied the facts—is fully evidenced, perhaps for the first time, by Bolloten. Even more damning is the author's definitive documentation of Juan Negrin's pro-Communist and pro-Comintern activity. As finance minister, Negrin oversaw the transfer of Spain's gold reserves, "estimated at the time as third largest in the world," to Stalin's Russia. His great defender abroad was Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*, author of several books on Spain: "he remained until his death in 1956 Negrin's principal apologist in the vast bibliography on the Spanish conflict." (Matthews was also principal American

apologist for Fidel Castro.) Of Negrin, the uniquely clear-headed Salvador de Madariaga had already written that his former colleague had abandoned "the strict path of truth" for the "intellectual bog" of Communism.

With respect to Spanish gold Bolloten's account is fascinating narrative. He speaks minutely of the transfer, by Russian trucks and tank-corpsmen from secret caves to dockside, of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of gold. The loading aboard Russian ships kept sixty sailors working all night for three nights. It constituted "the treasure of an ancient nation, accumulated through the centuries!" At Odessa, the stevedores who unloaded the ships were the "highest OGPU [NKVD] officials": they carried the boxes of gold on their backs over cleared docks for "days and days." Of the 7,800 cases only 13 contained ingots: 7,787 contained millions upon millions of gold pieces, from American dollars and Mexican pesos to English sovereigns and Russian rubles, antique and rare and of a numismatic value far beyond their weight. The Russians melted down these pieces of history for their weight alone, giving the Spanish Republic credit to buy arms (from the Russians themselves). Of those who signed the receipts many were later liquidated. A wealth of records and testimony is adduced for the entire transaction.

As indicated in the title, this book is about Revolution. It is not redolent with the sound and smell and fury which are present in such revolutionary classics as John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* or Leon Trotsky's *The Russian Revolution*, to give two examples from the left. And we could add, as an example from the "right," such a classic as Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, a searing vision. Bolloten's book of documented facts is no white-hot Remembrance of Things Past inspired by Clio. It is at the opposite end to the imagistic report furnished by Orwell, which, though riddled by lack-of-sense impressions, had savor. But Bolloten's book must be the definitive depository to date of most of the truth of what went on in Spain under the Great (Communist) Camou-

flage. In his Foreword, historian Raymond Carr calls the book a "mine" to be "worked over" by subsequent historians. Except for a subsequent chronicler's covering some omissions of the kind mentioned above, I cannot imagine anyone but a writer of history as literature carrying the story any further.

Reviewed by ANTHONY KERRIGAN