

Beware, Dangerous Corner!

Camillo Berneri

5th November 1936

1. I shall not say like some people: I cannot be silent! No, I want to talk. I have a duty to do it and I have a right to do it in the name of the self-criticism which is the essence of any party or movement concerned to retain its own appearance and to accomplish its own historic mission. Persuaded that the Spanish Revolution is rapidly approaching a dangerous corner, I seized my pen as I would seize a rifle or a revolver. With the same determination, but also with the same ferocity. Please allow me a style suited to the atmosphere of war in which I live: the style of a hail of machine gun fire.
2. The military situation has not improved. These are the principal reasons: lack or scarcity of arms and ammunition, absence of a united command, general inadequacy of the leaders, the capitulating attitude on the part of the central government, dualism and antagonism between Madrid and Barcelona. It appears clearly that we must change from a war of positions to a war of movement, unleashing the offensive according to a broad and solid general plan. Henceforth time is against us. We must definitely accelerate the process of war in order to pass beyond the phase of the war into the fuller and more profound one of the Social Revolution.
3. We must master the war, but we shall not master the war by limiting the problem to the strictly military conditions of victory. We must above all take account of the 'socio – political' conditions of victory.

The Civil War in Spain being an international conflict, it is on international ground that we must pose the problem of revolutionary action in terms of war, it is at its weak points: Morocco and Portugal that we must cruelly wound Spanish Fascism. Up till now the obsessing preoccupation with equipment for war has not permitted us to implement a plan of action which carried out in a timely and skilful manner would have been able to frustrate the Fascist Putsch. The Anarchists who assume the roles of generals would do well to remember their own experiences as revolutionaries.

4. When the CNT in Madrid declares that 'el gobierno de Madrid no sabe dirigir la guerra' (the government in Madrid does not know how to run the war), this inevitably poses the problem not only of the intervention of the CNT in the running of the war but also of the

conditions and form of such an intervention. It is not a matter of superhuman reforms, but simply of a broad, profound and rapid reform of the controlling groups and the organs and means of liaison among the various columns. The militarisation of the militias is not a solution of a technical nature only, and it is a political fault to have accepted it peacefully without clarifying its purposes, without illustrating its obscure points and without having discussed its principal outlines. The 'column spirit' ends the confusion between the power of political control and the power of military command can justify in part the decree of the Generalitat of Catalonia, but such a decree does not help at all towards the solution of the vital problems of the military victory of the revolution.

5. It is not possible to find a solution to the problem of the needs of the war until after we have resolved the question of Spanish politics.

Fabregas, councillor for economics of Catalonia could declare;

“We sent to Madrid a commission to ask the Government for credit of 300 million pesetas and also for the purchase of equipment for the war and 150 million francs for the purchase of raw materials. We offered as security 1000 million pesetas in government bonds belonging to our savings banks and deposited with the Bank of Spain. All that has been, refused us.”

(Solidaridad Obrera, 29th September).

- Madrid is not content just to reign, it wants to govern as well. As a whole the Spanish Government is just as hostile to the Social Revolution as to Monarchist and clerical fascism. Madrid desires a 'return to legality' and nothing else. Arming Catalonia, financing Catalonia, that signifies to Madrid arming the columns which carry the revolution on the points of their bayonets and supplying the new egalitarian economic order.

We must therefore, addressing ourselves to the Government in Madrid, give it the choice between defeat in the war and the revolution and victory.

6. Given that it is clear that the Government in Madrid is developing a 'policy of war' capable of ensuring its political hegemony and blocking the development of the Social Revolution; that the Communist Party (following directives laid down by Moscow) is tending to become the Foreign Legion of Democracy and Spanish Liberalism and that Spanish Social democracy at the very least, its controlling ranks is revolutionary ... in the manner of Caballero; it is therefore necessary that our press (without even raising the threat of war, of a 'march on Madrid' without even unleashing a polemic against the Communists and the Socialists, without even threatening the stability of the alliance between the CNT and the UGT) is at the very least cured of its intoxication with the unfortunate spins of 'holy union' which has ended up by reducing political criticism to an imperceptible minimum. 'Solidaridad Obrera' by exalting the Bolshevik government of the USSR, albeit in parentheses, achieved the summit of political naiveté.
7. The purging of the internal front is henceforth restrained by the normalisation, in terms of the police and the judiciary, of the struggle against Fascism. The fact that some elements

of the CNT and FAI have gone into police organisations is not sufficiently compensated by an autonomy which would have allowed speed and discretion in their duties and missions. And we must add to that certain absurd arrangements and certain red-tapisms that should have been abolished by the representatives of the CNT and the FAI continue to exist and are having disastrous effects.

8. The work of selecting military, health and administrative personnel is very incompetent. This selection could have been carried out by being based on the possibility of replacing immediately and equally, incompetent and unsafe elements by foreign elements faithful to the cause of the Spanish Revolution, or at least tested anti-fascists. This has not been tried.

In the same way the CNT does not make sufficient use of experts who could at present replace incompetent and suspect experts and tomorrow constitute the guiding cadres of libertarian communism

9. Some time ago the CNT and the FAI adopted, with respect to the 'normalisation' of the Spanish Revolution, an attitude of self-denial. 'L'Espagne Antifasciste' has denounced this phenomenon with great courage and keenness, I shall therefore not dwell on it. In short: the suppression of the Central Committee of the militias as well as the power of the workers' and soldiers' committees constitutes an outrage against the trade union control of the militias. I think that it is not without reason that 'Le Temps' heaves a sigh of relief while stating that the 'social revolution in Catalonia is becoming more and more egalitarian.'
10. The Council of Economy is basically nothing other than the 'Economic Council' instituted by the French Government. It does not seem to me to be a sufficient compensation for the Ministerialism of the CNT and the FAI, even in its practical applications. It is necessary to deplore, moreover, the advance of bolshevisation within the ranks of the CNT characterised by the ever diminishing possibility for elements at the power base to exercise a vigilant, active and direct control over the works accomplished by the organisation's representatives within government committees and Councils. We should create a series of commissions elected by the CNT and the FAI which have the aim of facilitating, but at the same time of rectifying whenever necessary the works of our representatives within the Councils of War and Economy.

This would be necessary in the same way in order to create points of contact between the personal work of these representatives and the necessities and possibilities of CNT and FAI initiatives.

11. I have tried to reconcile 'current' considerations, inherent in the necessities of the historic moment, with the direction of the 'trend' which does not seem to me to deviate from these necessities. I am not proposing any 'correct direction' to pilots navigating between surface shoals and powerful currents. Policy has its own necessities and the moment imposes on the Spanish Anarchists the necessity of a 'policy.' But we must be up to the mark of the historic role which it has been deemed useful to assume. But it is also necessary not to

believe that there are profound breaks of continuity in the directions of current trends.

To reconcile the 'necessities' of the war, the 'will' of the revolution and the 'aspirations' of Anarchism: there lies the problem. This problem must be resolved. On it depend the military victory against Fascism, the creation of a new economy, the social deliverance of Spain and the evaluation of the Anarchists' beliefs and actions. Three great things which merit every sacrifice and impose on each the duty to have the courage to state his own beliefs in their entirety.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Camillo Berneri
Beware, Dangerous Corner!
5th November 1936

Retrieved on 26th August 2021 from struggle.ws
Article which appeared in 'Guerra di Class' No. 4, 5th November, 1936. Translation published in
'The Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review' Number 4, 1978

usa.anarchistlibraries.net