

Madrid, sublime city

Camillo Berneri

2nd December 1936

Pilate is just as infamous as Judas. Who is Pilate today? He is not even the assembly of Geneva foxes, he is not even the ostriches of Social-democrat Ministerialism. Pilate is you, the European proletariat!

Can you, oh tender proletarian mother tuck your little child into its bed without seeing mangled children lying abandoned in the roads like carrion. Can you play lovingly with your child, oh proletarian, without thinking of the children lying in pain in hospitals, suffering the tortures of their wounded flesh and the anguishes of fear.

And yet you read left-wing papers and you know that there exists a great city running with blood, torn apart and reduced to ashes by explosions of shells; they tell that the children have been surprised by death when they were shouting to the heavens the songs of their unconcern, that their mothers roam about searching for the fruit of their wombs and carry their blood-stained bodies in search of unlikely or belated help. The stench of death rises from dispatches and correspondence from Madrid. The sky over Madrid is red with fires which should set the world aflame. And yet, everything collapses, everything burns, a whole population is dying – without the masses being affected.

In the agony of Madrid there is all the horror of a rape in the market-place on market day.

Death can continue to strike, sudden as hail in summer and unavoidable as lightening. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had for themselves the calm of high altitudes and the moral void of the époque. Let them shake it, let them rend it apart, let them burn it slowly, this martyred city; millions of proletarians don't care at all about it. Is Madrid resisting? Many wonder how long it can hold out. It is a European bullfight. It is a disgrace to the peoples and not merely to the governments and the classes. It is the blockade of anti-fascist indifference that adds itself to the criminal Fascist siege. Meetings will not stop the aircraft from flying through the sky over Madrid and scattering death and ruin. The cold sweat that weighs on the brows of mothers, the eyes of children enlarged by fear, the bodies pounded and shaken by the convulsions, are no more than a future vision of what you will suffer, you who are entrenched in non-intervention! Today, the war is in the sky over Madrid, tomorrow it will be in the sky over it Barcelona, the day after tomorrow in the sky over Paris. The European war has started again. It exists, even if it has not been declared. These are the aircraft and pilots of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany which are massacring and ruining Madrid.

The horror of it no longer touches people's consciences? Well then, the bombs will waken them. And that will be Historic justice.

Madrid, the joyous Vienna of the Iberian Peninsular is reviving the deeds of Sagonte. It has passed from the lovers' waltz to the Heroic Symphony. Epic witness of the acts of heroism of the masses and the militias, beside which those of the Commune of Paris pale in comparison; it is disappointing the warlike hopes of the generals it will expose their careful calculations, it will give the lie to their boastfulness. It is resisting and will resist. If the compassion of the masses is deaf, if Europe is incapable of anger, well then, the whole world will be branded by the energy of this city. Madrid will not be taken. It can be completely destroyed, but it will not be taken alive.

Death, exodus and the flames will make of it a new Pompeii to the very end.

If it is not the wings of victory, it will be those of Nemesis that are unfolded above it. The reputation of the Fascist generals is assured, but it will be the reputation of Genghis Khan. It will be another Commune. but it will not be a final glimmer; it will be the blazing up of a fire that will bring all the 'spectators' out of their lairs, at least as long as it does not burn them there in their Blumist beds.

Madrid where here thousands of men are fighting with an ardour nourished and sustained by the presence of thousands of women and children is in the process of pillorying its hangmen and the blind and deaf masses. It is in the process of lighting for all a light which will once more permit of hope in man.

Madrid, the martyr city, already merits the title of sublime.

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