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SPAIN AND VIETNAM

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Robert Colodny

Author of

Struggle for Madrid

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MEMBERS OF THE

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

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ROBERT COLODNY, author of "The Struggle for Madrid" (Paine-Whitman, N. Y. 1959) is a veteran of the 15th International Brigade, which fought in Spain, and of the U.S. Army in World War II.

The text of this pamphlet is based on an address delivered before the Historical Commission of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

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Illustrations by HARRY GOTTLIEB

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A NOTE TO THE READER

Here is a thoughtful work linking the thirties—and the fight against fascism in Spain—with the sixties—a time of American aggression in Vietnam. Professor Colodny is a fellow veteran of the war against Franco. We are proud to publish his essay on *Spain and Vietnam*.

Do you remember Spain, 1936? Young people know it only as history. Yet, though a quarter century has elapsed, it touches all of us today. It was the time of the Spanish Republic, when the fight against fascism flamed into life, when to help the Spanish people meant to help save the world from World War II. It was a time of great emotions, of compassion and conscience, most dramatically expressed by the 3,300 Americans who, with 40,000 other anti-fascists from 52 countries, formed the International Brigades that fought alongside the Spanish people. More than half remained behind with only the Spanish earth for their shroud.

Albert Camus wrote that "the tragedy of Spain remains to haunt the conscience of all true men." Today's tragedy of Vietnam not only haunts our conscience—it threatens to destroy life on our planet. Guernica, symbol for decades of the bitter fruits of fascism, is today surpassed a thousand times over by U.S. saturation bombings in Vietnam.

How obscene that Dean Rusk and our State Department should today distort the meaning of Guernica, Munich and Spain to marshal support for U.S. intervention in Vietnam. What madness to wage war in the name of peace, to rationalize our own criminal intervention and aggression in this far-off jungle country all in the name of stopping "the advance of communism."

The lesson of Spain—like the lesson Americans are learning in Vietnam—is that when a people love their freedom and their country, they will fight against unbelievable odds and as long as there is still one man who breathes. The people of Vietnam, like the people of Spain, reaffirm every day: "No Pasaran!"—"They shall not pass."

Fascism never succeeded in really defeating

the Spanish people. After three decades Franco continues to meet with mounting resistance. Asturian miners and workers are today quietly taking over the fascist-sponsored trade unions by electing their own candidates. The Catholic clergy, particularly lower echelons in the church, openly identify themselves with the struggle for elementary human rights. Students and a large segment of university faculty members demand the right to their own academic unions. A new generation of Spaniards is on the march. Change is in the air. In Barcelona and Madrid, Spring '67, mass demonstrations opposed U.S. intervention in Vietnam. The link of past to present is clearly evidenced.

We, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, see clearly the connection between the strangling of Spain and the rape of Vietnam. We call upon all Americans, all friends of peace to express once again their solidarity with and assistance to the noble Spanish people in their continuing quest for freedom and democracy. We are convinced that Robert Colodny's essay on *Spain and Vietnam* will help arm a new generation of anti-fascists here in America.

Maury Colow

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

October, 1967

SPAIN AND VIETNAM:

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By ROBERT G. COLODNY

Here in this company, where the memory of Spain is always green, and where the guns of Jarama and the Ebro have gone on reverberating to this day, it would be an act of pure pedantry to try to make a point-to-point correspondence between the tragedy in Spain of thirty years ago and the cruel conflict which is now raging in Southeast Asia. I think that in the minds and in the consciences of every adult who was shaped in some way by the Spanish War, there is the raw material and the theoretical understanding to do most of this on his own. What I propose to do here is to bring into sharper focus some of the ideas which have tormented us as we have watched month by month, year by year, the role once played by Hitlerism and the legions of fascism preempted by our own country. Having said this, I have, I think, cut to the heart of the issue.

The parallels between the Spanish conflict and the agony of Vietnam are stark and illuminating, and although a generation separates the events, there is a continuity between them. We need only remember that the same power elites which have maintained the hangman's regime of General Francisco Franco now sustain with blood and fire the military junta in Saigon.

Let us first examine the origins of the two conflicts. To the extent that historical scholarship can unravel any complex issue, it is certain that the violence in Asia, as well as the violence that raged recently in the Caribbean islands, had the same source as that which devastated Spain: it is the problem of the land, of the peasant, and of the landowner. It is the oldest story recorded by historians. For centuries the pattern of the struggle has been the same; only the name of the oppressor changes. There would be a silence and peace of a sort in Vietnam if the peasants only consented to remain serfs or slaves;

if they forgot, for our convenience, their millennial demands for agrarian justice. This was also the truth of Spain a generation ago. The Bourbon kings would still be ruling proudly had not the land hunger of the dispossessed, summed up over a dozen decades, brought that corrupt society down. In both cases, then—Spain thirty years ago, Vietnam today, (the highlands of the Andes tomorrow)—the dispossessed peasant, rifle in hand, fights for what is his. The courage and the self-sacrifice of today, which our leaders translate as “Red terrorism,” is but a repetition of the action of the tens of thousands of peasants and urban poor who made up the Fifth Regiment of the Spanish Republic in the days of our youth.

Furthermore, the occasion of the war in Spain was the triumph at the polls of the *Frente Popular*, that loosely knit political coalition stretching from middle class republicans to the communist and anarchist masses. And what had happened in Spain occurred also in France. There was thus in the mid-thirties a gathering of the peoples, their mobilization to oppose the menaces of fascism, imperialism and war. The catalyst of this movement, its orchestrator, was the Comintern. There are some who wish to suppress this fact, as though history could be undone, run backwards like a tape recorder and spliced to fit the political conveniences of the moment. Let us consider carefully this last point. In many countries of the world between 1933 and 1936, after the seizure of power by Hitlerism, and after a decade and a half of tragic internecine struggle among different factions of the working class, there was welded the transient unity of the Popular Fronts. The outcome was the dramatic peaceful victories at the polls from Belgium to Portugal, as millions of people proposed to establish a barrier against fascism and war, and at the same time, to remake the social foundations of collective life.

What is now the analogue in Asia? It is a generation later. The Second World War has been fought. The fascist thrust for global hegemony has been turned back. Russia's October Revolution, now celebrating its 50th anniversary,

has been followed by another revolution of equal profundity on the mainland of China, and sparks and embers from this revolution fall along all the peripheral lands of Asia. This stupendous change in the history of the world may mystify the Harvard deans called to Washington to play war games. It may baffle the computers clicking in the Pentagon. But the peasants of Asia, despite the fact that they did not attend the seminars of Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. or Jr., and do not have the advantage of doctor's degrees from Princeton and Yale, understand perfectly that the feudal agrarian order in the Orient was irreversibly undermined by World War II and the success of the People's Armies of China. It was this understanding that gave birth to the Viet Minh under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and sustained them in their costly but successful effort to drive French imperialism from their homeland.

Every reflection on the Vietnamese tragedy must start with the fact that the French effort to retain its imperial foothold in Asia was financed by the United States; that under John Foster Dulles, during the Eisenhower years, every counter-revolution in Asia was sustained by American power. The essence of the counter-revolution was to retain feudal relations on the land. Is it by chance that the South Vietnam generals are members of great landowning families (as they were when they served in the army of the French colonialists)? Is it coincidence that villages “liberated” by the “Allies” resume payment of 40% of their crop to absentee landlords? Is it only because of terror that the Vietcong can recruit from the peasant masses in areas where



the land has been distributed to those who cultivate it? It was in such a setting, during the murderous tyranny of Diem, that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam came into being. This was, I suggest, the *Frente Popular* of Spain brought up to date, as the center of gravity of revolution and counter-revolution shifted from Europe to the rimlands of Asia.

In the perspective of history, the Spanish conflict emerges as a people's war for social justice into which was intruded the power of foreigners: the intervention of Germany, Italy and Portugal on the side of the generals and oligarchs for whom the military acted, and the betrayal of the Spanish people's hopes and the legitimacy of its government by the elites of Great Britain and France, with the complicity of the State Department in Washington. It was in this context that Spain became a laboratory where the instigators of World War II perfected their weapons, tested their strategy, learned the range of the 88's, the coordination of tank and airplane. And those who graduated from this school plied their trade from Dunkirk to the Volga; whereas those who defended the ruined approaches to Madrid fought again at the gates of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad, on the beaches of Normandy and Anzio, Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal.

Today in Vietnam tests are also being run. Under the eyes of the entire world the techniques of counter-revolution are being perfected. Night after night Mr. and Mrs. North America can watch their sons at work applying the craft of counter-insurgency. A generation ago it was the radio which broadcast the agony of Spain to the ears of a fearful world. Today the magic of television makes us all direct, visual participants in Vietnamese violence. Our nerves reach out along this electromagnetic network. They contact the burning bodies of babies, and through this same enlargement of our awareness, our responsibility deepens. Thus we can watch the successors to Hitler and Mussolini perfect the techniques for the suppression of the modern Popular Fronts of the world.

We can no longer say, however, that this is being done on the orders of the President and

Secretary of Defense. It is done in our name, and it is we who have caused blood to be shed. If this war is the continuation of politics by means of violence, the politics with all of its dreadful mindlessness is *our* politics, *our* failures, and individually and collectively, we must be prepared to answer for it. It is one thing to wish to bring the war to an end. But this political task will remain an abortive enterprise as long as we fail to understand the social roots of the conflict. A remote peasant population is being portrayed as our national enemy, a threat to our national security. This is the judgment of the eminent Texan that *we* elected, and his



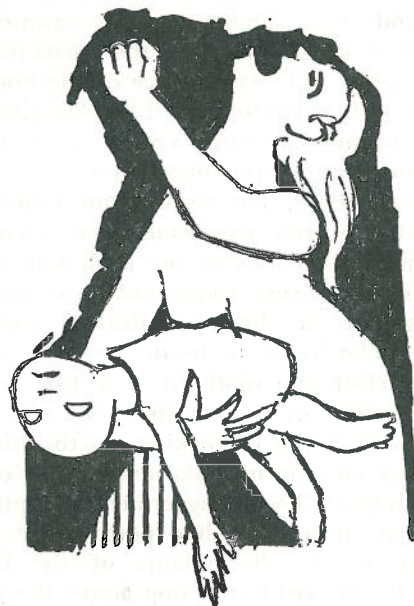
designation of Vietnamese villages as appropriate targets for American bombs has been sanctified by Cardinal Spellman and others. Yet we must repeat that the courage of the Vietcong and its long disposition to sacrifice itself in the face of insuperable odds reminds us of the Spanish Militia who, in similar circumstances, proved that flesh and spirit were stronger than steel and fire. And we must be prepared to ask ourselves whether or not there is enough napalm in the tanks of Dow Chemical to extinguish the soul of an entire people.

To tell the truth about Vietnam is a double-pronged enterprise. We are concerned not only

with the innocent flesh we burn there; we are equally concerned with the moral future of our own society. How will we explain this to our children and to our children's children? We are a young people, and it is not part of our national character to have built-in historical insight. But this American crime in Vietnam will echo down through the centuries. It becomes a piece with the ravages of the Huns, the *furor teutonicus* of World Wars I and II. And when the history of Asia is retold in generations to come, along with the depredations of the Mongols and Tamerlain, future historians will recall the helicopter fleets, the body counts, the strategic hamlets, the free-kill zones, the U.S. Marines, and generals who proposed to bomb a nation upon the stone age. This terrible burden placed upon the American conscience, already tormented by the radioactive ghosts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is part of our legacy to our children, and it is not lessened by the fraudulent appeals of the Secretary of State to the lessons of history and the conjuring up of the example of Munich. Indiscriminate genocidal bombing attacks and search-and-destroy missions are not undertaken to preserve the freedom of the Vietnamese people nor to protect them from China. These acts are coldly calculated to secure an American *place d'armes* on the continent of Asia, just as the fascist crusade against the Spanish Republicans was intended to secure a base of operations for the greater war already on the planning boards of the general staffs in Berlin and Rome. To what other end do vast permanent encampments arise at Camranh Bay and in Thailand? Do we not propose to make the Pacific an American lake in the same manner that Mussolini proposed to turn the Mediterranean into his *mare nostrum*?

These multiple horrors will evoke bitter memories among those who supported the Spanish Republic. Who has forgotten Guernica? This was one small Basque town of 8,000 people. It was shattered in one afternoon in April, 1937, and that crime has haunted its perpetrators ever since. How many Guernicas have U.S. bombers created in Vietnam? In remembering this ter-

rible epoch, we will not do justice to our own generation if we do not recall also that the struggle and agony of the Spanish people deeply touched the conscience of the whole world, and that the response to German *schrecklichkeit* as displayed in Spain prepared the overthrow of fascism. This was a complex process, but it involved among other things the awakening of political awareness of tens of millions of people who otherwise might have participated passively, if at all, in the events that were shaping the twentieth century. Spain was the great political and moral crisis which forged the destinies of our generation and gave the world a second chance. The cry that echoed from Madrid, the thesis that no man is an island, called legions upon legions of ordinary men and women out of the cocoon of self-centeredness, transforming them into citizens of the world. In the aftermath, the Thousand-Year Reich of Adolf Hitler, the Neo-Roman Empire of the Blackshirts, and the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere of Imperial Japan were consumed in the flames. As the Spanish conflict produced this effect in the thirties, so the Vietnamese war is doing the same



in the sixties, with consequences which many a regime now ruling by the grace of God will come to regret before the seventies have passed.

One of the fateful consequences of this conflict is the following: the Americanization of the Vietnamese civil war has called into being an international rear guard for the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Its psychic logistics run back into every city and village around the globe. The International War Crimes Trial, summoned by Bertrand Russell, Jean Paul Sartre and others, is but one manifestation, and surely not the last, of a global concern. Not since the days of the Spanish struggle have the intellectuals, the writers, poets, playwrights and artists, united with millions of ordinary folk in so profound and sustained an effort to change the course of history.

Despite the growing intensity of the Peace Movement, particularly in our own country, our historical memory should sound a warning. When the Spanish Republic fought for its life, and when on the outcome there hung precariously the peace of the world, great crowds also demonstrated and called into question the morality and intelligence of their governments. The five International Brigades arrived in Spain to fight and die. Their sacrifice aroused the admiration of the world, but the fascist intervention persisted. The cruel farce of the non-intervention policy continued. The American embargo on arms shipments to Spain was not lifted. The unity of the potential victims of fascism was not achieved. The Second and Third Internationals did not overcome their ideological differences, and many of the leaders of the national sections were foredoomed to suffer and die together in the concentration camps of Europe. The lesson to be drawn from this for today is clear and ominous. The two great socialist powers are locked in a fateful conflict. Those who dream of picking up the pieces of European empire in Asia take great comfort from this feud. They exaggerated its depth, they distort its meaning. They portray for us the prospect of the descendants of the Chinese Eighth Route Army storming across the steppes

of Central Asia to clash with some new Alexander Nevsky on the plains before Kiev and Novgorod. This should not become our nightmare, but neither can we ignore the cruel fact.

There is another parallel which must be examined briefly. The liberal imagination of the twenties and thirties was stirred by the hopes occasioned by the creation of the League of Nations. Yet when the aggression against Spain was brought before that forum, the British and French governments, abetted by their client



states, sabotaged all efforts of the League to fulfill its obligations to a member state, the Spanish Republic. Has not the same wrecking process been carried out in the halls of the United Nations? Have not the peace-making efforts of U Thant been aborted? Remember that Portugal, the primary base from which aggression was launched against Spain, was a puppet of the British Empire, as Thailand, the American bomber base against Vietnam, is a satellite of the United States. In neither case was the accomplice called to account. Of course, the exclusion of China from United Nations membership—a critical plank in U.S. foreign policy—hopelessly complicates the problem of peacemaking in Asia. The League was a marble shell at the end of the Spanish conflict. The United Nations will be a glass and steel mausoleum for the people's dreams if the Asian war is not halted.

In the case of Spain, not only did the oligar-

chy call upon the Spanish generals to suppress the Spanish people; they summoned the Condor Legion from Germany, six divisions from Fascist Italy; and recruited the scum of Europe and put them into the Spanish Foreign Legion. They brought 75,000 Moors from Spanish and French Africa, their ex-colonial subjects, as mercenary killers. Do we not see a similar pattern in Vietnam? What is the role of the South Korean divisions, the troops from the wretched Philippine Islands, the Australians and New Zealanders? These alien forces are no different than Franco's Moors. They play the same shameful role in Asia today as did the Hessians of King George III in the America to be of 1776.

The policies of the pro-Franco forces were justified in the name of a "Nationalist" anti-communist crusade. It was asserted in Berlin and Rome that Germany and Italy had no designs in Spain other than to prevent the establishment of a Soviet beachhead. This shoddy propaganda created no credibility gaps in London, Paris, Washington and the Vatican. Beneath the mask of anti-communism as worn by Hitler and Mussolini were the cold eyes of the frightened bourgeoisie of Europe and its merchant princes. Of course, they hated the Spanish "Reds," and the blood of the innocent in Barcelona and Andalusia disturbed their sleep but little. They had a place in their ledgers, however, for the mercury of Almaden, for the lead mines of Penarroya, the copper of Rio Tinto, the iron of Bilbao, the mineral wealth of Morocco, for the good wines that had been shipped from Spain to England since the peninsular wars of the early 19th century. The anti-bolshevik crusaders of the thirties had one eye cocked on the stock exchanges of the world.

Imperialism has not changed its character. It feared then that a victory of the Spanish Republic might set the example for fundamental reforms all over the western world, with the concomitant threat of the nationalization of the sources of wealth. The British, French and American statesmen who prepared the way for the shameful betrayal of Munich had this fear in the forefront of their minds—which is why

they preferred Franco to Caballero, Hitler to Blum. This was an early example of the so-called domino theory of history which is used now to justify the Vietnam adventure. John Foster Dulles and his successors in the Department of State did not really anticipate a sweep of Mao Tse-tung's armies into Saigon or Bangkok. What they feared, then as now, was a successful indigenous peasant revolution which might by its example set aflame the peasant lands of Asia. But be it noted very carefully: the suppression of these revolts will not lead, nor is it intended to lead, to a birth of democracy or of agrarian justice in this vast area of the globe. What is proposed is the support of a series of Asian Francos, of whom General Ky, the Hitler-lover, like Chiang Kai-shek before him, is the perfect model. Imperialism's answer to peasant rebellion is counter-revolution, implemented with all the terrible weaponry of the 1960's.

We must keep clearly in mind that there is nothing new about all of this. Social reform at home and imperialism abroad has been a pattern of Western history since the 1830's. In the old days there was less hypocrisy about it. The British and French Empires were built on the bones of armies recruited in the industrial slums. It was on the backs of the urban poor that the "white man's burden" was carried. Two generations ago the rebellion of Aguinaldo in the newly conquered Philippine Islands was crushed by a U.S. expeditionary force



which had large contingents of black Americans recruited from the misery of the rural south. Do not the American poor, black and white, bear the major burden of the Vietnamese war?

But the times have changed. Imperial adventures are no longer the concern of professional soldiers in the metropolis, nor can they be restricted to purely national exercises in power politics. We have set the jungles ablaze in Vietnam and the embers have fallen on our own cities. Should U.S. escalation continue, we may well turn the whole earth into a radioactive mist. The response to this must be commensurate with the danger and it must begin with a change



in the American historical vision and political attitudes. We must not delude ourselves. We are the *only ones who can accomplish this. We will not be rescued from this Vietnamese folly by the guile or diplomacy of General de Gaulle. Chairman Kosygin will not and cannot extricate us. We should not wait for the appearance of Russians or Czechs or North Koreans as international brigades defending Hanoi. There remains only the American people. We are 190,000,000. We are not totally devoid of political experience or of historical insight. Nor is the current young generation ready to be led like sheep to a slaughter which has no greater consequence than

to save the careers of deceitful politicians. The young people who rode the freedom buses to Alabama, who died in Mississippi delta towns, who have mobilized their membership for a hundred peace marches, who have produced scores of martyrs already languishing in jail, deserve more from American society than death in counter-revolutionary wars. We can help them by clarifying the historical roots of their anguish; above all, by showing them what Americans accomplished during the crisis of the Spanish War. Even peace in Vietnam will not end our travail. The theoreticians of this war have made it clear that they are prepared to shower napalm and dispatch Green Berets to any area of the third world where the poor and the damned rise up in their desperation.

When will we know that the crisis has been overcome, that America and the rest of humanity have learned how to build that federation of the peoples implicit in the magnificent science and technology of this age? We will know this when an agency of the United States Government will be empowered by the Congress to go to Spain, and from one of the battlefields where the fallen of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade sleep, bring back one dead American and put him as an unknown soldier in Arlington Cemetery—where he has the same right as those who fought at Gettysburg or at Belleau Wood or on the beaches of Normandy. For then, and only then, will Americans have redeemed the bright promise of their own birth.

What You Can Do

- ✓ **Write to President Lyndon B. Johnson**
and to your Congressmen and Senators
demanding an end to the war in Vietnam.
- ✓ **Write to Ambassador Merry del Val,**
Spanish Embassy, in Washington, D.C.,
informing him Americans will aid
Spaniards who oppose U.S. intervention
in Vietnam.
- ✓ **Contribute to the V.A.L.B.**
to enable us to circulate many additional
thousands of copies of this pamphlet.
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.....
*For there are those who cannot see
The mighty roots of liberty
Push upward in the dark
To burst in Flame—
A million stars—
And one your name:
Man
Who fell in Spanish earth:
Human seed
For freedom's birth.*

excerpt from *Tomorrow's Seed*
by LANGSTON HUGHES

.....
*I remember a tune we used to hear in Spain
And it made the heart beat faster, and we knew
Each time as our blood was kindled once again
Why the blue sky above us was so blue*

.....
*I remember a tune which was whistled at night
In a sunless time, an age with no wandering
knight
When children wept for the bombs and in
catacombs
A noble people dreamt of the tyrant's doom*

excerpts from *Santa Espina*
by LOUIS ARAGON



Madrid
University students
burn U.S. flag
in April 28, 1967
demonstration
against war
in Vietnam.

Banner reads:
YANKEE KILLERS
GET OUT
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