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1938

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Insulting the flag

André Prudhommeaux

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The most fulsome possible insult to the tricolour flag has just been hurled at it by the neo-patriots.

The Daladier¹ government has just cast itself in the role of flunkey to Mussolini and Hitler and the French Cagouards² by launching an across-the-board embargo on foreign anti-fascists.

The National Popular Front or Popular National Front chamber has put its signature to this disgraceful measure, a trespass against democracy, a silly chauvinism and cravenness on the part of this nation.

The range of political parties, personalities and agencies of the Left has made itself complicit in this infamy: without the slightest whimper of protest.

Ultimately, the country as a whole has indicated that it is okay with penal servitude, okay with butchery, okay with the most abject of Sacred Unions, that of stupidity and slavishness.

¹ Edouard Daladier, French politician: one of the 'fathers' of the Popular Front.

² The Cagoule was the nickname of the clandestine, far right, pro-fascist CSAR (Secret Revolutionary Action Committee) Cagoulard was the name given to its members/supporters.

The entire nobility of a people can be summed up by its stance vis a vis those not part of the nation.

Now, by order of Monsieur Albert Sarraut, known as “The Sphinx,” there are to be two very well-defined classes of “guests of France”; the well-to-do, protected ones, including the spies and agents provocateurs of foreign powers, such as the likes of Troncoso, Tamburini and Co.³, the S.A. from the Brown House in Paris, the henchmen of the fasci, the informers of the GPU and Gestapo, in short, all of those one associates with money, idleness, papers in perfect order (be they genuine or phoney) and adherence to the police-national-capitalist game. And then there are the others...

The others: that means the outlawed, the persecuted, the courageous free men who had fled from the abjection of dictatorial rulers. It means the workers lured to France by French capitalists and who have well-meaningly agreed to rent their brawn to it, without quite agreeing to sell it their souls too. It means all those foreign proletarians or colonials who have retained their independence vis a vis the informers of such as Chiappe,⁴ Sarraut or Doriot⁵ — and stayed honest when faced with the thugs from the Consulates, Mussolini’s dopolavoro⁶ schemes and the yellow unions — and retained their integrity

³ Julian Troncoso was the leading Francoist spy involved in operations against Spanish republican interests on French soil. Tamburini (passing for an “anarchist”) was involved with Locuty and Fiomberti — in a double bombing in Paris in 1937 designed to bring a crackdown on communists and anarchists. On capture, he admitted having worked for Rome, Salamanca and Berlin.

⁴ Jean Chiappe, French civil servant, police prefect and politician involved with the far right.

⁵ Jacques Doriot, one-time leader of the Communist Youth and a communist party prefect who moved to the right and launched the PPF (French People’s Party) in 1936, before becoming an open associate of the Third Reich and fighting on the Eastern Front alongside the Germans in WW2.

⁶ The dopolavoro (after-work) schemes were the cultural front of the Italian fascist movement.

by steering clear of Carbone's gangs⁷ and the gangs of Sidilarite Francaise.⁸ Meaning, ultimately, all the Spanish republican refugees that have been stalked (by bombs most fascist, Nazi flame-throwers, blackshirt bayonets, the cut-throats of the Tercio⁹ and Moorish mercenaries, by shells blessed by the Pope and, sometimes, even by the revolvers of the stalinist Cheka) all the way to the oh-so- hospitable and oh-so-liberal land of French democracy.

These are in good standing. All set-asides of expulsion orders are to be reviewed and all files re-examined! There is to be no renewal of residence permits for those who had managed thus far to evade civil service whims! Draconian punishment (minimum of one year in prison) for any breach of the foreigners' statute! Draconian prison terms and fines for any French citizen who may have welcomed, hosted, harboured under his roof a foreigner whose identity card is not up to date! Men hunted through the streets, in furnished rooms, in public places, in workshops and homes. Rewards posted for information given, for unspeakable revenge, for anonymous informants. Police attention unleashed against all who have dared think that France was somewhere that they might yet have the right, even though starving to death, to think for themselves and walk along with head held high, without being subjected to marching in step and political, trade union and religious dragging into the ranks of totalitarian fascism.

This climate of provocation and unbridled tittle-tattle, this fascism which they had been seeking to flee from, is orchestrated by France against these people first and even against her own liberalism-guilty citizens.

⁷ Carbone was a Corsican gangster, pimp and drug pusher, involved in political bossism and strike-breaking in Marseilles and partnered with Chiappe (above) in prostitution in Montmartre.

⁸ A mocking reference to Solidarité Française, a far right activist group founded by Major Jean Renaud.

⁹ The Spanish Foreign Legion, notoriously pro-fascist.

The policy of the Popular Front and communists, the bloc stretching from Thorez¹⁰ to Marin,¹¹ proceeds to cries of “France for the French!” It is to cries of “France for the French!” that machine-guns will be installed tomorrow along the Pyrenean border, not so that they can be trained on fascist or swastika-daubed planes coming to bomb Cerbere or Bourg-Madame, but to strafe the huddled working class masses stalked by Franco’s murderers and to deny refugees seeking asylum across the French border, which will be open solely to the disciples of Gil Robles¹² and Juan March,¹³ but must remain hermetically sealed against these “undesirables.”

In the face of such a disgrace, without precedent in the history of any people, our reckoning is that every French person whose bond with the land of their birth is not made up exclusively of sordid jealousy and greed, is duty-bound to consider themselves a foreigner in their own country. And have no option but to deny a Homeland which is brazenly embracing a world that is a hideous confraternity of profiteers, informers and assassins, a land bereft of righteousness, ideals or honour.

The blood of natives, slaughtered in their thousands by the French government in Violette’s Indochina and in North America; the blood of Spaniards turned away under aerial bombardment or handed over to the firing squads of the rebel army; the blood of the Italians and Germans delivered up to their fascist executioners; the blood of those we have described as “our friends and our guests” and which is holy in the eyes of every god-given and man-made law; that blood is on the head of the French nation.

¹⁰ Maurice Thorez, prominent French Communist Party leader.

¹¹ Louis Marin, French politician who held a number of cabinet portfolios in the 1930s.

¹² Leader of the right-wing CEDA party in Spain.

¹³ Notorious Spanish smuggler and financier who was a major backer of the July 1936 coup attempt in Spain.

That blood is and shall remain upon your head, all of you who support the parties (whether these purport to be “nationalist” or “internationalist”) which have, by their silence or their votes, countenanced, allowed, authorized, encouraged the recent ignominy of the Daladier government.

The shame that falls upon all who go by the description “French,” when that tag is synonymous with so much squalor, money-grubbing and penny-pinching, when, say, they turn back to certain death and despair all of the asylum-seeking populace of Spain, just to make a 50-billion franc saving!

When German racism seeks to exclude from Germany those of different stock, it may come as an affront to one’s humanitarian feelings; yet it operates on the basis of a political complex of ideas and enthusiasms. But for France which — so they say — “covers with her flag” a majority of colonized peoples (whose lands she has ravaged) and foreigners (whose labour she exploits) to have behaved the way she has towards the “native” and “foreign” workers on her “soil” is an overwhelming indication once and for all just what a sordid and filthy rag the flag of Monsieur Jean Zay¹⁴ and the French Republic is.

A.P. In *Terre libre* (Nîmes) No 52, 6 May 1938

¹⁴ Jean Zay, French minister of Education, 1936–1939.