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On the militarisation of the Italian column

Unpublished letter on militarisation

Camillo Berneri

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Rosselli¹ envisages having the maximum contact between our column and the other (the Italian section of the International Brigades attached to the Communist Party. Translator's note), well I refuse it. But the important problem is that of the autonomy of our section, autonomy which Rosselli proposes, but which I do not find advisable, because it amounts to cutting off the majority of the section which we have formed from a militia responsive to our ideas; because I do not see how militarisation would exclude us when it did not succeed in separating us from the Ascaso column. It seems to me, therefore, easier to escape militarisation by remaining within the CNT and FAI militia, rather than submitting directly to the military command.

There remains the question of the development of the section. The Italian column of Albacete (the International

¹ Carlo Rosselli and his brother were behind the 'Giustizia e Libertà' group which called for a united anti-fascist front for a Socialist Republic. Berneri followed their position closely. (Translator's note).

Brigades' base. Translator's note) contains a thousand men, and there is also a column of Germans similarly organised by the communists who number 200. From a trustworthy source, we know that since the start some 8,000 Germans have entered Spain, commanded by 'Russian officers.' It is obvious that Madrid is organising its own 'Tercio': a foreign legion which, well armed and well commanded will be able to restore order. The increase in the police forces (guardias de asalto and guardias civiles) and the mass arrival of Moscow's Moroccans must give us pause for thought. All those who would be on our side in the event of any attempt to stifle the revolution can be considered as good allies. On the other hand I continue to consider useful the politically heterogeneous character of our column. Battistelli, to give only one example, is an ideal officer for a column such as ours, and S. would not be.

The more the war intensifies, the more the need to perfect the commanding ranks will increase. It seems to me in conclusion that the presence of non-anarchist elements in our column has been militarily and politically not negative.

Setting aside the breaking up of our column and our militia, the agreement between us and the members of 'Giustizia e Liberta' could rest on these two points:

1. joint recruiting committees;
2. joint aid committees

It is up to you to examine and resolve this agreement.²

² Berneri was not involved in the column since he was running 'Guerra di Classe'. The letter seems to be from October 1936. It was published in 'Volonta' 19th July 1951.