

P15/1/3

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*The following article by Vernon Bartlett  
appeared in the "News Chronicle"  
on October 13th, 1937.*

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By Vernon Bartlett

**T**HIS article is an attack on the British Government for cowardice amounting to treachery. It is written by one who has no affiliations with any political party, who believes that the necessity of preventing war, the good name of Britain and the respect for treaties voluntarily accepted are so important that one should not try to make party capital out of them.

\* \* \*

Fifteen months ago civil war broke out in Spain. Within a fortnight of its outbreak three armed Italian aeroplanes crashed in Algeria on their way to help General Franco, and their pilots admitted to the French High Commissioner that they had received their orders three days before the rebellion began.

The excuse given was that Russia was turning Spain into a Communist State.

I went to Spain eight weeks later and in Madrid, Valencia, Toledo, Alicante and Barcelona I met one Russian, the Ambassador. Or possibly two, for his secretary was not, I think, Spanish.

The few airmen defending Madrid had old machines, and they fought against such odds—for Franco already had German and Italian machines by the score—that of the seven British pilots I met there three were killed and two were wounded in one week.

\* \* \*

The Spanish Government, against whom Italy and Germany had so soon intervened, had not even a Socialist in its ranks. The election which had put it in power had been carried out under another Government of Conservative tendencies.

It may have been weak, but it was certainly far more "democratic" than are the Governments of at least a dozen countries with which Great Britain maintains friendly relations.

\* \* \*

All that is stale news. But there is some news which we have no right to forget, and which the impartial historian of the future will remember—to the shame of the British Government.

For this Government at once adopted the policy of non-intervention. It was in such a hurry that it even took unilateral action and was the first to

forbid its subjects and ships to help the legal Government of Spain.

And yet Spain, the only country in the world which has put adherence to the League Covenant into its Constitution, from the beginning pledged itself to accept any decision the League might reach.

During one year of so-called non-intervention, every member of the Cabinet has known that Germany and Italy were, in fact, intervening in Spain. It matters not one twopenny damn whether the idea of non-intervention originated in Whitehall or the Quai d'Orsay.

\* \* \*

The French are, compared with ourselves, weak, and they are almost pitifully anxious to do nothing which would destroy the *entente cordiale*. That makes our responsibility all the greater, for we have encouraged France to drift into a policy which we know must lead to war.

We have encouraged France to keep the League out of it all by arguing that non-intervention was a success when we knew it was a failure, and to turn deaf ears to the dignified appeals from the Spanish Government, not for our active help, but at least for our permission to buy, at great profits to our arms manufacturers, the ordinary weapons of self-defence.

For months Mussolini and Hitler have given up all pretence of respecting their pledges to keep out of the Spanish war. They boast of their intervention.

They may, between them, have fewer than 100,000 men in Spain, but those men are the technicians, the pilots, the gunners, the mechanics, whose job it is to turn the ordinary infantryman into cannon fodder. Still, despite all the evidence, we have done nothing.

At last the threat, not to the principle of collective security (that had ceased to matter), but to the British and French power to communicate through the Mediterranean with their own overseas possessions, became so great that fear drove us to action.

We called the Nyon Conference, which succeeded with encouraging speed just because we had left the aggressors out of it. And, within a fortnight, we were destroying its effects by inviting one of them to join in.

\* \* \*

On every possible occasion during the last week it has been asserted in London and Paris that an Italian refusal to agree to the withdrawal of "volunteers" from Spain would be met with drastic action.

At the very least the Pyrenean barrier between Spain and the rest of Europe was to be destroyed so that the Government might obtain those armaments which it should have been allowed to obtain a year ago.

But once again there is hesitation to open this frontier even pending an agreement to make non-intervention a fact, and not a farce. So still the

Spaniards wait while we say nice things to the Duce, and more material goes to the Italian and German armies in Spain.

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We need not hurry with drastic sanctions, we were told at the time of the Italo-Abyssinian war, because Italy could not win for another year. And Abyssinia was crushed with bombs and poison gas.

We are told the same of Spain and may discover our mistake when the Spanish people, heroic in their defence of Madrid, will nevertheless have had to admit that German and Italian steel is harder than the flesh of men, women and children.

We ordinary men in the street have not much influence and no great intellectual subtlety. We admit that the members of the Government have terrible responsibilities to face. But we have our sons to save from the horrible and useless butchery such as that in Spain and China.

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And this we know :

(1) That no bully on earth ever mended his ways if he found that people were frightened to face up to him.

(2) That Italy, with one army in Abyssinia, one army in Spain, and one army in Libya, could be no match for the British Empire.

(3) That if Italy *did* fight, and if Germany joined in, public opinion in this country would unite even more spontaneously than it united in 1914, for there would still be something decent left to fight for.

(4) That if democracy were to entail continual shirking of responsibility, callous acceptance of sacrifices by others, betrayal of our pledges to build up the collective system to compensate for the losses in the last war—then we could have no use for it.

(5) That this is not democracy, but the betrayal of it, and the men who uphold this policy deserve, and are winning, nothing but contempt.