



When Italians Cried "Long Live Democracy!"

(From a Talk by J. B. PRIESTLEY, Broadcast by the BBC on February 17)

AS they came along the streets of Benghazi, glittering after rain and now in bright sunshine, the vanguard of our army, Australian infantry and artillery, hefty sunburnt fellows in their dusty khaki, packed into lorries or seated on rattling gun-limbers, were cheered from the crowded pavements and balconies—for out of its total population of 65,000 only about 5000 had left the place. There could be heard everywhere loud cries in Italian of "Long Live England" and "Long Live Democracy."

Notice that second cry, "Long Live Democracy." It seems to me very, very important. It contains the very root of the matter. There can be no doubt those Italians in Benghazi meant what they said. They saw the British Forces not as invaders belonging to a foreign power, but as what they truly were, the penetrating advance guard of Democracy now roused and militant—the very Democracy at which the swaggering Fascists had been sneering for years.

It must be remembered that there have been millions of Italians who have never been converted to Fascism, just as there are millions of Germans who have never been converted to Nazism. Again, there must be many Italians who once believed in Fascism but who have now come to dislike it, seeing clearly after years of disillusioning experience the hollowness of its pretensions, the cheap gangsterism that hides behind its facade of service and devotion to the idea of the State. Some of those Italians were in Benghazi and they cheered and shouted "Long Live Democracy" because they knew that at last they were being rescued from the tyranny and sheer stupidity of Mussolini and his gang who had plunged Italy into a war for which there had never been the least shadow of justification.

Not a National War

This shout in Benghazi confirms me in the view of this war that I have held from the beginning, namely, that it is not a national war or a war between rival imperialisms, but a war between two opposing sets of ideas. We are fighting this war to defend the democratic way of life which is threatened by both Nazism and Fascism with utter and total destruction. Anybody who believes in this way of life—not only in what it has already accomplished but even more in what it is capable of achieving in the future—is on our side and should indeed be helping our side. It's not a question of where we live, it doesn't matter whether you live in Alaska, or Patagonia, or Borneo,

the cause is still yours. It's not a question of geography, but a political and social belief.

"We are Fighting Nazis and Fascists"

In my opinion, we are not fighting the Germans and the Italians; we are fighting the Nazis and the Fascists. Any other suggestion is, to my mind, as mischievous as it is untrue, and the Italian who has never accepted Fascism and has resisted the onslaught upon his belief in the democratic idea is an ally and not an enemy. Any German who sincerely believes that Nazism is wrong and that a liberal democratic view of life is right, is an ally and not an enemy. We are not fighting against him—we are fighting for him.

In the same way the people who in their heart of hearts dislike the democratic way of life and admire crushingly authoritarian systems—in which by the way they always see themselves having the authority—those sort of people may have British or American passports, but they are really the enemy, and line themselves up behind Hitler and Mussolini. The fact that this war is really being fought by one side as an attack upon, and by the other as a defence of, the democratic way of life, explains many things. It explains better than anything else to my mind why the Communists everywhere are not really on our side in this war. All their talk about imperialism and capitalism doesn't explain why they whose comrades have been hunted down and tortured and murdered by the Nazis have so mysteriously developed a mere

shoulder-shrugging attitude of mind towards this conflict with the Nazis. The real reason in my opinion is that the Communists know that this war is being fought in defence of the democratic idea, and as they dislike the democratic idea, they can't see any point in fighting for it.

Communists Never Become Democrats

We have seen that it is not difficult for a Communist suddenly to turn into a Nazi or a Fascist. It has happened over and over again. What we don't find is men of this stamp turning into liberal democrats. They can't do it—they would have to be born again. Their whole psychological make-up is wrong.

In a way, this war could not unreasonably be described as a desperate conflict between two distinct psychological types. Perhaps the basis of all fiercely and intolerantly authoritarian systems with all their emphasis upon obedience and with a hatred of liberty, is a deep contempt for ordinary human nature and twisted poisonous scorn for the average man and woman. You can see it written large in Hitler's fantastic autobiography, "Mein Kampf." He regards the mass of his fellow men as so many sheep and donkeys to be lied to, to be falsely wheedled, then bullied and persecuted into submission to the rule of a few ruthless leaders. And wherever you find a man of this type who wants power at all costs, is almost crazily ambitious without having any specific talent that would enable him to win respect and admiration in the ordinary way, there, too, you

will find a potential Nazi and Fascist—there is the beginning of your Fifth Column.

We have several such men here—now in gaol—men by no means without ability, but spurred all the time by almost insane ambition, impatient for power at all costs. Now, such men are always motivated not by compulsion, benevolence, perfection, but by angry contempt and hatred which drip like poison in all their speeches. They hate the democratic way of life because it involves sensible discussion, possible compromise, much open criticism, give and take, tolerance, humour, common-sense and kindness, with no swaggering and strutting about in fancy uniforms, no loud bullying, no looting and plundering.

Germans on Our Side

Nazism and Facism are not Germany and Italy, but are the worst sides of the German and Italian characters given full play, just as the most enthusiastic members of these parties are shady fellows who couldn't adapt themselves to a democratic way of living. Name one German acknowledged by the whole world to be a man of distinction and nobility of character, as men like Einstein or Thomas Mann are acknowledged to be, who is an enthusiastic supporter of Nazism. I can't think of one. All such men are on our side. They're not supporting Britain against Germany, but a decent way of life against a deliberately ignoble life. And when we say we're fighting for the democratic idea, it's no true argument to retort that we may not be good democrats. I have never pretended that Britain is anything but a very imperfect democracy. I've urged for years that we should be far more democratic than we are. But it's one thing to be faulty; it's another thing to abandon and attack the very idea itself. Most of us would admit that we're not very good husbands or wives—that there's a great deal of room for improvement in our behaviour as married folks—and we're always making resolutions to be better husbands or wives in the future. But because we may be faulty in the marriage relationship, that doesn't mean we have no right to disapprove of, and if necessary, fight against a proposal to abolish marriage altogether and to let us breed like cattle.

It's the same with the democratic idea. We may have realised it imperfectly but nevertheless, it remains the idea we live by, and so we are ready to fight for it. And let me say just once more—whoever agrees with this is on our side, and whoever disagrees with it, whoever doesn't believe in the democratic way of life but in some intolerant, authoritarian system, is not on our side—is against us. And here on the balconies and sidewalks of Benghazi were lots of people who were on our side, and we shall find them elsewhere more and more as the war goes on. First thousands, and then millions and millions trying to be liberated and brought back into democracy.



A FEW WEEKS AGO a reader wrote asking us to publish a photograph of John Charles Thomas, the famous baritone. Here is one of him in the more unusual role of yachtsman and speed-boat enthusiast. He is holding a national championship trophy which he presented some years ago to the American Power Boat Association.

A combined recital by John Charles Thomas and Albert Sandler's Orchestra will be heard from 3YA on Sunday, March 9, at 4.30 p.m.