

Book review of European Resistance Movements 1939-1945

EUROPEAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS 1939-1945. Presentations at the First International Conference on the History of the Resistance Movements. (London: Pergamon Press. 1960. Pp. 410. 40/--.)

The First International Conference of which this is the record was held in Belgium in September 1958. The papers presented include a keynote address reviewing the broad course of the Resistance (and quite cutting in its resentful depreciation of American help) and several studies exploring each of five of its particular aspects--resistance in Germany and Italy, the psychological war, Jewish resistance, the maquis and other guerrillas, and the role of the Allies.

Of more current interest than the content of these papers is the East-West political battle that has developed over the interpretation of the history of the Resistance. To the First Conference historians from Russia, Poland, and Yugoslavia as well as from appropriate countries of the West had been invited, and they had originally agreed to attend. At the last minute, however, the delegations from the three Communist countries decided not to come, the Poles and Russians because invitations had also been extended to General Bor-Komorowski, leader of the Polish underground army at the time of the Warsaw uprising, and to some of his colleagues associated with the wartime government-in-exile in London. The Yugoslavs did submit a paper on their partisans' struggle, and it is included in the volume.

The First International Conference has now been followed by a second, held in Milan, Italy, on 26-29 March 1961. This time the USSR and all its European Satellites, including East Germany, sent delegations. The "London Poles" were apparently not invited. No formal invitation went to any historical or official group in the United States, but five U.S. scholars were in attendance. At the Second Conference the Bloc presentations showed a well-planned and concerted effort to rewrite the history of World War II and its resistance movements in terms of Communist dogma, claiming for the USSR and the Communist parties the largest

share of credit for the liberation of Europe and support of the Resistance.

Through all the Bloc texts and speeches ran a major theme--namely, that the main purpose of the Resistance was not primarily to aid in the military defeat of the Axis forces and to liberate the occupied territories (as the Bloc charged the British and Americans viewed it), for this was being accomplished in any event by the military might of the advancing Red armies. The "anti-popular" European governments which had been in power at the beginning of the war had, according to the Bloc thesis, abandoned their people and the fight against fascism, and this abandonment made necessary the creation of resistance movements in which the "progressive" masses of the people, led in large measure (although admittedly not completely) by the Communists and the workers, could participate. And the overriding purpose of these movements, in the Communist view, was to make certain that the "anti-popular and reactionary" regimes did not return after the liberation to oppress and exploit the workers and the masses. In short, the Bloc aim at the conference was to downgrade the military aspects of the Resistance and its Anglo-American and other non-Communist elements, picturing it as a social mass movement which the USSR well understood and fostered and in which the Communists proudly played the dominant role.

In their corollary effort to discredit the part played by the West, and particularly by Great Britain and the United States, in the Resistance, the prepared Bloc texts and speakers made the following salient points:

That the "phoney war" of 1939-40 was a direct Anglo-French continuation of the spirit of Munich, in an attempt to direct the German aggression against the USSR and thus consolidate the Anglo-French postwar position (As a rebuttal to the Western charge that the Communists had not participated in the war or the Resistance during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Bloc asserted that the war was then not a "just" war; only after the German attack in June 1941, when the USSR could participate in a true anti-Hitlerian coalition, did it become a "just" war, a "peoples'" war against fascism.);

That the United States and Great Britain supported only the reactionary political regimes of the European governments-in-exile and the reactionary elements of the resistance movements, with the ultimate aim of preserving the Anglo-American political and economic position in Europe after the victory was won; and that they failed to support, and thus alienated, the true aspirations of the anti-fascist and progressive masses of the people;

That the British and the Americans utilized the Resistance almost exclusively for military and intelligence purposes, without regard for its true purposes and the real interests of the people;

That the West gave little material support to the resistance movements; and

That the West opposed the organization of Resistance forces.

The Western delegates met this challenge head on and did not give an

inch. Although their argumentation probably did not convince a single Communist, no Communist argumentation gained any ground either. Each Communist charge was countered by a Western speaker. When the Bloc threw Munich at the West, the Hitler-Stalin pact was thrown back in reply. When they charged failure to help the Resistance, the failure of the Soviet armies to move at the time of the Warsaw uprising was thrown back at them and the Katyn massacre heaped on for good measure. Attacks on the British were effectively rebutted. A blanket invitation from the Communist-dominated Fédération Internationale des Résistants to attend an identically named "International Conference on the History of the Resistance" now scheduled for April 1962 in Warsaw will find no takers among responsible Western historians, who seem to have no disposition to support another joint conference of this kind.

The Bloc's fantastic claims regarding the Communist role in the Resistance, its depreciation of the non-Communist resistance and Anglo-American aid, its arrogation of the supreme role to the Soviet Union--all this one tends to dismiss as "doublethink" written in "Newspeak." But one must remember that what the Communists were saying in Milan was just a sample of what they are spewing out in their official histories and papers and books. These are being translated into many languages and are being sent all over the world. They need to be countered. The West cannot leave the history of the war and the Resistance to the Communists. A true historical picture must be drawn, and it must get circulation behind the Iron Curtain and in the uncommitted nations of the world. From the standpoint of the Milan Conference, this is the unfinished business of the West.

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