

Analogues for our Time



Defeated Republicans march into exile in France.

by Ralph Berry

Independence movements create analogues effortlessly. Ukraine calls into play the historic past of Greece, many parts of South and North America, Garibaldi's Italy, Catalonia. All are available to those writing on the current turmoil in Ukraine and its relationship with Russia, together with the bordering states of NATO. I'll come later to the analogue that dares not speak its name, but I'll deal first with the country that seems to be well placed in the front of the analogue line: Spain.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) started with a revolt against the Republican Government by the Nationalists, led by General Franco. This soon developed into a proxy war in which the Nationalists were backed by Germany and Italy, who sent arms and fighting units to Spain. Britain and France tried to stay out of the combat, but many Republican sympathizers enlisted with the International Brigade. They included the famous

names of George Orwell (who got shot in the throat) and W.H. Auden. (The romantic appeal of the International Brigade is still with us, as two captured British volunteers were lately displayed on Russian TV.) The overwhelming weight of Left-wing propaganda went to the Republicans, whose banner poster was Picasso's *Guernica* (which I consider to be the most over-rated artwork of its era, consisting, as it does, of human bits and pieces which symbolize human bits and pieces). The defeat of the Republicans left Auden's sublime elegy for Spain:

'History to the defeated
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon'
(*Spain 1937*)

After which the cause of Republican independence was put into cold storage until November 1975, when the death of Franco allowed the modern age to take over and Spain to be welcomed into the European Union.

Ukraine is borne up on a huge wave of popular support, much more than for Spain in the 1930s. Since President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the House of Commons, and Boris Johnson travelled by Polish rail to Kiev, the full-hearted support of the British Government for the cause of Ukrainian independence from Russia is a geopolitical fact even if it is based on Johnsonian opportunism.

Yet Ukraine is still a proxy war between Russia and the US, and the European nations are altogether less committed than Britain. Germany still heeds Bismarck's advice to his countrymen, 'Make a good treaty with Russia.' They did, and one result is Nord Stream 2. France has been immobilized by its Election; on Monday morning President Macron will resume his full powers as the leader of a great European nation. It is highly unlikely that he will seek to endorse Boris Johnson's claim to be the de facto champion of Europe. He probably regards Johnson as a Perkin Warbeck, a pretender to

the throne that is rightfully France's.

The war goes on. Whatever the outcome, it can hardly be the victory for Ukraine against Russia that the media call for, led by the ever-belligerent retired Lieutenant-Colonels. I suggest an analogue that has a likelier ending: the American Civil War between the Confederacy, which sought only secession, and the mightier power of the Federals. After four years the Confederacy was crushed, and the independence of the South became a haunted dream. For Ukraine, their dream is located in the Great Gate of Kiev. The Golden Gate is no more, but a reconstruction was made in 1982 and a superb musical score embodies the dream. Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, orchestrated by Ravel, ends with 'The Great Gate of Kiev', a triumphal tribute to the nation that is now I understand very popular in Ukraine. And Mussorgsky was a Russian. The dream lives on, as does its still visible warning from the past: Appomattox Court House.