

to the effect that the United States had a considerable responsibility for the defeat of France and should now mind their own business. In Tunisia there are signs of anxiety because it is thought that Bizerta will now be used as an Axis port, and that Tunisia will in consequence be the subject of R.A.F. bombing. Elsewhere, it seems probable that the general's dismissal may have an injurious effect on French prestige to the advantage of the Germans. It is axiomatic, however, that the Moors respect the ability to apply force, and their attitude may be much affected by the progress of the campaign in the Western Desert.

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL.

Although neither the press nor the radio has, on the whole, given much importance as yet to the British offensive in Libya, there are reports that the Spanish people themselves are keenly interested in the campaign, the outcome of which cannot fail to have repercussions in the peninsula. In Spanish Morocco a highly-placed official is said to have declared that the resignation of General Weygand was explicable by the termination of his mission, and that his retirement was voluntary. It is difficult to believe that this view is generally accepted. The picture of Spain as the "strong" nation of the Western Mediterranean, drawn by von Papen in his interview with the Angora correspondent of the Barcelona *Vanguardia*, must be attractive to the Falangists, who are not likely to have been deceived by the unconvincing German denials that such an interview was given. The Falangists, realising the failure of Hispanidad in Latin America, have for some time past been turning their eyes on Africa, where they not only claim a spiritual influence, but also hint at the desirability of an increase of their territorial possessions at the expense of France. The Falangist press has made a strong bid to awaken the people's interest in the Islamic world, and many articles have been published comparing French and Spanish treatment of the Arabs, always to the detriment of France. There are reports that the Spanish Ambassador to Vichy, Señor Lequerica, has left for Paris to take part in conversations on Morocco, and that before his departure he had a "very long" conversation with Abetz. Whatever the Falange may believe, or profess to believe, the truth is that discontent is growing and is approaching breaking point, so much so that in a recent broadcast the Falange threatens to "impose its rule ruthlessly and cruelly by returning to our old methods."

From Sir Samuel Hoare's interview with the Minister of Industry and Commerce it is clear that the Spanish Government continues to show a desire to co-operate with us commercially, although, naturally enough, Señor Carceller is anxious to obtain such essential raw materials as cotton and rubber in return for Spanish exports. The shortage of rubber in particular is causing grave transport difficulties. Certain supplies of rubber have already been made available by us this year, but they would have been insufficient to meet the demand even if the bulk had not been earmarked for military requirements of tyres. Apparently the Spaniards are unable to provide tonnage for further shipments. The Spanish sterling balance has greatly decreased, and Sir Samuel pointed out the advisability of avoiding delays in granting export licences. The Spaniards seem very ready to meet our demands for fruit, but on the question of mercury, over the shipping of which there has lately been delay, Señor Carceller admitted that he was being caused some embarrassment by German curiosity as to the destination of the mineral. Germany has recently obtained from Spanish and Italian interests a complete monopoly of sale of all mercury inside Europe, although Spain and Italy retain the liberty to sell outside. Certain interested persons, however, do not wish to come completely under German control and appear only too willing to sell, even at some sacrifice, to the United States and to Latin America. North America would, then, seem to have an opportunity of improving her commercial relations with Spain and, at the same time, of preventing Germany from obtaining a mineral essential to her war industry.

From Portugal, too, come reports which show how a co-ordination of British and American policy is becoming more than ever necessary. The shortage of shipping and of supplies at source and restrictions on United Kingdom exports have done much to favour German penetration of the Portuguese market, where the enemy will pay almost any price for tin, wolfram, sardines and fish-oil. To counteract the headway already made by Germany, it has been suggested that

Great Britain and the United States, in collaboration, should draw up a supply and purchase programme to encourage trade in a Western Mediterranean area which would comprise Spain and Portugal and their Colonial Empires. By encouraging exchange of products between the component parts of this area, we should prevent supplies leaking out to Germany. At the same time, by purchasing all exportable surpluses, we should supply the Western Mediterranean with sterling and dollar currency and thus bring it within the zone of our influence. It appears that the Americans are alive to the advantage of a Western Mediterranean bloc from the economic and strategic standpoints. They are not, however, yet educated to this as a political concept, and in any case there would be strong opposition on various grounds to the necessary work of co-ordination being done elsewhere than in Washington.

ITALY.

Italian reactions both to the military and political aspects of the British offensive in Libya have taken the form of a mass of confused, inconsistent and even directly contradictory statements. At first our move forward was not described by so unpleasant a term as "advance" and was said to be merely an "approaching march" which had been checked by a "vigorous counter-manceuvre" of the *Ariete* armoured division. Subsequently, the Italians began to emphasise the strength of the British army, saying that we had brought into the present encounter stronger forces than had yet been employed in any previous battle in North Africa, and announcing that the battle was raging with increased violence. More excusably the accounts of the fighting have similarly varied, sometimes being cautious, sometimes claiming boastfully that, thanks to Italian valour, our attack had been not only held but broken with very heavy losses to us in tanks and armoured vehicles. The most diverse military objectives were ascribed to our High Command. In some Italian eyes the British offensive was mainly dictated by considerations of prestige and rather intended to impress France, the United States and British home opinion than seriously undertaken in the hope that it could exercise any decisive influence upon the course of the war as a whole. Other critics, on the contrary, insisted that "the issue now being fought out in the Marmarica is extremely important"; that "the true objective of Britain is, perhaps, the conquest of the whole of Libya and complete mastery of the Mediterranean"; and even that "the future course of the war depends to a great extent upon Italy's steadfastness and on the struggle over the African sands which bear the indelible imprint of the Roman legions."

The ultimate political issues at stake have been depicted in correspondingly contradictory language. Whereas one broadcast admitted that British success would liberate a large portion of the British fleet, free Egypt from the Italian menace, and enable the British to send troops against the Germans "after they have crossed the Caucasus," thereby consolidating our whole position throughout this area, other Italian spokesmen have ridiculed the notion that any victory gained by us in Libya could compensate for the loss of Rostov, and that what Stalin had demanded was the opening of a second front in Europe and not in Africa. But, it was claimed, Great Britain was incapable of opening such a front. If there was a second front it was that which had been imposed by Italy upon Great Britain in Africa and in the Mediterranean and would be maintained until Italian war aims had been reached. At the same time disparaging views upon the military and political importance of the Libyan fighting have been attributed to several foreign countries by those Italians whose cue it is to minimise the battle, although the Italians are, of course, perfectly well informed of the great political significance attached to the issue by all countries, even those more remotely affected.

From the incoherent and often excited tone of the Italian comments it might be deduced that, as a matter of fact, our offensive has created a profound impression and much nervousness as to the effects upon the already faltering morale of the nation. This deduction is borne out by several observers. It has been stated on good authority that the Italian people are following events "with great tension," and that a British victory would create great difficulties for the Fascist régime, especially at a moment when Germany has her hands full in Russia. The Rome correspondent of a Swedish newspaper has gone so far as to declare that