

# 1936: Spain - Stalinism and the Spanish Civil War

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The Spanish revolution attracted international support as many workers and youth saw it as a crucial struggle against fascism, immortalised in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. But why did the Spanish Revolution fail?

During the night of 17-18 July 1936 General Franco launched the Spanish army's long prepared rebellion against the Spanish Republic. During those same days, thousands of miles away in Mexico, Leon Trotsky was revising the final draft of his book, *The Revolution Betrayed*.

Charting the degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalin's bureaucratic regime, Trotsky noted:

"At the present time, the 'Communist International' is a completely submissive apparatus in the service of Soviet foreign policy, ready at any time for any zig-zag whatever". (*The Revolution Betrayed* p186- 7)

The events in Spain over the next two years were to tragically confirm that statement. Soviet foreign policy, in the wake of the Stalin-Laval pact and the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1935, dictated that the Spanish Revolution be crushed. And so it was ? consciously, mercilessly, and murderously.

This fact in itself required Trotsky to re-evaluate the nature of Stalinism. Until the civil war in Spain he had continued to view Stalinism as ?bureaucratic centrism?, pursuing a policy of zig-zags. Trotsky had recognised that the 1935 Seventh Congress of the CI was important,

". . . because it marks - after a period of vacillation and fumbling - the final entry of the Communist International into its fourth 'period'." (*Writings 1935/36* p127)

This policy of reconciliation with the ?peace loving? democratic bourgeois states at the expense of the socialist revolution succeeded the ?ultra-left? Third Period. For a while, Trotsky did not rule out the possibility of the Popular Front (i.e. the 'fourth period'), leading to impasse and further defeats, and being succeeded by another turn to ultra-leftism.

However eighteen months of Stalin?s intervention in Spain forced Trotsky, once and for all, to abandon this view. If the Popular Front was born in France, in Spain it was to be baptised in blood. In early October 1937 Trotsky told his American comrades that in the light of the Spanish events the term ?bureaucratic centrism? was out of date. In December of that year, in *The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning*, he elaborated;

"I once defined Stalinism as bureaucratic centrism and events brought a series of corroborations of this definition. But it is obviously obsolete today. The interests of the Bonapartist bureaucracy can no longer be reconciled with centrist hesitation and vacillation. In search of reconciliation with the bourgeoisie, the Stalinist clique is capable of entering into alliance only with the most conservative groupings amongst the international labour aristocracy. This has acted to fix definitively the counter-revolutionary character of

Stalinism on the international arena.? (The Spanish Revolution p311 )

The actions of the Spanish Stalinists and Stalin's international agents during the Spanish Civil War, in particular during its first year (July 1936-June 1937) led the whole Fourth International to conclude that Stalinism was "the crudest form of opportunism and social patriotism". It is these actions, imbued with cynicism and carried through with murderous vindictiveness against the flower of the Spanish proletariat, which are the subject of this article.

### **The Second Republic is born**

Spain in the early 1930s was a predominantly agricultural nation. Agriculture accounted for half the national income and some two-thirds of all exports. About 70 per cent of the population was rural. However, the agricultural yield per hectare was the lowest in Europe; the techniques of production were extremely primitive.

The brief agricultural boom of the war years 1914-18 had boosted profits but the landowners had not re-invested these on any scale. The world depression, especially after 1929 hit Spain particularly hard. Fierce competition from the more productive plains of South America and Australia put economic pressure on the landlords to reduce wages in this labour intensive industry. This was added to by Anglo-French retaliation against Spanish, agriculture due to the high tariff walls that had been erected, to protect Spanish industry from collapse.

One-third of Spain's agrarian land was owned by the great lords. Sometimes an estate covered a whole province. Another third was in the hands of smaller, though still large, landlords. The rest were either sharecroppers or semi-proletarians hiring themselves out for starvation wages to the estate owners for 90 to 150 days a year.

In the depth of the world recession the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera collapsed in January 1930. The monarchical rule of King Alfonso XIII was left exposed and fragile.

Over the next period a rising tide of opposition swept away the last supports of the King. First municipal and then national elections in April and June 1931 brought a Republican Socialist coalition to power, which drew up and passed a bourgeois democratic constitution for a second Spanish Republic.

The bourgeoisie played virtually no role in the downfall of Rivera and Alfonso. During student and worker demonstrations in May 1930 and general strikes and the arming of the workers in the spring of 1931 they resisted the downfall of the monarchy. Only the massive popular hostility to the monarchy forced the bourgeoisie to call itself republican.

Significantly the oldest and largest republican group - the Radical party led by Lerroux - turned its back on the government of the Second Republic almost as soon as it was born. Power was left in the hands of the smaller left republican parties and the social democratic PSOE.

The weak Second Republic did little to solve the real task at hand: the handing of the vast estates to the peasantry and the provision of state aid in order to boost agricultural productivity.

Yet there was a spurt in the growth of the agricultural unions and significant wage rises were achieved. But the failure to advance a radical solution to the peasants' plight by the republican bourgeoisie led to despair, apathy, and as a result, the election of a reactionary Catholic nationalist government in November 1933.

Spanish industry was weakly developed. The country only accounted for 1.1 per cent of world trade in 1930. There were few centres of industry which accounts for the meagre eight thousand miles of railway

in Spain at the time. Yet Spanish industry, and hence the working class was highly concentrated. Of the two million industrial workers most were in one province ? Catalonia, in the North East. Barcelona, the largest port and industrial centre accounted for 45 per cent of the Spanish working class!

This high concentration allied to immense union organisation and the political tradition placed the working class in the leading role in the Spain of the Second Republic.

In early 1934 the right wing republican Lerroux took power. He began to undo such reforms of the Second Republic as the raising of the minimum agricultural wage. Wages on the land fell by as much as 50 per cent. In many areas peasant worked for food only. By the end of 1935 rural discontent was intense.

### **The Third Period**

Throughout this period the small Spanish Communist Party (PCE) operated under the sway of the policies of the Communist International's Third Period. From the ninth ECCI in February 1928 its Stalinist leadership declared that the Comintern had now entered a new period of revolutionary offensive. Capitalism was declared to be in profound crisis. A fresh series of imperialist wars was predicted with ?gigantic class battles.? Every strike would assume ?A political i.e. general class character? and it was declared that the:

?More militant elements of the working class were abandoning the social democrats and coming over to the communist camp.? (Theses of the Sixth Congress on the International Situation.) The major obstacle to communist revolutions was Social Democracy, "the main social prop of the bourgeoisie".

These parties were now designated as being as dangerous, if not more so, than the fascists. They represented, "social fascism". In Stalin's words at the time, "social democracy and fascism are not antipodes, they are twins".

From 1928 to 1935 this Third Period dominated the Comintern. The tactics that flowed from it involved the complete rejection of the united front except under the leadership of the communists, and then only ?from below?. Therefore no approaches were to be made to national or local leaders of Labour or Socialist parties. Revolutionary trade unions were encouraged as Red Unions, organisationally separate to the majority ?scab? unions affiliated to the Second International. All electoral co-operation with the ?social fascists? was to be stopped immediately.

This line was to have disastrous consequences for the fledgling PCE which claimed less than 1,000 members. In 1930 its National Conference rejected the idea that a bourgeois-democratic regime was possible in Spain. Events over the following year and a half refuted the PCE's claims but failed to change either its mind or its tactics. Even the Communist International was to find the PCE overly sectarian in its passive application of the Third Period line.

An article in Communist International in spring 1931 called the PCE "very sectarian". The article claimed that in the spring of 1931 the PCE's:

"organisation in many towns followed incorrect tactics. When the masses streamed into the streets to celebrate the proclamation of the Republic, the Communists, together with the Monarchists cried: ?Down with the Republic? so isolating themselves from the masses".

Above all the Stalinists refused to recognise that after 17 years of dictatorship the masses had profound democratic illusions that had to be positively elated. The PCE did argue for the disarming of the civil guard the dissolution of the secret police and the arrest of the monarchist ministers ? all correct in themselves, but they refused to advance slogans of political democracy that could test and break through the illusions

of the workers and peasants.

At best they could only agree to not contest those illusions for opportunist reasons, with an anti-republican slogans. In contrast to the later slavish attitude to bourgeois democracy., the Stalinists at the time turned their backs on the revolutionary democratic character and potential of the struggle against the monarchy. In this they were entirely at one with the Third Period of the Comintern.

### **Denunciations**

The tiny PCE was left isolated offering the mass of workers, who looked to either anarchist or socialist leaders, a 'united from below' while denouncing their leaders as the 'mass bulwark of the counter revolution' or servile props of the bourgeoisie.

This line was persisted in and insisted upon right up until the summer of 1934. There were regular denunciations of the Socialist Party PSOE and Anarchist leaders. Moreover, the then Prime Minister and the future President of the Republic and chief Republican ally in the Popular Front Azana, was referred to as a 'fascist' constantly in these years.

In the November 1933 national elections the leader of the PSOE left, Caballero, was denounced as a social fascist and leading Stalinist Dolores Ibarruri (La Passionaria) even compared his legislation while Minister of Labour between 1931 and 1933 with that of Adolf Hitler.

Consistently the PCE reacted to Lerroux's attempt to undo the reforms of the Second Republic by insisting that he was no different to the previous government.

In April 1934 the PCE finally got round to forming their own trade union federation - the CGTU - which was affiliated to the Profintern. It counted for very little in the Spanish labour movement but red unions were an obligatory Third Period tactic. At the same time the Communist Party of Catalonia (CPC) was founded to contest Maurin and Nin's grip in that province (Maurin and Nin established a Left Communist Party in 1931. This was later to become the centrist Workers Party of Marxist Unification - POUM - In September 1935).

Most revealing, however, was the PCE and CPC's reaction to the Workers Alliance - set up by Caballero in February 1934 as a united front organisation to resist the new government's counter-reforms. The First Congress of the CPC called it "an abortion" and "an alliance against the united front and the revolution". In response the PCE tried, without success, to launch its own anti-fascist front completely in line with the 'united front from below' perspective.

The Third Period was to reap its most bitter fruit in Germany. It meant that the largest non-Soviet Comintern section the German Communist Party (KPD) - concentrated its fire against the 'social fascist' Social Democrats and grossly underestimated the threat of real fascism.

In reality the policy itself coincided with the Soviet bureaucracy's view that German nationalism was less a threat to its interests than was Social Democracy's attempts to integrate Germany into an alliance with France and Britain. As triumphant German fascism increased its hostility to the USSR so the Stalinist regime's foreign policy - and with it the tactics of the Comintern - underwent a profound change.

Just as the Third Period squared with the Stalin group's orientation to alliance with the German bourgeoisie, so the jettisoning of that line was the result of a major re-orientation of the Stalin clique's foreign policy. Once its attempted bloc with Germany was definitely broken the Kremlin bureaucracy set its sights on securing an alliance with 'democratic' imperialism - principally with France - and embraced a new set of tactics for the Comintern in order to exert maximum pressure to that end.

The French Communist Party (PCF) was given the go ahead to pursue 'a united workers and broad popular front' in 1934. This entailed political unity with the social democrats and bourgeois radicals. The Comintern's Seventh Congress in August 1935 committed the entire Comintern to the pursuit of the Popular Front. Meanwhile the USSR had secured the Stalin-Laval pact with France in May 1935 which was based on what Stalin called his:

"Complete understanding and approval of state defence, carried out by France 'with the aim of maintaining its armed forces at a level commensurate with the needs of its security".

The effects of this shift on Spain and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) were not immediate although the Popular front line was eventually to triumph. In early 1934 the Comintern did not see the threat of fascism in Spain 'us being as great as in France. The Republic's government was so right-wing as to not be an obvious candidate for being placed in the camp of the USSR's 'democratic friends'. However a shift of line on the part of the PCE is observable from the summer of 1934.

In July 1934 the PCE wrote to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) executive informing them that they would be prepared to cease all attacks on the PSOE leaders if their proposals for united front action were accepted. The PSOE replied that the PCE was free to join the 'Workers Alliance' formed against the right-wing government. This the PCE refused to do.

The position on the Workers Alliance was to shift in the Autumn. By this time the Comintern's main agent in Spain - Codovilla - had been present at a July preparatory commission for the Seventh Congress and returned insisting on an unconditional shift of perspective.

The focus of the shift was the Workers Alliance and the occasion was the September 11th/12th meeting of the PCI leadership. In the previous months the PCE had refused to join in the preparations for the General Strikes in Catalonia, Madrid and Asturias. even as late as September 11th The PSOE was attacked as "the rallying point of reactionary forces". At a fiercely contested meeting of the PCE that weekend, Codovilla succeeded in shifting the PCE. A resolution supporting the Workers Alliance was passed. The resolution argued for the Workers Alliance to be broadened to embrace the peasantry.

The PCE's change of line on the Workers Alliance enabled it to participate fully in the Asturias uprising of October 1934. The rising was prompted by the entry into the Madrid government of three members of the CEDA, the arch-reactionary party of Gil Robles. He openly modelled himself on Dolfuss in Austria, the bonapartist dictator who had recently come to power. CEDA's promotion, everyone knew, prefigured further attacks on the Spanish workers. In turn, the risings were an attempt to forestall them.

The risings and General Strikes in Madrid and Barcelona were quickly suppressed, but the Asturian miners were more successful. The 50,000 miners were politically dominated by the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT). However the PSOE's General Union of Labour (UGT) and even the PCE had significant support. Within three days Asturias was in the hands of a fully armed proletariat; joint workers committees held political power.

The weakness of the revolution, however, as with the Paris Commune, was its isolation from the rest of the country. In days the Republican government assembled a massive army led by General Franco and marched on Asturias. Defended by the Foreign Legion, the army savagely destroyed the uprising. After fifteen days of fighting, nearly 2,000 workers were killed and some 3,000 wounded. More were butchered in the atrocities that followed: about 30,000 were taken as political prisoners in the following weeks.

## **Repression**

Severe repression of the workers continued unremittingly throughout early 1935. When the Republican leaders decided to let up on this, CEDA provoked a crisis by resigning in protest at this leniency. That crisis was resolved in CEDA's favour in May when they were given two extra Cabinet seats. One of them - the Ministry of War - went to their hated leader Gil Robles.

It was on the basis of these events that the Comintern took the decision to proceed to create a Popular Front in Spain. Early in June the PCE issued its first popular front programme. Gone was the spectre of revolution. It was constructed for the radical democrats and republican bourgeoisie rather than the workers and peasants. Its four points demanded: the resignation of the government and fresh elections, the confiscation of large estates, self-determination for Catalonia etc. and the dissolution of the fascist groups, such as the paramilitary Falange Espanola established in 1933.

There was, however, one major problem for the PCE in winning socialist support for this bourgeois programme. The leader of the PSOE left Caballero was himself moving further left under the pressure of events. His star was rising in the PSOE and its trade union federation the UGT.

He was spitting blood at the entire bourgeoisie, whether monarchist or republican. In October 1935 the PCE wrote to Caballero proposing unconditional unity of organisations; that is, on Caballero's programme. Unfortunately, the PCE was forced to recognise that this entailed, "the organic political unity of the proletariat...(with) . . . full Independence vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, and a complete break-up of the social democratic bloc with the bourgeoisie." (E.H.Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* p2).

### **'Deviations'**

This alarmed the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI). Stalin immediately decided to go to the heart of the problem. He dispatched the PCF leader - Duclos - as a personal envoy to Caballero to get him to shift his stance, arguing that the Prieto led right/centre of the PSOE should be supported because it could command greater electoral support. There were to be no more 'deviations' by the PCE. The late summer Seventh Congress of the Comintern had sealed the total victory of the Popular Front. Henceforth, the PCE would be making a hundred and one declarations in tune with the November 1935 speech of Jose Diaz;

". . . at the present moment we understand that the struggle taking place is not in the area of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but in the struggle of democracy against fascism as its immediate objective". (Quoted in D. Catell *'Communism and the Spanish Civil War'* p30/31)

From this time the PCE's main task was to win adherents to the 'Bloque Popular'. With elections only months away, Caballero wanted only a united front with the PCE, spurning the republicans. The PSOE right led by Prieto wanted a popular front with the republicans without the PCE. PCE wanted an three. This was to prove its strength for the bourgeoisie and its danger to Spanish workers.

### **The Popular Front in power**

The PCE emerged from the Austrian rising with increased credibility. They continued to grow during 1935 recruiting mainly from the left-wing of the PSOE. Estimates for the PCE's membership vary widely but it is likely that by the time of the February 1936 elections they were between 20-30,000 strong. This strength was reflected in the division of seats agreed for those Popular Front elections, since it was agreed that the PCE should receive 6% of the seats (19) in case of victory. Previously, they had had only one.

The election results revealed the rapid class polarisation that had been taking place in Spain. The total vote for the Popular Front (PSOE, PCE, republicans) was evenly matched by that for the Catholic,

monarchist, crypto-fascist right. The parties of the centre - the large moderate Republican groups were obliterated; the previous premier, Lerroux, didn't even, get a seat.

## **Watered down**

After the election, the PCE's first programme for the new government was a watered down version of that of the previous slimmer. Even Minimum working class demands, were displaced. The PCE called for the immediate seizure of the largest estates, the separation of Church and State, and an end to Church subsidies and the formation of a 'people's army'.

Time and again the PCE and the ECCI stressed the 'democratic' character of the revolution. In his opening speech to the Cortes Jose Diaz said on April 15th that the PCE "loyally supports the left Republican government."

At a May meeting of the ECCI Dimitrov heaped praise upon the PCE for criticising,

"the leftist slogans of the left socialists headed by Largo Caballero, who proposes to begin Immediately the struggle for the socialist republic".

Nevertheless, a determination to confine the revolution to democratic tasks did not exhaust the problem of strategy and tactics in Spain at this time. There were urgent democratic tasks to be carried out. The PCE's Popular Front programme gave muted recognition to this.

The key question of February to July 1936 was by what methods were these tasks (e.g. land redistribution) to be carried out? Piecemeal by legislative reform at a pace and scope suitable to the Republican government? Or radically, from below, by workers and peasants at a pace and scope that frightened the republican bourgeoisie and even threatened to go far beyond the boundaries of radical democratic demands?

Although the PCE reported favourably some of the early land seizures, after February it became increasingly alarmed when the workers and peasants took steps far in advance of the Popular Front programme. For these reasons the Popular Front government that emerged in February 1936 was doomed. Class polarisation had gone too far. Azana, the new President of the Republic said in the Cortes on 3rd April, that the government would fulfil its Popular Front programme, "without removing a period or a comma, and without adding a period or a comma."

(Quoted in B. Bolloten 'The Grand Camouflage, p.26)

However, the former was unacceptable to the CEDA and the Falange, while the latter was unacceptable to the workers and poor peasants.

The key to the Spanish revolution was the agrarian question. The Popular Front passed a mild agrarian reform law on taking office. Without satisfying the peasants it encouraged them to action. The peasants

"calculate that the agrarian laws plans fifty thousand settlements a year which means it will take twenty years to settle a million peasants and more than a century to give land to all. Realising this, the peasants just occupy the land." (Quoted in Bolloten p.20)

In the cities the situation was the same. In the spring there were innumerable strikes over wages, conditions, and to win amnesty for prisoners. The prisons had been thrown open and all the victims of the repression after October 1934 had been released by workers and taken by them back into the factories to their former jobs.

## **Armed**

The decisive strike wave began on June 1st when 70,000 building workers struck indefinitely for higher pay. Although by the 4th July the Ministry of Labour had conceded the original demands the strike had gone far beyond them. Many workers were armed, originally to protect themselves from Falangist attacks. The CNT had formed a Central Defence Committee. The workers were also realising their strength in incidental ways: .

"the strikers, weapons in hand, force the shopkeepers to serve, them, seized restaurants and ate without paying" (P.Broue and E.Temime 'The Revolution and' Civil War in Spain' p94)

As the revolutionary tide accelerated the PSOE and PCE leaders in the UGT called off the strikes after the original concessions, but the CNT refused to do likewise.

Faced with this tide the Falange and the army had been making preparations for an uprising. Ever since August 1932 the right had been openly discussing a coup d'etat. A meeting of top generals took place in early March 1936 and preparations were set in train.

## **Beginning**

This was well known to the Republican leaders who preferred to cover it up. The Popular Front's War Minister proclaimed on March 18th that he had

"the honour of making public that all the officers and non-commissioned officers of the Spanish Army maintain themselves within the strictest discipline. . . and, needless to say, to obey the orders of the legally constituted government. "(13. Bolloren p.27)

On the night of July 17/18th General Franco forced him to eat his words. Fifty garrisons revolted. Only 500 of the 15,000 Army officers stayed loyal to the republic, together with about 5,000 of the 34,000 civil guards. Within weeks the Army and Falange controlled half of Spain. The Civil War had begun.

## **Stalin's foreign policy**

Early in 1936 a favourite slogan of the left-wing of the PSOE was "if you want to save Spain from Marxism, then vote Communist". But what was a half serious election campaign jibe turned into grim reality during the Civil War. To understand why and how, it is necessary to start with an understanding of the Kremlin's attitude to Spain in the wake of the Franco rebellion.

After the signing of the Stalin Laval Pact Moscow felt it was in its political interest to block the rise of fascism in Spain. Stalin argued at one level that this was in the interests of France and Great Britain since Italian and German success in Spain would threaten both of them.

However, Stalin recognised well enough that the leading factions of the French and certainly British ruling class regarded the USSR as the greater evil in Europe as compared to fascist Germany or Italy. They were unwilling to see Hitler defeated to the degree that Germany was a bulwark against the USSR. Stalin's foreign policy was reduced, in effect, to the attempt to get governments elected in Europe which were hostile to German war aims in Europe.

## **Antagonise**

British imperialism, on the other hand, was interested only in deflecting Germany's advance so as to allow it time to rearm. The Soviet bureaucracy's whole aim in Spain was thus, first, to prevent the success of

socialist revolution in Spain, which would antagonise Britain and France and run the threat of throwing them into a block with Germany against the USSR. Secondly, to bend all efforts to enlist France and Britain to help the Republic beat off Spanish fascism. The best statement from a Spanish Stalinist of this perspective came from a PSUC (Catalonian Communist Party) leader at a public meeting:

"in the democratic - bloc of powers, the decisive factor is not France; it is England. It is essential for all party comrades to realise this so as to moderate (their) slogans at the present time. . . we should realise that the big capitalists in England are capable of coming to an under,. standing at any time with Italian and German capitalists if they should reach the conclusion that they have no choice with regard to Spain. (Therefore) we must win, cost what it may, the benevolent neutrality of that country, if not its direct aid." (Quoted in B Bolloten The Grand Camouflage.)

'Cost what may' was a threat issued to the Spanish workers. This reactionary schema was based on the false premise that Britain preferred the victory of the Republic over Franco. In fact the reverse was true, 'because Britain rightly feared that a Republican victory would be but a passing phase in the Spanish socialist revolution or long drawn out instability in European politics.

Thus, the opening weeks of the Spanish Civil War gave the Comintern and the PCE cause for concern. The working class were on the offensive. In the North and East they had disarmed the army, stormed the barracks and everywhere were in control. Within a week dual power had been established in the Republican held areas. By September 1936 Koltzov - Stalin's personal agent in Spain - estimated that about 18,000 industrial enterprises had been taken over by the work

## **Workers' control**

In Catalonia about 70% of the factories kicked out all management from the plant. In Madrid it was more common for managers to remain but under the direction of the workers. Only in the Basque region was there hardly any workers' control at all. Whenever the CNT was strongest in gun industry the firms were collectivised to use resources more efficiently. In Catalonia the CNT/UGT closed down 46 out of the 72 foundries and did everything in the remaining 24.

The most dramatic upheavals took place on the land. In Catalonia the mass of peasants were small holders and leaseholders who were glad to be rid of rents and gain more land. Collectivization of the land was limited there. But in Aragon it was a different story. To begin with the fascists had encroached into the Aragon countryside and it took the best anarchist and socialist workers of Barcelona to repulse them. But in the process they were also revolutionary agitators. Durruti, the CNT leader of the militia, said:

"we are waging a war and making the revolution at the same time. . . Every village we conquer begins to develop along revolutionary lines."

The bigger estates were collectivized by the agricultural workers of Aragon. Very soon 70% of the population (about 500,000) in the area were in collectives.

## **Advances**

The greatest advances of all were at the political level. PCE leader Ibarri could reflect in these weeks that:

". . . the whole state apparatus was destroyed and state power lay in the street."

While the state was not destroyed it was certainly in complete disarray. The Republic hold no army except that of the workers' militia. The Republican government continued to exist but it was impotent. President

Azana commented:

"Faced by the revolution the government had the choice either of upholding it or suppressing it. But even less than uphold it could the government suppress it."

## **Dual power In Spain**

Real political power was being exercised by the workers' militias operating both as an armed and a political force. The cabinet of Giral had no authority beyond the suburbs of Madrid. There, however, the workers' political alternative was weakest. By 27 July the official police had reestablished control of the streets. In Barcelona tile workers were in power. Workers in ordinary clothes controlled the streets. Tens of thousands of arms had been distributed. No bourgeoisie were to be seen; their posh haunts had been closed down, their restaurants and hotels, commandeered. The beggars were off the streets and being cared for.

## **Committees**

The Revolutionary Committees that ruled Republican Spain went by dozens of different names from region to region and they were under the control of different political parties in each area. In the villages of Catalonia and Aragon the CNT/FAI had exclusive control. In the towns, apart from Sabadell and Lerida, they were also in control but with much greater representation from the UGT, PSUC, POUM and even the Esquerra.

The committees were appointed or elected in a variety of ways. Sometimes they were elected by mass meetings in the factories, sites and villages. In others, they were elected by trade unions or political parties. Everywhere, however, they were the political rule of the armed militia rather than of the factories or villages.

In Catalonia power was exercised by the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee. It existed alongside and over the Generalidad of President Companys - the regional government of Catalonia. In Valencia the Popular Executive Committee existed alongside Barrio's Provisional junta. In Malaga it was the Committee of Public Safety which ruled!

Yet it was in Aragon that the most democratic power existed the Defence Council. It was the only regional body in Spain that drew its authority from direct elections from local town and village committees. Enforcing the political power were the armed militia, organised and controlled according to political allegiance. There were fifty thousand in the CNT militia, thirty thousand in the UGT, ten thousand in the PCE/PSUC and about five thousand in the militia of the POUM.

## **War footing**

In these first weeks nothing was done unless it was through or by these revolutionary committees. The anarchist leader - Sentillan - gave a good picture of all of them when he described the functions of Catalonia's Anti-Fascist Militia Committee:

"An establishment for revolutionary order at the rear, an organisation of forces more or less on a war footing, with school; for communications and signals, food and clothing, economic organisation and legislative and judiciary action, the Anti-Fascist Militias Committee was everything, supervised everything; the transformation of the peacetime industries into war industries, propaganda relations with the government in Madrid, help for all the fighting centres, relations with Morocco, the cultivation of available land, health, supervision of coasts and frontiers, and a thousand and one problems of every kind."

## **The flawed revolution**

Despite all of this the revolution suffered from considerable internal weaknesses that were a reflection of the failings of the politics of anarcho-syndicalism and left reformism. First, there were certainly 'excesses' in the sense that in the towns even the smallest petit-bourgeois, opticians, bakers, etc - were 'collectivised'. On the land the CNT refused to consider at all the possibility of land division even where it may have been more appropriate. The PCE was to use these mistakes as ammunition against the revolution.

Secondly, the factories, rather taken under workers control as a stage on the road to complete expropriation and management within a planned economy, were most often turned into "producers' co-operatives", still content "to be subject to the laws of capitalist economics" (F Morrow Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain). Most disastrously, the CNT allowed the Republic to retain control over the Treasury and the banks. The committees merely prevented payments to fascists and encouraged loans to collectivised factories.

The greatest defect in the revolution was the political weakness of anarchism. To start with the anarchists allowed the Republican bourgeoisie to be represented on the revolutionary committees. In Catalonia delegates from the Generalidad were allowed to sit in on the Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militias:

This popular frontism was the logical outcome of the anarchist prejudice against 'the state in general and its opposition. in the midst of revolution, to the undivided rule of the working class. Sentillan displayed this weakness when he said, in accepting the offer of 'advice' from President Companys:

"We could have remained alone, imposed our absolute will, declared the Generalidad null and void and imposed the true power Of the people in its place, but we did not believe in dictatorship when it was being exercised against us, and we did not want it when we could exercise it ourselves only at the expense of others. The Generalida would remain in force with President Companys at its head."

Felix Morrow accurately summed up the contradictions and limits of the revolution in its early period, a weakness that was to allow the Stalinists to take back the initiative. He correctly stated that at a local level the power of the revolutionary committees was possibly greater than pre-October 1917 in Russia and certainly greater than that of the German revolution of 1918/19. But unlike those examples, the Spanish revolution gave birth to no national, centralised alternative to the government of the Republic. Despite its immediate disarray, this gave the bourgeoisie a toe hold on power. Morrow observed:

"One power, that of Azana and Companys, without an army, police or. other armed force of its own, was already too weak to challenge the existence of the other. The other, that of the armed proletariat. was not yet conscious enough of the necessity to dispense with the existence of the power of Azana and Companys. "

Finally, the revolutionary committees did not embrace the widest layers of the exploited and oppressed. They represented ? aside from Aragon - the political rule of the vanguard organised in militias, rather than the masses.

## **Stalinists**

Nevertheless, the anarcho-syndicalists did want to see the revolution go forward. The PCE. on the contrary, wished to see it halted and reversed from the very start. Even in the period of revolutionary rise, when the most left of the Republican bourgeoisie dared not contest the situation, the Stalinists assumed total responsibility for standing against the stream of revolutionary events. Even before the Stalinists entered the government they railed against the land seizures. The PCE repeatedly stated in Its press:

"To embark on such projects is absurd and equivalent to playing the enemy's game".

Springing to the defence of the Republican landlords - who, although being considerable employers of agricultural labourers, were consistently dubbed 'small farmers' ? the PCE declared ominously:

". . . that those who attack this property must be regarded as enemies of the regime.

Needless to say their attitude to workers' control in the factories was the same. They supported only the nationalisation by the Republican government of openly pro-fascist capitalists, rather than workers' control. They constantly attacked the collectives as 'wasteful' and as undermining the maximum mobilisation of resources for the war effort.

### **Limit set**

Politically, Stalin and the PCE had set definite limits to the Spanish revolution. On the day of the fascist uprising - 18 July - the PCE declared: "The government commands and the Popular Front obeys.

Later the Spanish delegate to the ECCI said that the PCE's motto must be "All for the Popular Front, all through the Popular Front." For the Comintern Andre Marty stated:

"The working class parties in Spain, and especially the Communist Party, have on several occasions clearly indicated . . . that the present struggle in Spain is not between capitalism and socialism but between fascism and democracy. In a country like Spain, where feudal institutions and roots are still very deep, the working class and the entire people have the immediate and urgent task, the only possible task not to bring about the socialist revolution but to defend, consolidate and develop the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

### **Property**

This argument was false to the core. The techniques of production on the land may have been 'feudal' but the property relations were thoroughly capitalist. Land had been bought and sold for years. Like any other commodity. The big landowners were, in fact, completely tied up with - in many cases identical with the captains of industry and finance. The notion of fascism as being a feudal reaction to democracy was a threadbare justification for the Popular Front. Spanish fascism, as with its German twin, was an instrument of finance capital against the working class.

'La Passionaria' herself, for the PCE, assured the bourgeoisie:

"Cease conjuring up the spectre of Communism, you generals . . . In this historic hour the Communist Party. . . places itself at the side of the government which expresses this will (i.e. of the people), at the side of the Republic, at the side of democracy."

The PCE did not confine itself to mere propaganda. During the early weeks, while the workers and poor peasants were consolidating and extending their gains, the Stalinists tried to intervene to call a halt. In Valencia, for instance, as early as 23 July the Provisional Junta challenged the authority of the Popular Executive Committee (PEC) and declared the latter's rule null and void. In response the PEC split; the CNT, UGT, PSOE and POUM rejected the ultimatum, while the PCE and the Republican left alone urged compliance with the edict. The Junta took fright and dissolved four days later. Nevertheless, the PCE remained unabashed.

### **Demobilising**

In Aragon, the PCE consistently attacked the town and village committees as 'factionalist' and 'cantonist'. In Madrid where the rule of the revolutionary committees was weakest, the Republic tried early in August to demobilise the militias. To this end, they passed conscription measures. The PCE immediately agreed. Fortunately, the CNT/UGT did not and the cabinet was forced to allow recruits to join the militia.

Without doubt the worst example was in Catalonia. On 2 August the bourgeois nationalist Casanovas attempted to restore Republican authority by forming a cabinet. He offered the PSUC three ministries which they immediately accepted. The CNT and POUM workers reacted so ferociously that on 8 August the PSUC had to resign or lose all credibility with the masses.

### **Anti-Labour**

So concerned were the Stalinists for the interests of the bourgeoisie that the PCE formed the GEPCI a federation for traders and small employers in the towns, which had a membership of 18,000 within a month or so of the civil war. The CNT mercilessly exposed this organisation of "Intransigent employers, ferociously anti-labour" which included one of the main textile employers who had backed the failed army rebellion of 1932.

At an international level the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Kremlin coincided completely with this conservative line. During the last two weeks of July Moscow's press carried a good deal of coverage on the civil war. Trade union levies were organised and money strictly for medical aid - was sent to the Republican government. Relations with the revolutionary committees were shunned. This period of support culminated in a mass rally in Red Square of 120,000 workers in support of the Republic on 3 August.

At the end of that week, however, Britain proposed a Non-Intervention Committee. On 6 August the USSR replied:

"The government of the USSR subscribes to the principle of non-interference in the affairs of Spain."

To show its sincerity the Kremlin ceased reportage on Soviet support for the Spanish Republic, and no attack was made on the policy of neutrality. Nothing was done to hinder negotiations between the imperialist powers leading to the creation of such a committee. The USSR ratified the treaty setting up the committee on 24 August and Germany the next day. The Non-Intervention Committee met on 9 September for the first time with 26 countries present.

From its inception to its demise this committee was a pure farce whose only purpose was to restrain the hand of the USSR and absolve Britain and France from giving military aid to the Republic. Meanwhile Germany and Italy continued to pour troops (e.g. 40,000 Italian troops) and arms into Spain to help Franco.

Many Stalinist writers have claimed that the lack of arms doomed the Republic from the start and that it was impossible to provide more. Even those with POUM sympathies - such as Orwell - came to the same conclusion.

### **No difference**

The truth was that fascism succeeded above all because the Republic failed to arouse the peasantry to its side with a bold programme of land reform. Eventually the peasantry fell into despair and saw no qualitative difference between Franco and the Republic and hence no reason to defend the latter.

Everything the Stalinists did in Spain from the very first weeks of the uprising was designed to prevent the success of the revolution. While they did not wish to see Franco triumphant. their murderous policies

ensured it nevertheless.

## **The battle for Barcelona**

By early 1937 the Stalinists in Spain were in an increasingly strong position to enforce their perspectives against the wishes of the working masses. They held many key governmental positions and by March were the largest single political party. The party and the Stalin led Communist International were committed to ruthlessly destroying all those forces who wished to wage the struggle against fascism as the struggle against the capitalist system that gave birth to it. The flower of the Spanish working class was to pay for this with their blood.

There were, however, serious obstacles that still lay in the path of the PCE in their drive to destroy the social gains and political organisations of the masses. Prime Minister Caballero wanted to marginalise the POUM but was not prepared for an all out attack on the mass of workers and peasants'. He was fearful of losing his mass UGT base by attacking workers' control in the factories and completely destroying land reforms. Under pressure from the PCE to launch attacks he struck up an alliance with the CNT in order to obstruct such measures. Similarly he tried to ally with the CNT in order to retard the dissolution of the militias into a 'mixed brigade' regular army.

## **Caballero**

The Stalinists attempted to put heavy pressure on Caballero to dissolve the militias and place their key figures in command positions. Soviet Ambassador Rosenberg visited Caballero daily in order to press this matter. Yet in February Caballero re-assigned several top PCE military men and replaced them with his own supporters. At the same time he was obstructing proposals to fuse the PSOE and PCE and attempts by the Stalinists to secure leading positions within the UGT.

It is no surprise therefore that the March Central Committee decided to attempt to oust Caballero. This was done in alliance with the leaders of the right wing of the PSOE - Negrin and Prieto. They had both realised that the PCE was the best bulwark against revolution. Hand in hand, the Stalinists and the PSOE right were prepared for a show down with the vanguard of the Spanish proletariat - the workers of Barcelona. Caballero was to be a victim of the Barcelona proletariat's defeat.

Barcelona was a focus of discontent with the course the Republic was taking. Living' conditions were deteriorating. Queues, black markets and corruption were evident. Even the bourgeoisie felt confident enough to put in a public appearance again. On April 14th women workers in the city led a huge demonstration against food rises.

The growing mood of proletarian discontent was reflected in a radicalisation within both the POUM and the CNT. Once they had been expelled from the Catalanian government the POUM leader Nin had concentrated his efforts on regaining entry to that government. Not so the POUM youth and militia who pressed for more radical action. Under their pressure the POUM leaders published a March call for the formation of a 'revolutionary government' while at the same time calling for the Catalanian Stalinists (PSUC) to be in it! In April the official Trotskyists, who now operated inside the POUM, secured the support of the small Madrid section for an oppositional programme. The Barcelona section voted for the immediate organisation of Soviets on April 15th. In the face of these militant stirrings in the POUM's ranks Nin forbade the formation of factions. Dissidents were called back from the front and expelled.

## **Challenge**

These developments coincided with a small break in the CNT's ranks. In late April the 'friends of Durruti'

declared' themselves for 'all power to the working class' and the creation of "democratic organs of workers, peasants and combatants power".

Together the POUM and Anarchist youth were able to mount an effective challenge to the Stalinists in Catalonia. In February 1937 the POUM youth (JCO and the anarchist Catalan Libertarian Youth) were able to bring 14,000 young militants together to form the Revolutionary Youth Front (RYF). In opposition, Santiago Carillo formed the Alliance of Anti-fascist Youth (AAFY) which comprised the Stalinists and some republicans. The Stalinists were to become increasingly alarmed as the RYF succeeded in causing several splits in the ranks of the AAFY and winning sections of it.

The threat of revolutionary opposition in Barcelona stung the PSOE right and the Stalinists into action. PSUC leader Bonaudès coined the notorious slogan 'before taking Saragossa, we must take Barcelona'. The Stalinists set out to crack down on CNT power. Relations between the Republic and the CNT militia broke down after Negrín sent the Carabñeros to take control of frontier customs posts out of the hands of the CNT militia. On May 3rd Barcelona police chief and PSUC member, Sala, took three truck loads of Civil Guards to take control of the Telephone Exchange out of the hands of the CNT militia.

## **Strike**

In response the Barcelona workers immediately struck. Within two hours the workers had stopped all industry and covered the city with barricades. The city was theirs again.

At a joint CNT IF AI/POUM meeting the POUM, sensing what was at stake, argued:

"Either we place ourselves at the head of the movement to destroy the enemy within or the movement falls and that will be the end of us."

However the CNT IFAI rejected a confrontational course with the Stalinist bourgeois coalition. Fatally, the POUM refused to break with the CNT and strike out on an independent course.

For three days the CNT leaders toured the area urging the workers to lay down their arms while they sought a compromise with the Republic. Yet the workers were in a strong position to advance and seize power throughout Catalonia. In Lerida and Hostofrancos the government forces surrendered to the workers. The POUM/CNT militias seized the PSUC Headquarters at Tarragona and Geron.

Despite this the CNT leaders surrendered the initiative to the Stalinists and, in turn the POUM surrendered leadership to the CNT. There was massive working class disgust at the behaviour of the CNT leaders. Ripped up copies of the CNT paper littered the barricades. But the POUM made no attempt to lead this militancy against the conciliating CNT leaders. On May 6th the CNT ordered their men out of the Telephone Exchange. The POUM commanded their forces

the Telephone Exchange. The POUM commanded their forces to leave the barricades.

The agreement struck with Catalan President Companys at the end of the strike had called for all troops to leave their positions. This was supposed to hold for militia and civil guard alike. Yet while the CNT/POUM militias observed every letter of the agreement the Republic shipped in hundreds of Assault Guards to secure the city. The police moved in to the Telephone Exchange to prevent communications between CNT forces.

## **Cowardice**

The Barcelona workers paid dearly for the cowardice of their leaders. 500 were killed and 1500 were wounded In the three days of the rising. Hundreds more were killed or wounded In the 'mopping up' operations.

Having defeated the Barcelona workers the Stalinists stepped up their offensive against the revolution. Target number one was the POUM. The POUM were constantly misnamed Trotskyists by the Stalinists. This was not simply because of Nin's one time connection to the Left Opposition.

## **Destroying Trotskyism**

In the Moscow trials and Siberian camps Stalinism was slaughtering all potential opposition in the name of rooting out a Trotskyite fascist world conspiracy. Designating the POUM as Trotskyite signified it as being on the hit list for Stalinist terror.

This was made abundantly clear by PCE General Secretary Jose Diaz on May 9th. Speaking at a public meeting he proclaimed that some 'enemies' of the Republic:

"call themselves Trotskyite which is the name used by many disguised fascists who use revolutionary language in order to sow confusion. I therefore ask ... why does (the government) not treat them like fascists and exterminate them pitilessly? ... I must ask: Is it not perfectly clear that the Trotskyites are not a political or social organisation of a definite tendency like the Anarchists, Socialists, or Republicans, but a gang of spies and provocateurs in the service of international fascism? The Trotskyite provocateurs must be swept away". (B. Bolloren. p308)

## **Suppression**

At the May 13th Cabinet meeting the two PCE ministers demanded the complete suppression of the POUM. When Caballero refused to sanction this the PCE ministers walked out and resigned. In turn Negrin and Prieto announced their refusal to serve in a Cabinet without the Stalinists. Caballero's government fell on May 15th and was replaced by one headed by Negrin himself.

The drive against the POUM could be stepped up now that the Negrin-PCE coup had succeeded. On June 16th the POUM was.

outlawed, its leaders and its militia arrested. The Soviet Consul General In Barcelona - Antonov Orvseenko - ordered its headquarters to be transformed into a prison. Nin was summarily executed after the International Brigades cooperated in staging a supposed Nazi attempt to liberate him from prison.

The Stalinists also turned their attention to pushing the CNT out of the government of Catalonia. President Companys, pressured to bring into his Cal. Pedro Gimpera - a seasoned reactionary and monarchist had in response the CNT withdrew from the government on 30th.

There was nothing now to stand in the way of the full scale operation of the Stalinist terror machine. The Stalinists had a practised apparatus of terror. Oglov of the Soviet internal security force (NKVD) had been sent by Stalin to supervise the operation. In June 1937 Togliatti, one of the heroes of today's communists - in order to supervise the action of the PCE and PSUC on Stalin's behalf. The main centre of it was at Albacete where the International Brigade's secret police (the SIM) had its headquarters. This was completely independent of Republican control and in hands of PCE chief and ECCI member Andre Marty. The force was enormous. In Madrid it was 6000 strong.

After the Civil War Marty was to boast that he personally had sent 500 members of International Brigade to

their deaths. However it was the POUM and Anarchist workers who to bear the full brunt of the oppression. The Stalinists consolidated their grip on the m forces and used this to up the repression of those stood in their way. By June 60% of the army were members of the PCE - many of them joined the party in order to serve The Stalinists controlled key positions in the army's command structure from this position of strength they could send POUMists on suicidal assaults as they did on Aragon front. The alternative to simply shoot them in the back of the head.

Control of the armed forces and of their own terror machine made It relatively simple for PCE to proceed to crush the remaining militias and incorporate them into the standing army.

Negrin government supported PCE's demand for tight control over the CNT militias. The leaders surrendered to Negrin.

By the autumn of 1937 the Republic had finally eliminated all militias independent of its direct command. It now had over half a million troops in 152 brigades dancing to its tune. That tune was being called by the Stalinists.

### **Militia defeated**

The militias were the last remaining force protecting workers' control in the plants and on the agricultural collectives. Once the militias had been put down It was only a matter of time before he Republic could attack these gains of the working masses. Workers control was undermined by nationalisation at the hands of the Republic which appointed a manager to rob the workers of their power. Things were to prove less easy for the Stalinists on the land.

In June 1937 the left socialist federation of Land Workers demanded that the October 1936 .and Decree be extended to all landowners who:

"had violated labour contracts, discharged workers unjustly because of their ideas, denounced them, (to the police) without good reason, (and) encouraged strike-breaking."

In reply not only did the PCE Minister of Agriculture turn down his demand. He also ordered that and be handed back to proprietors "who had employed under 25 workers. The CNT General Secretary of the Peasants Federation of Bastille complained:

"We have fought terrible battles with the Communists, especially with brigades and divisions under their control, which have assassinated our best peasant militants and savagely destroyed our collective farms."

When the harvest was completed n August the Stalinists began their biggest reign of terror. They went out to destroy the Aragon collectives by force. The PSUC had no base in the area which vas the power base of the CNT. the PSUC's onslaught began with the dissolving of the council of Aragon - the last remaining revolutionary committee - and the appointment of a Governor General. The attack was backed up by a Stalinist press campaign that accused the Aragon peasants of all manner of crimes Including.

terror, theft, the maintenance of arms stores and even forced collectivisation. Those who had herded the Russian peasantry Into collective farms at bayonet point now turned on the self organisation of the Aragon peasants. The Aragon peasants made serious inroads into the very private property system the Stalinists were set on defending.

### **Aragon**

Eventually Enrique Lister PCE leader of the II th division marched into Aragon and proceeded to destroy collectives. Municipal committees were closed down. Land and implements were handed back to their old owners. At least 600 CNT leaders were arrested.

From this time onwards the fate of the republic was sealed. Proof of the fact that only the defence and extension of the social revolution could defeat fascism is to be seen in the fate of the Aragon front. It was to collapse within months of the Republic's attack on the Aragon peasantry That same Republic could no longer command the selfless support of the workers and peasants of Aragon.

### **Stalin the executioner**

In the face of Franco's advance the Comintern entertained not the slightest thought of changing tactics or perspectives. At the same time the pro-bourgeois socialists and the last remnants of a republican bourgeoisie began to consider ways of making peace with Franco. The Comintern's response was to call on the PCE/PSUC to urge popular front policies on the government and on the CNT/UGT rank and file. There could be no questioning of the strategy that was paving the way for the victory of fascism over the Spanish proletariat.

Stalin had cynically sought to use the Spanish Revolution and Franco's offensive as a means' of pressurising Britain and France into an alliance with the USSR.

Stalin hoped that these democratic imperialist powers could be forced to ,protect their own Interests by fighting Germany and Italy In Spain. In this way they would also be preventing a war against Russia.

In March 1938, Jose Dial stated:

"We want (the democratic states) to help us, and believe that in this way they will be defending their own Interests . . . fascist aggression is going forward at such a pace that national Interests, In a country like France, for Instance, must convince all men who desire the liberty and Independence of their country of the necessity of standing up to this aggression. "

### **False**

Always a false perspective, the dependence on "those who desire liberty" in France and Britain was becoming more and more evidently false throughout 1938.

Britain and France had never wanted a loyalist victory for fear of precipitating a social revolution. A victory for the Republic would also, they feared, provoke a German-Italian Invasion and so bring war with Great Britain and France that much nearer.

Whilst the British and French bourgeoisie could not openly side with Franco they could and did achieve the same result through the force of the Non-Intervention Committee.

At the end of 1938 Britain and France ended that farce. At Munich Britain signed a 'peace pact' with Hitler. After this Stalin and the ECCI effectively abandoned the perspective of turning Britain and France against Hitler and began to shift the CI toward an accommodation with Hitler. This was revealed in a caustic attack on Britain and France by Dimitrov in Pravda in November 1938. In the United Front Against Fascism after Munich, he blamed the failure of Stalin's foreign policy upon the:

"reactionary Imperialist who, out of fear of the growth of the working class movement in Europe, of the movement of national liberation in Asia, out of hatred for the land of Socialism, sacrificed to fascism the Interests of their own people."

That Stalin abandoned the Republic to Franco after this point was evident in the removal of Soviet personnel and equipment from Spain from the autumn of 1938. In November the remaining 10,000 of the International Brigade were pulled out.

Yet the cynical, lying propaganda of Stalinism continued to spew out the necessity for the International Popular Front. Even in defeat the PCE refused to abandon it. With the fall of Catalonia to Franco on February 23rd 1939 the Politburo of the PCE said:

"It is a profound error to believe that we can hope for nothing or for very little from abroad and that the democratic countries. . . will not help us now that we have lost such an Important position. . ."

Stalinism continued to push the illusion that the Imminent victory of Franco:

"opens the eyes of those who until now have not wanted to face reality, and Increases the possibility of direct and indirect aid for the Spanish people."

Four days later Britain and France recognised Franco's forces as the legal government of Spain, a full month before the fall of Madrid and the end of the Civil War.

### **Isolated**

The final eighteen months of the Civil War within Spain itself reflected these political shifts? within the ECCI. On the one hand, the PCE continued to become politically isolated although this was masked by their total control over the bloody apparatus of terror. At the end of 1937 the PCE added the Ministry of Justice to their spoils in order to push more vigorously their campaign for "the complete extermination of the Trotskyist POUM gang". (ECCI letter to PCE. July 1938) Togliatti's only answer to the political shift to the right was to lead it and give it a political expression. Togliatti and Stepanov submitted, on behalf of the PCE, a new draft programme for adoption by the government In April 1938.

It was the most nationalistic document yet produced. Its commitment to democracy insisted on the inclusion of a clause protecting the property of foreigners.

None of this, however, could prevent the shadow of the bourgeoisie defecting from the Popular Front. Negrin opened negotiations with Franco In February 1938. But this delay and hesitation In publicly dumping the PCE Irritated the Spanish military command - now? left to their fate by the departure of the USSR "advisors?". On March 5th/6th Casado as head of the Madrid garrison formed a Council of National Defence thus usurping Negrin's ministerial authority. Having done that he oversaw the fall of Madrid on March 29th. By then the PCE had abandoned the Republic. In hiding, Togliatti issued a PCE statement on March 10th calling for an end to the resistance.

### **Defeat**

On that same day in Moscow Stalin presided over the CPSU's 18th Congress. The events in Spain were hardly referred to. The lessons of defeat would not be drawn in Moscow. To ensure that they would not be drawn, Stalin silenced dozens of his henchmen on returning from their operations In Spain. Stalin thereby hoped to hide from history the crimes of Stalinism. But this was impossible. The Spanish revolution had been drowned in the blood of those who dared to make it.

As Trotsky himself argued:

" . . . Stalin in Spain in 1937 is the continuator of Stalin of the March 1917 Conference of the Bolsheviks. But in 1917 he merely feared the revolutionary workers; In 1937 he strangled them. The opportunist had become executioner."

In this connection, workers everywhere will do well to recall the words of the Spanish Stalinist Ibarri who in 1937 proclaimed:

"We must always remember this. An unbridgeable abyss of blood lies between us and the Trotskyists. ?

If we understand by ?Trotskyism? the vanguard of the Spanish proletariat, whether socialist, anarchist, centrist or genuinely Trotskyist, then we agree. We merely reply to those who carry her mantle and celebrate her party?s achievements fifty years on: the abyss was filled to overflowing by your murderous activities. The blood of Spain still stains your hands.

## **Glossary**

**CNT (CONFEDERACION NACIONAL DE TRABAJO)**

The National Confederation of Labour, founded in 1910. was the anarcho-syndicalist trade union.

**FAI (FEDERACION ANARQUISTA IBERICA)**

The Iberian Anarchist Federation was mainly an anarchist pressure group within the CNT

**PSOE (PARTIDO SOCIALISTA OBRERO DE ESPANA)** The Spanish Socialist Worker?s Party had a ?left socialist? wing which followed Largo Caballero, and a ?right socialist? wing which followed Prieto and Negrin?s social democrat direction.

**VGT (UNION GENERAL DE TRABAJADORES)**

The trade union of the socialists.

**PCE (PARTIDO COMUNISTA DE ESPANA)**

The Spanish Communist Party.

**PSVC (PARTIDO SOCIALISTA UNIFICADO DE CATALUNA)**

The United Socialist Party of Catalonia was an amalgamation of Catalan socialist parties in the early summer of 1936 which was completely taken over by the communists.

**POUM (PARTIDO OBRERO DE UNIFICACION MARXISTA)**

The Workers? Party of Marxist Unification was led by Andres Nin (Trotsky?s former secretary from whom he had disassociated himself) and Joaquin Maurin. Its main strength lay in western Catalonia. The party was not ?Trotskyist? as the Stalinists claimed.

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