

# The Spanish Revolution and those who killed it

## Dossier

THE Spanish civil war was not primarily a struggle of "democracy against fascism". It was a class struggle of the Spanish workers and peasants against capitalist, landlord and priest rule in Spain.

This working class struggle was subverted by the Stalinists, who came to dominate the Republican areas from which the old ruling class had fled. The workers had effective power in society, but, led by anarchists who did not believe in class power, the Spanish workers did not consolidate that power. The Spanish Communist Party, under the military discipline of Stalin, defended in the Republican areas the interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie, even those who had fled to the area controlled by the fascist General Franco. Why?

Stalin wanted to show Britain and France, hoping for an alliance with them against Germany, that he could quell any threat from the working class in any part of Europe. Erecting a police state in the Republican areas, the Stalinists drove the peasants off the land they had seized from landlords and quelled the independent workers' movement in Catalonia.

The carrying through of the social revolution in the Republican areas would have won workers and peasants from Franco; the granting of independence to Morocco would have won over Franco's Moorish troops. By crushing the social revolution in the "anti-fascist" areas instead, and refusing to grant Moroccan independence the Stalinists strengthened Franco, and ultimately ensured his victory.

It was the Stalinists, not the fascists, who killed the Spanish revolution: the fascist scav-

engers then moved in for 40 years of fascist rule in Spain. That is the story in brief.

In the following pages we publish documents, eye-witness accounts and contemporary political analysis which amplify, demonstrate and prove these statements.

In June 1931 the second Spanish Republic is instituted. The government disestablishes the Catholic Church and makes some weak liberal reforms. It crushes the strike wave of July-August 1931.

In October 1933 the Spanish fascist movement, the *Falange Española*, is founded.

At the end of 1934 anarchist and socialist workers organise huge protests around the country, and in the Northern Asturias a miners' insurrection is crushed by an army led by General Franco. 5,000 are killed, 30,000 arrested.

In September 1935 a new left party in Spain — the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) — is formed by former followers of Trotsky such as Andrés Nin and the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, a "Bukharinite" group originating in the Catalanian Communist Party and led by Joaquín Maurín.

In February 1936 the "Popular Front", an electoral alliance of the Socialist Party, left Republicans, Catalanian nationalists and the tiny Communist Party wins the general election.

Trotsky bitterly denounces the Popular Front as an alliance tying the working-class parties to the bourgeoisie.

The Republicans, however, govern alone until September 1936, when the Socialist and Communist Parties join the government. Both anarchists and the POUM support the Popular Front's election, but keep their distance.

Despite a gigantic wave of peasant land seizures in March 1936, the government equiv-



Queuing up to vote in the 1936 election

ocates on agrarian reform, though Spain has the most unequal distribution of land in Europe. The vast majority of the rural population are landless labourers or small tenant farmers.

On 17 July 1936 the Spanish military rise in rebellion, supported by the Falange, the Catholic Church and monarchists. The government refuses to arm the workers, who arm themselves.

Those who had stayed with Trotsky's Left Opposition after 1935 — the "Bolshevik-Leninists" — are very small in number but they are the only group to consistently call for the establishment of soviets, the arming of the workers, for the replacement of the Republican/Popular Front government with a workers' government.

With the Stalinists working ruthlessly behind the scenes, gradually the government, which after September 1936 has a Socialist Prime Minister, Largo Caballero, wrests control away from the workers organisations.

The Stalinist slogan — behind which they organised a bloody counter-revolution — was "win the war against the fascists first, then make a workers' revolution". While the POUM and the much larger organisations of anarchist workers — the CNT (syndicalist union) and FAI (anarchist "party") — support workers' control, both adapt themselves to the Stalinist line. Both join the Popular Front government (the POUM in Catalonia and Valencia). Anarchist leaders such as García Oliver and Frederica Montseny remain in the government that was at war with the revolutionary anarchists!

In August 1936 — the months of the first of

## Chronology

**January 1930:** dictator Primo de Rivera resigns.

**April:** International Left Opposition organised in Paris.

**June 1931:** Republicans/Socialists win election

**October:** Falange Española forms.

**November:** right wing win elections.

**November 1934:** Asturian uprising crushed.

**August 1935:** 7th Congress of Comintern adopt Popular Front policy.

**September:** POUM forms.

**February 1936:** Popular Front wins election.

**March:** mass land seizures.

**May-June:** mass strike in France. French Popular Front elected.

**July:** fascist rising begins in Morocco.

**August:** first Moscow trial. Zinoviev and

Kamenev executed.

**September:** CNT and POUM join government.

**October:** Madrid under siege by fascists.

**December:** POUM expelled from government.

**April 1937:** bombing of Guernica.

**May:** government attempt to seize telephone exchange in Barcelona, leading to new upsurge.

**June:** POUM outlawed and leaders arrested.

**January 1938:** bombardment of Barcelona begins.

**April-June:** Franco's army reaches northern coast. Republican Spain now cut in half.

**November 1938:** International Brigade leaves Spain.

**January 1939:** Barcelona surrenders.

**February 1939:** France and Britain recognise Franco.

**March:** Madrid and Valencia surrender.

**August:** Stalin-Hitler Pact signed.



Seville. As the fascists took territory they brutally suppressed any opposition

the Moscow Trials, in which the leaders of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 are tried as fascist agents and sentenced to be shot — the Stalinists begin a campaign of smears and attacks against both the POUM and the anarchists. In December 1936 the POUM is kicked out of the Catalan autonomous government.

Stalin sends "experts" from his secret police (GPU), and the Spanish Stalinists begin to organise a local GPU.

In May 1937 Assault Guards, at the behest of the Stalinists, attempt to seize the Barcelona telephone exchange which had been won by the anarchist workers in July 1936 from the army. Spontaneously, barricades go up around Barcelona. This was plainly an attempt to liquidate the most militant group of workers in Barcelona and strike a fatal blow at the workers' revolution. The battle ends after the anarchists and POUM leaders "negotiate" a deal with the government. After 3 days the POUM orders their members to leave the barricades.

Extracts published here tell this story and its aftermath in some detail. George Orwell gives an eye-witness account and John McNair answers the lies the Stalinists told about the POUM and revolutionary workers after May 1937.

What did the Trotskyists propose? Our comrades argued for a general strike, for the arming of the working class, for unity of the POUM and the anarchists in defence of the revolution, for soviets and the working class to seize power. We reprint here the leaflet they distributed on the barricades — "Next time it will be too late".

A document published here — "Anarchists massacred at Tarragona" — tells in the words of a survivor the tragic story of another counter-revolutionary attack elsewhere in Catalonia, at Tarragona, in May. Hundreds of anarchist workers are murdered. Things like this were repeated in many places.

By the middle of June the POUM is outlawed, its leaders arrested. Their foremost leader, Nin, is kidnapped, tortured and murdered.

The repression of the workers' movement is pursued ruthlessly. The Stalinist Republican police state has much in common with Franco's police state.

By strangling the workers' movement the government weakens the fight against the fas-

cists. The strength of the militias, the production of food and arms depends upon the real, lived, committed involvement of the workers in the struggle. And because the struggle for equality, which is absolutely central to it all, has become sidelined and crushed it no longer has the hearts and minds of the workers. Two of our extracts here demonstrate this most graphically: that of M Casanova who shows how the Stalinists killed workers' control in the economic sphere, and the account by a young British socialist Robert Martin of his experiences, "With the International Brigade". He tells how class differentiation and class rule had been introduced into the International Brigade and how demoralising this was to his comrades and himself.

As a traceable consequence of the counter-

# 1. Workers' control in Spain

By John McNair\*

I PROPOSE to give an account of what I saw while in Spain, and of the further developments since my return.

The work of economic reconstruction commenced immediately after the various barracks and buildings occupied by the fascists had been retaken by the armed workers, and it is being carried on parallel with the military activities against fascism. There was no question of patching up the capitalist framework — it was realised by the workers at the very outset that capitalism had failed in every respect and that a new social order would have to be established.

In order that the taking over of industry should be carried out on a scientific basis, the various working-class organisations decided to form an Economic Council which would function as the central advisory

\* John McNair was an Independent Labour Party organiser. This article appeared in the October 1936 edition of the ILP magazine *Controversy*. The ILP was in uncritical solidarity with the POUM. All the articles in the collection have been abridged.

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revolution in Republican Spain, from late in 1937 the tide of war turns in favour of the fascists. In January 1938 the fascists advance into Catalonia and Valencia and the bombardment of Barcelona begins. A year and two months later Madrid surrenders. The fighting ends. The workers are defeated, and 40 years of Francoist rule begin.

sory body on all questions of economic control, the decisions of this Council to be legalised by the Government. These Economic Councils have been set up in various parts of Spain which are under the control of the workers, but we shall deal with their development in Catalonia as, in this province, the whole of the territory has been freed and it is thus possible for them to function normally.

The Economic Council of Catalonia consists of 15 members, 10 elected by the various trades union, the CNT, the UGT, the FAI and the POUM and five by the purely political parties. Each member of the Council is called upon to deal with a particular branch of economic activity such as Metallurgy, Textiles, Banking, Food Supplies, etc. The particular job of each member is to apply the programme indicated below to the particular branch of industry under his control.

1. Reorganisation of production in accordance with the needs of the consumers, suppressing or modifying unnecessary industries and stimulating energetically the creation of new industries which it will

be useful and necessary to develop in Spain following the change in the value of the peseta.

2. The establishment of a strict control on export and import trade to prevent foreign attacks on the new economic order.

3. The collectivisation of large estates and agricultural undertakings which will be worked by the Peasants Syndicate with the aid of the Government and the compulsory adhesion of agriculturists who exploit medium or small farms.

4. The partial devaluation of urban property by means of rent reductions or the establishment of equivalent taxes where it is not deemed advisable to reduce the amount of the rent.

5. The collectivisation of all the principal industries, public services and all forms of transport.

6. The immediate taking over and collectivisation of all undertakings abandoned by their owners.

7. The intensification of the co-operative system in the distribution of all commodities

*"High finance, which was sympathetic towards the reactionaries, has had to be subordinated to the interests of the people."*

and especially the co-operative exploitation of all the important distributing undertakings.

8. The immediate workers' control of the

banking system with the ultimate aim of the nationalisation of the banks.

9. The full control by the workers' syndicates of all small undertakings which remain in the form of private property.

10. The immediate absorption by agriculture and industry of the unemployed. To assist this process, agricultural products will be immediately distributed at controlled prices; the return to the land of those workers who can be absorbed by the new agricultural methods of work will be hastened and so will also the creation of important industries to produce manufactured articles which it may be difficult to import, and the complete electrification of the whole of Catalonia, including all the railways.

11. The rapid suppression of all forms of taxation in order to institute one unique tax on revenue.

It will be seen that the above programme provides for the taking over of almost all forms of industry, and the immediate measures adopted by the works during the transition period are as follows:

Each industry is controlled by a Committee of Workmen elected through their unions, whose job it is to develop and direct the undertaking along its particular line and to produce most economically and efficiently the various products for which the particular industry exists.

During the time of transition, however, and in view of the imperious necessities of the moment, a homogeneity of action is imposed which is brought into being by the following measures:

1. The election of a General Committee of Direction and Control, on which are represented delegates from each trade union.

2. Election of smaller committees at the head of each section of the undertaking.

3. Publication of the salaries paid to the high directors of the concern. Suppression of these salaries. Suppression of the office of director in all the concerns taken over. Levelling up of wages.

4. Suppression of the Board of Directors and the expropriation of the concern taken

over. (NB to avoid diplomatic difficulties no foreign concerns have been taken over).

5. Preparation of the 36-hour week. The 40-hour week has already been decreed by the government.

6. Modernisation of all sanitary arrangements etc.

7. The publication of the financial situation of the concern, together with a complete list of the stock.

8. The fixing of a definite programme of

*"The results of this co-operative, collectivist control are that production has been increased enormously."*

work, especially in those industries working for the military defence of the workers.

9. The employment of the former experts and technicians who are in sympathy with the ideals of the workers, and they are numerous. Some of them indeed have been elected as members of the Workmen's Committee of Control.

The total result of the taking over of the industries by the workers has been that the rate of production of all essentials is even now greater than before the rising.

We shall now examine in detail the functioning of several branches of the new economy, commencing with what is in many respects the most important, namely, banking.

Banking, which came to a complete standstill with the military insurrection, has once more started to function by order of the legal government. Naturally finance has had to adapt itself to the new conditions created by the civil war. High finance, which was sympathetic towards the reactionaries and even gave them active support, has had to be subordinated to the interests of the people. The administration of the banks and other financial institutions has been taken over by committees of employees and a government representative.

Sums may be withdrawn from banking accounts only when intended for the payment of salaries and wages, to cover running costs and general works expenses. Private depositors, however, are permitted to withdraw a sufficient amount to cover their personal expenses within the limits imposed by the Committee of Control. The Stock Exchange is closed and speculation is prohibited. Exchange transactions are also prohibited and foreign currency may be obtained only for travelling expenses. The work of the Workers' Committees of Control has prevented any financial panic, any increase of prices or any hoarding of money.



The Barcelona Ritz was taken over and turned into a workers' cafe



**Workers took over the mansions and estates of the capitalists, expropriating their wealth**

As we have seen, all the large estates have been taken over by the people and the medium and small properties have been left in the hands of the peasants.

A law has been passed providing for the compulsory trade union organisation of the peasants. The reason for this law was the absence of a comprehensive agricultural organisation to regulate and control the necessary preparation and distribution of products intended for consumption.

The principal object of this new law is to ensure that all agricultural activities are governed by the general food requirements of the population, to stimulate the productivity to the point necessary to provide adequate food supplies, and to ensure the peasants against any risk or usurious exploitation.

The trades unions created by this law, together with those already in existence, will supervise work in the following sections:

- A. The necessary preparation and sale of agricultural products.
- B. The acquisition of supplies.
- C. Mutual insurance.
- D. Credit fund.

The trades unions controlling the exploitation of land which has been taken over have created sections for collective work. They are grouped into municipal federations which look after the distribution of food in the following manner:

- 1. Sales to local trade unions.
- 2. The creation of central offices for the preparation of the agricultural produce.
- 3. Establishment of distributing centres in all towns and villages.
- 4. Insurance fund against risks together with credit funds opened in the Agricultural and Co-operative Credit Bank under the control of the Peasants' Union and the Government.

The organisation of agricultural work on a co-operative and collectivist basis has been

accepted by the people as the most effective

*“Workers realise now, for the first time in Spanish history, that they are working for themselves.”*

way of deriving the fullest benefit from the agricultural exploitation of the land and the improvement in the standard of living.

The same principles which have been applied to banking and agriculture have also

been successfully carried out in the workers' control of industry.

The following is a list of the industries which have been taken over and run under workers' control on a collectivist basis:

The railway companies; the omnibuses and trams; the underground; the petroleum, automobile and steamship companies; all public services, including electricity, gas, water, etc; all munition factories; the hospitals, theatres, cinemas, etc.

The results of this co-operative, collectivist control are that production has been increased enormously, in spite of the fact that large numbers of the workers are fighting on the various fronts, and, further, the increased production has been attained more economically on account of the fact that highly paid and often useless directors have been displaced and their places taken by experts and technicians who have proved their sympathy with the aims of the workers. In many cases these experts have been co-opted on to the committees of control and as a result there is a complete absence of friction between the office staffs and the workers, which naturally increases production and reduces costs.

Finally, behind all this is the fact that the workers realise now, for the first time in Spanish history, that they are working for themselves. They see quite clearly that the increase in production will not cause unemployment, as in capitalist countries, but will result in shorter hours and improved conditions of working. Even now the hours are 40 per week, to be reduced to 36, with an increase in wages of 15 per cent. In spite of this, however, the workers are voluntarily working 12 to 14 hours per day without extra pay, to increase further the rate of production, and they are forgoing their wage advance of 15 per cent., which is going to the wives and dependants of the armed workers at the front.

They are doing all this because they know that they are in control of the new economic order and can afford to build durably and well. ■



**Barricades in Barcelona, July 1936**



## 2. How the Stalinists killed workers' control

By M Casanova\*

THE workers took control of the factories. The revolution came from below. From above, in other words from the leadership of the workers' parties, came only curbs. The decrees of the Taradellas government of the Generalitat on collectivisation, for example were only a tardy confirmation of an already established state of fact.

The economy of governmental Spain reflected the contradictory tendencies that tore the anti-fascist camp apart. On the one side there were the measures of nationalisation, in other words the state takeover of "abandoned" factories and enterprises, those factories where the workers had forced out the capitalists, and on the other the collectivisation, which reflected the desire of the workers to run the economy, and which were particularly inspired by the anarchists, who saw in them the start of the realisation of their theories of a union of free communes. These collectives quite often had features of petty-bourgeois socialism: the workers would seize an enterprise, and often even shared the proceeds. In spite of this false orientation these collectivisations could obviously have served as a starting point for a socialist economy in the event of revolutionary developments.

Despite the methods of the trade union bureaucracy that prevented them functioning democratically, the factory councils constituted a proletarian organisation arising from the movement of 19 July. Hence the government's constant struggle against the factory council.

The Popular Front government was torn between capitalist concepts of the economy, the anarchist concept of free communes and the socialist conception.

The general orientation of the Popular Front obviously pointed down the road towards the suppression of the collectives. They did not fit inside the framework of the democratic republic, and formed an obstacle to winning Chamberlain's frozen heart.

Despite this tender and persistent courtship of Chamberlain, the leaders of the Popular Front could not go all the way to the suppression of the collectives. They could not break with the workers, neither the CNTers in particular nor the workers of the UGT, who did not want the destruction of the collectives either.



Food production campaign

In a word, our democrats were placed between two fires. They wanted to reconcile the good God and the Devil. It was difficult. It was even impossible. But by their very class nature these petit-bourgeois could do not other than attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable.

The economic policy of the Popular Front is an exact reflection of this contradiction.

The Communists were naturally the supporters of the state taking over the whole war industry. This was the leitmotiv of their propaganda: "War industry and transport into the hands of the government." But it was easier said than done.

The workers had no confidence in Negrin's state, in other words the bourgeois state. The centralisation of the entire war industry, transport, and the economy in general was obviously necessary as far as we Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists were concerned as well, but it could be only realised under proletarian power, which is called the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Communists, however, were impatient. They pushed the government in the direction of energetic measures — new measures of nationalisation, in other words. For these heroes of gangsterism every thing came down to energetic and dictatorial measures. These "Marxists" imagined that everything could be resolved by administrative measures and the methods of a "strong government". Thus they believed that strong and dictatorial measures would bring order into the war industry, that decrees would suppress flourishing speculation etc. And this, moreover, is easy to understand. Did they not, by police measures, "crush" Trotskyism and assassinate Andrés Nin, our Erwin Wolf, Moulin, etc. Only it is far easier to carry out an order to

kill working-class militants than it is to solve an economic problem by decree.

We Trotskyists are opponents of the theory of "Socialism in One Country" and this is one of our cardinal sins, but even more so we understand the foolishness of the theories and practices of socialism in a single village, as well as in a single factory and on a single farm. In fact the collectives could only develop and prosper when centralised and generalised and with the continued help of a proletarian government. But yet again, this did not exist in Spain.

The economy of Republic Spain was therefore very diverse: nationalised industry, run by either the central government or the Generalitat, each waging war on the other, the collective competing with each other; and finally, private capitalism, which little by little rebuilt itself. Add to this a flourishing speculation, the influx of a number of foreign adventurers and traders against whom the policy of the Popular Front could do nothing, the almost complete breakdown of exchange between town and country, as the peasant shut himself up in his collective or on his little plot, not wishing to sell anything because he would only receive banknotes from the town whose value diminished by the day — and we get a return to a primitive economy etc.

Negrin's economy was not and could not be an organised capitalist economy, any more than it was a 'socialist' economy either (that is to say, the economy of the transitional period and of the dictatorship of the proletariat). It was neither chalk nor cheese. It was a nonsense, erected into a system.■



The government had to resort to crude propaganda in order to encourage the war industry.

\*M Casanova was the pseudonym of Mieczyslaw Bortenstein (1907-42). Polish by birth he was a member of the Young Communists in Poland and the Communist Party later in France. He was expelled in 1934 and joined the French Trotskyist organisation, the Ligue Communiste Internationaliste. He left France for Spain in July 1936, served in the militia of the CNT, and then worked on the journal of, and became a leader of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists. He escaped to France in March 1939 only to be arrested by the Nazis. In August 1942 he, a Jew, was deported to Auschwitz, where he died. Taken from *Revolutionary History* Volume 4, nos. 1/2.



POUM demonstration in Barcelona

### 3. The issues in Spain

John McNair

LET us examine the real points at issue between the Communist International and the revolutionary workers of Spain, including the POUM. There are five points:

1. The attitude towards collectivisation.
2. The "Popular Army".
3. The May Days in Barcelona.
4. The fight for a democratic republic or the fight for workers' power.
5. The separation of the war from the revolution.

1. One of the stock arguments of the Communist International is that the POUM and the revolutionary workers forced collectivisation on the peasants. This is a plain mis-statement of what actually occurred. When the fascist revolt had been beaten by workers and peasants in August 1936, and cities as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Malaga saved from the fascist dictatorship, the workers and peasants continued their pressure on the retreating fascists, who were forced back to the mountains around Madrid, the hills of Navarre and the plains of Aragon. It was obviously immediately necessary at this moment to commence the re-organisation of the agricultural and industrial life of Spain.

The property holders both of land and capital had almost without exception gone with the fascists and therefore the workers and peasants simply took over the workshops, factories and land. These measures of collectivisation were not foisted on the unwilling peasants by the POUM, but were simply the inevitable result of the economic situation. It is to be borne in mind that workers' control was not an empty phrase during the first month of the revolution but an actual state of things. Its effect

was to ensure the functioning of the economic machine in Spain and to allow the workers to continue the fight against fascism. All this is well known: and the outstanding fact is that in spite of the withdrawal from industry and agriculture of a large number of workers and peasants between the ages of 18 and 45 and the lack of raw material from abroad, production was actually greater under workers' control than it had been under capitalism prior to the fascist revolt.

The vast majority of the peasants and all the landless labourers, had not only welcomed collectivisation but were beginning to take pride in it, as was demonstrated in the whole of Catalonia and even in the Valencia districts.

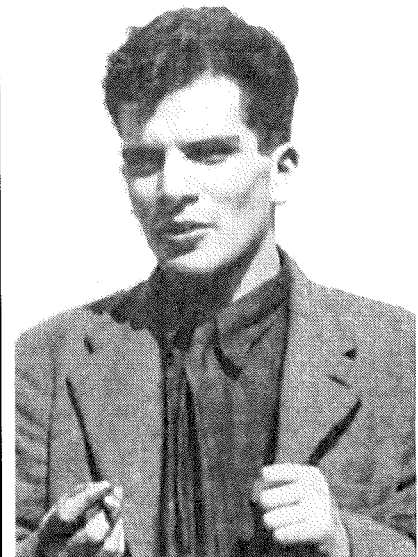
Jose Diez, General Secretary of the Party, on 4 February, 1937: "It is absolutely essential that all our democratic victories should be consolidated on the basis of respect for the small proprietor".

This is not a British Conservative speaking but a Spanish Communist. In these circumstances numbers of the small proprietors turned to the Communist Party in the hope that its efforts would result in the restoration of private property. Because the POUM opposed all this, they were naturally "fascist spies." The counter-reactionary role of the Communist Party in Spain is clearly shown, and it is only necessary to quote one or two instances:

*GANDESA*: "A punitive expedition arrived in this town and arrested the most prominent members of the peasant collective and of the union. This expedition then requisitioned the buildings of the union. To complete its work of "pacification" it returned the collectivised land, which had been worked by the peasants to its former owners."

*VINEBRE*: "The peasant collective and the peasant union had been flourishing in the locality since August 1936. The town was invaded by forces of the Carabineros who, with the aid of the PSUC, sacked the headquarters and homes of the peasants and dissolved their collective. The right wing elements were naturally re-animated and proceeded to calumniate the revolutionary workers. The work of the counter-revolution continued and was completed by the forced dissolution of the Town Council and the collective. The reactionary bourgeoisie are congratulating themselves in this town."

2. The constitution of the workers' military forces in Spain was the subject of endless controversy. The point of view of the Communist Party was to liquidate the armed workers' "rabble" and to replace



#### Letter from Spain to a lover in England

Heart of the heartless world,  
Dear heart, the thought of you  
Is the pain at my side,  
The shadow that chills my view.

The wind rises in the evening,  
Reminds that autumn is near.  
I am afraid to lose you,  
I am afraid of my fear.

On the last mile to Huesca,  
The last fence for our pride,  
Think so kindly, dear, that I  
Sense you at my side.

And if bad luck should lay my strength  
Into the shallow grave,  
Remember all the good you can;  
Don't forget my love.

1936, John Cornford

it with an organised Popular Army with a single command. The plausibility of this argument obscures its inherent falsity. Neither the POUM, nor any of the revolutionary workers desired a "rabble". They did however realise the historic truth, that, in moments of crisis, unless the workers control the army the army will control the workers. At the beginning of the insurrection this so-called "rabble" was able to repulse Spanish fascism and would have saved Spain for the workers had not Italy, Germany and Portugal supplied men, munitions, aeroplanes, tanks, etc, to Franco. It was the workers' militia, together with the International Brigade (which was also in those days a workers' militia), which saved Madrid, which held off the fascist forces in the Basque provinces, and which defended Malaga (which was subsequently lost, but not by the Workers' Militia). Both the POUM and all the revolutionary workers in Spain realised the necessity of strengthening and organising the workers' military forces, and instituting a single command: the vital difference was that the POUM desired that the military forces should remain under the control of the organised workers and that the differences of pay and of class should not be re-instituted.

WE can understand the sneers of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* about a workers' militia, but it is a strange tragedy when these are echoed by numbers of the Communist workers themselves.

What are the real differences between the Popular Army and the workers' militia? The workers' militia is based on equal pay for all fighters. The naming of the officers from among the workers on the basis of technical and military proficiency. The final control of the organised workers and the



The Republican Army

driving force of the army itself to be revolutionary discipline with the definite object of winning Spain for the workers. The Popular Army had abolished equal pay. The rates of pay are on the same scale as the French Republican army. The officer class is drawn largely from the middle classes. So-called "military" discipline replaces revolutionary discipline. The control of the army is now in the hands of the middle classes, the old military caste, and the Government. This is not the place to compare the military effectiveness of the two types of forces, but a careful examination of what

has occurred in Spain since the outbreak of insurrection will prove that even on applying the acid test of military effectiveness the workers' militia were to say the of it, not behind the Popular Army.

3. The May days in Barcelona. The street fighting was caused by the unprovoked aggression of the Government Assault Guards against the Telephone building in Barcelona which had been held by the workers since they defeated the fascists on 19 July 1936. This provocation followed a whole series of attempts to destroy collectivisation and workers' control of the factories. The attack on the Telephone building was the last straw and the revolutionary workers of Barcelona resisted. This resistance took the form of a cessation of work on Monday evening, 3 May. This strike was not called either by the CNT or the UGT but was spontaneous on the part of the workers, of all the workers in Barcelona. Work ceased almost everywhere. Barricades were built in the centre of the city and all the political and trade union buildings were placed in a state of defence.

The workers instinctively took the streets to defend their revolutionary conquests. On one side of the barricades were the members of the CNT, many members of the UGT and the POUM; and on the other the Civil Guards, the Assault Guards, sections of the Esqerra (left Republicans), and the Communists. The crime of the POUM was therefore to be seen on the workers' side of the barricades. "The workers were on the streets and our party had to be on the side of the workers. It is the obligation of each of us to fulfil his duty and his responsibility as he conceives them. We understand our duty and responsibility thus: We are a class party of the working class, and our place is by its side." This is from the official statement of the POUM published on 11 May after the Barcelona events.

## "Next time it will be too late"

THE formal seizure of Barcelona, the constitution of a revolutionary government, would have, overnight, led to working-class power. That this would have been the outcome is not seriously contested by the CNT leaders nor by the POUM.

That is why the left wingers in the CNT and POUM ranks, sections of the Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti and the Bolshevik-Leninists called for the seizure of power by the work-

ers through the development of democratic organs of defence (soviets). On 4 May, the Bolshevik-Leninists issued the following leaflet, distributed on the barricades:

"Long live the revolutionary offensive."

No compromise. Disarmament of the National Republican Guard and the reactionary Assault Guards. This is the decisive moment. Next time it will be too late. General strike in all the industries excepting those connected with the prosecution of the war, until the resignation of the reactionary government. Only proletarian power can assure military victory.

Complete arming of the working class.

Long live the unity of action of CNT-FAI-POUM.

Long live the revolutionary front of the proletariat.

Committees of revolutionary defence in the shops, factories, districts."

From *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* by Felix Morrow

# 4. Eye witness in Barcelona

By George Orwell

IT HAS been asserted in the Communist press that the so-called uprising in Barcelona was a carefully prepared effort to overthrow the Government and even to hand Catalonia over to the fascists by provoking foreign intervention in Barcelona. The second part of this suggestion is almost too ridiculous to need refuting. If the POUM and the left-wing anarchists were really in league with the fascists, why did not the militias at the front walk out and leave a hole in the line? And why did the CNT transport-workers, in spite of the strike, continue sending supplies to the front? I cannot, however, say with certainty that a definite revolutionary intention was not in the minds of a few extremists, especially the Bolshevik Leninists (usually called Trotskyists) whose pamphlets were handed around the barricades. What I can say is that the ordinary rank and file behind the barricades never for an instant thought of themselves as taking part in a revolution. We thought, all of us, that we were simply defending ourselves against an attempted coup d'état by the Civil Guards, who had forcibly seized the Telephone Exchange and might seize some more of the workers' buildings if we did not show ourselves willing to fight. My reading of the situation, derived from what people were actually doing and saying at the time, is this.

The workers came into the streets in a spontaneous defensive movement, and they only consciously wanted two things: Telephone Exchange and the disarming of the hated Civil Guards. In addition there was the resentment caused by the growing poverty in Barcelona and the luxurious life lived by the bourgeoisie. But it is probable that the opportunity to overthrow the Catalan Government existed if there had been a leader to take advantage of it. It seems to be widely agreed that on the third day the workers were in a position to take control of the city; certainly the Civil Guards were greatly demoralised and were surrendering in large numbers. And though the Valencia Government could send fresh troops to crush the workers (they did send 6,000 Assault Guards when the fighting was over), they could not maintain those troops in Barcelona if the transport workers chose not to supply them. But in fact no resolute revolutionary leadership existed. The Anarchist leaders disowned the whole



**George Orwell, fought with the POUM militia**

thing and said "Go back to work," and the POUM leaders took an uncertain line. The orders sent to us at the POUM barricades, direct from the POUM leadership, were to stand by the CNT, but not to fire unless we were fired on ourselves or our buildings attacked. (I personally was fired at a number of times, but never fired back.) Consequently, as food ran short, the workers began to trickle back to work; and, of course, once they were safely dispersed, the reprisals began.

The enormous majority of the people behind the barricades were ordinary CNT workers. And this point is of importance, for it was as a scapegoat for the May riots that the POUM was recently suppressed; the four hundred or more POUM supporters who are in the filthy verminous Barcelona jails at this moment, are there ostensibly for their share in the May riots. It is worth pointing, therefore, to two good reasons why the POUM were not and could not have been the prime movers. In the first place, the POUM was a very small party. If one throws in Party members, militiamen on leave, and helpers and sympathisers of all kinds, the number of POUM supporters on the streets could not have been anywhere near ten thousand — probably not five thousand; but the disturbances manifestly involved scores of thousands of people. Secondly, there was a general or nearly general strike for several days; but the POUM, as such, had no power to call a strike, and the strike could not

4. The fight for a democratic republic or workers' power. It has been said by the Communist International that the struggle in Spain is for democracy and the bourgeois republic against international fascism. This is a complete misreading of history. The Spanish workers who successfully resisted the fascist rebellion were actuated, not by any desire to merely defend "democracy", but to overthrow Spanish landlordism and capitalism. This is why they took the land and set up collectives all over anti-fascist Spain. During the time I was in Spain I asked the question many times, of both workers and soldiers. The invariable reply was: "We are fighting for bread, for land, and for the control of industry by workers' power." If I had told them they were fighting for "democracy" they would have simply smiled and put it down to my foreign ignorance.

5. The separation of the war from the revolution. The Spanish Communist Party said: "Let us beat fascism first and talk about the revolution afterwards." The POUM said: "The way to beat fascism is to fight it by an efficient workers' army at the front on the basis of workers' power and control in the rear." The mere statement of the POUM position is sufficient to demonstrate its worth and logic.

We believe in workers' power because we know that society is based on labour, and the greater the strain, as in the case of an anti-fascist struggle such as is occurring in Spain, the greater the possibility of victory if the broad, sound, economic and practical method of socialist production is adopted.

The carrying on of the war and the revolution does not dissipate the workers' energies. It strengthens and co-ordinates them. It gives them the organised material basis on which to fight and inspires them with the revolutionary will for victory, because they know they are fighting for their ultimate economic emancipation. ■



**Arresting a major in the Civil Guard**

\*George Orwell, a member of the I.L.P., served with the POUM militia. He wrote a book about it — *Homage to Catalonia*. This article has been abridged from *Controversy*, August 1937.





Assault Guards parade through the streets of Barcelona, to show that "order" has been restored, after the May events

have happened if the rank and file of the CNT had not wanted it. As to those involved on the other side, the *London Daily Worker* had the impudence to suggest in one issue that the "rising" was suppressed by the Popular Army. Everyone in Barcelona knew, and the *Daily Worker* must have known as well, that the Popular Army remained neutral and the troops stayed in their barracks throughout the disturbances. A few soldiers, however, did take part as individuals; I saw a couple at one of the POUM barricades.

Thirdly, as to the stores of arms which the POUM are supposed to have been hoarding in Barcelona. As a matter of fact the POUM possessed pitifully few weapons, either at the front or in the rear. During the street-fighting I was at all three of the principal strongholds of the POUM, the Executive Building, the Comité Local and the Hotel Falcon. It is worth recording in detail what armaments these buildings contained. There were in all about 80 rifles, some of them defective, besides a few obsolete guns of various patterns, all useless because there were no cartridges for them. Of rifle ammunition there was about 50 rounds for each weapon. There were no machine-guns, no pistols and no pistol ammunition. There were a few cases of hand-grenades, but these were sent to us by the CNT after the fighting started. A highly-placed militia officer afterwards gave me his opinion that in the whole of Barcelona the POUM possessed about a hundred and fifty rifles and one machine-gun. This, it will be seen, was barely sufficient for the armed guards which at the time all parties, PSUC, POUM and CNT-FAI alike, placed on their principal buildings.

In reality, by far the worst offenders in this matter of keeping weapons from the front, were the Government themselves. The infantry on the Aragon front were far

worse-armed than an English public school OTC; but the rear-line troops, the Civil Guards, Assault Guards and Carabineros, who were not intended for the front, but were used to "preserve order" (i.e., overawe the workers) in the rear, were armed to the teeth. The troops on the Aragon front had worn-out Mauser rifles, which usually jammed after five shots, approximately one machine-gun to fifty men, and one pistol or revolver to about thirty men. These weapons, so necessary in trench warfare, were not issued by the Government and could only be bought illegally and with the greatest difficulty. The Assault Guards were armed with brand-new Russian rifles; in addition, every man was issued with an automatic pistol, and there was one sub-machine-gun between ten or a dozen men. These facts speak for themselves. A Government which sends boys of fifteen to the front with rifles forty years old, and keeps its biggest men and newest weapons in the rear, is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than of the fascists. Hence the feeble war-policy of the past six months, and hence the compromise with which the war will almost certainly end.

## II

WHEN the POUM, the Left Opposition (so-called Trotskyist) off-shoot of Spanish Communism, was suppressed on 16-17 June, the fact in itself surprised nobody. Ever since May, or even since February, it had been obvious that the POUM would be "liquidated" if the Communists could bring it about.

On 16 June Andres Nin, the leader of the party, was arrested in his office. The same night before any proclamation had been made, the police raided the Hotel Falcon, a sort of boarding-house maintained by POUM and used chiefly by militiamen on leave and arrested everybody in it on no par-

ticular charge. Next morning the POUM was declared illegal and all POUM buildings, not only offices, bookstalls, etc., but even libraries and sanatoriums for wounded men, were seized by the police. Within a few days all or almost all of the forty members of the Executive Committee were under arrest. One or two who succeeded in going into hiding were made to give themselves up by the device, borrowed from the Fascists, of seizing their wives as hostages. Nin was transferred to Valencia and thence to Madrid, and put on trial for selling military information to the enemy. Needless to say the usual "confessions", mysterious letters written in invisible ink, and other "evidence" were forthcoming in such profusion as to make it reasonably likely that they had been prepared beforehand.

Meanwhile, the rank and file of the Party, not merely party members, but soldiers in the POUM militia and sympathisers and helpers of all kinds, were being thrown into prison as fast as the police could lay hands on them. Probably it would be impossible to get hold of accurate figures, but there is reason to think that during the first week there were 400 arrests in Barcelona alone; certainly the jails were so full that large numbers of prisoners had to be confined in shops and other temporary dumps. So far as I could discover, no discrimination was made in the arrests between those who had been concerned in the May riots and those who had not. In effect, the outlawry of the POUM was made retrospective; the POUM was now illegal, and therefore one was breaking the law by having ever belonged to it. The police even went to the length of arresting the wounded men in the sanatoriums. Among the prisoners in one of the jails I saw, for instance, two men of my acquaintance with amputated legs; also a child of not more than twelve years of age.

One has got to remember, too, just what imprisonment means in Spain at this moment. Apart from the frightful overcrowding of the temporary jails, the insanitary conditions, the lack of light and air and the filthy food, there is the complete absence of anything that we should regard as legality. There is, for instance, no nonsense about Habeas Corpus. According to the present law, or at any rate the present practice, you can be imprisoned for an indefinite time not merely without being tried but even without being charged; and until you have been charged the authorities can, if they choose, keep you "incommunicado" — that is, without the right to communicate with a lawyer or anyone else in the outside world. It is easy to see how much the "confessions" obtained in such circumstances are worth.

But perhaps the most odious feature of the whole business was the fact that all news of what had happened was deliberately concealed, certainly for five days, and I believe for longer, from the troops on the Aragon front. As it happened, I was at the front from 15 to 20 June. I had got to see a medical board and in doing so to visit various towns behind the front line, Sietamo,

Barbastro, Monzon, etc. In all these places the POUM militia headquarters, Red Aid centres and the like were functioning normally, and as far down the line as Lerida (only about 100 miles from Barcelona) and as late as June 20, not a soul had heard that the POUM had been suppressed. All word of it had been kept out of the Barcelona papers, although, of course, the Valencia papers (which do not get to the Aragon front) were flaming with the story of Nin's "treachery". Together with a number of others I had the disagreeable experience of getting back to Barcelona to find that the POUM had been suppressed in my absence. Luckily I was warned just in time and managed to make myself scarce, but other were not so fortunate. Every POUM militiaman who came down the line at this period had the choice of going straight into hiding or into jail — a really pleasant reception after three or four months in the front line.

The POUM was by far the smallest of the revolutionary parties, and its suppression affects comparatively few people. Nevertheless, its suppression is symptomatically important. To begin with it should make clear to the outside world what was already obvious to many observers in Spain, that the present Government has more points of resemblance to fascism than points of difference. (This does not mean that it is not worth fighting for as against the more naked fascism of Franco and Hitler. I myself had grasped by May the Fascist tendency of the Government, but I was willing to go back to the front and in fact did so.) Secondly, the elimination of the POUM gives warning of the impending attack upon the Anarchists. These are the real enemy whom the Communists fear as they never feared the numerically insignificant POUM. The anarchist leaders have now had a demonstration of methods likely to be used against them; the only hope for the revolution, and probably for victory in the war, is that they will profit by the lesson and get ready to defend themselves. ■

## 5. Anarchists massacred at Tarragona



**An anarchist militia: "Durrutti's column"**

ON Wednesday 5 May at 8am, a large force of police suddenly appeared at the Central Telephone Exchange of Tarragona, plentifully armed with weapons and grenades for taking it by assault. They occupied it without encountering any resistance whatever from the workers. Once masters of the building, they took control of the urban and inter-urban communications, cutting the lines of the working-class and anarchist organisations.

Four hours later a conference took place at the general military headquarters between Comrade Casanovas, representing the telephone workers, and the lieutenant-colonel, chief of the coastal military forces, when a detailed account of the unexpected developments was given. As a result of the conference it was agreed that the police forces should be withdrawn from the first floor, where the apparatus was, and should keep watch in the vestibule.

But 15 minutes later the Chief of the Police announced that the Commissar for Public Order in Tarragona refused to carry out the agreement following very strict

orders received from Barcelona.

While these conferences and telephone conversations were proceeding, our comrades discovered activity on a large scale in the local headquarters of the Republican Izquierda, numerous individuals entering without arms and leaving with a gun. The same thing happened, but with less cynicism in the headquarters of the Socialist Party, and in the People's Club.

The following day, in the morning, a violent and open attack on our organisation began. Supported by an intense musketry fire and bomb throwing, an assault was launched against the quarters of the Libertarian Youth. This attack was repulsed. In face of the gravity of such aggression, we appointed a commission to get in touch with the Commissioner of the Catalonian Government with a view to demanding a general conference of all the anti-fascist forces in order to avoid a repetition of such lamentable episodes. He agreed to this request and called together the representatives of all the political and industrial organisations.

In order to acquaint themselves with what was happening at Tarragona, our comrades Castello and Rueda had set out for that town. On arriving, they heard a lively fusillade and realised that it had to do with a fresh assault on the headquarters of the Libertarian Youth led by part of the State forces collaborating with elements from different



**Barricades outside the office of the anarchist union, May 1937**

*This account of events in a small Catalonian town during the tragic week beginning 3 May appeared first in the Spanish Anarchist paper, "Solidaridad Obrera", of 15 and 16 May, having been considerably mutilated by the censorship. It was reproduced in "Revolution Proletarienne" of 10 June, from which the following is translated. The French paper printed under the heading "The White Terror in Catalonia."*

organisations. The tremendous violence of this attack made it possible for the assailants this time to achieve their aim.

At the conference, the delegate of the Central Government, the Air Force Captain Barbeta, disclosed that he had explicit instructions from the government to use every kind of force — including the air force — to destroy the syndicalist and anarchist organisation if it did not surrender its arms.

Our representatives declared that they were ready to surrender their arms — but on condition that the disarmament was general.

To this very natural request, Captain Barbeta replied that he could not proceed to disarm the other organisations because they had placed themselves unconditionally on the side of the government — to which our comrades replied that the Confederation was so little against the Government that it was part of it.

The discussion continued and finally our comrades consented to abandon their right — indisputable though it was — in order to avoid any violence which might be prejudicial to the workers. They laid down their arms at the air force camp on the following conditions:

1. that all who had been arrested should be set free;
2. that the police forces actually present along with all the forces belonging to political organisations should be removed from Tarragona and replaced by air force men;
3. that the life and liberty of all comrades should be respected and their headquarters immune from attack.

These points having been accepted by all the organisations represented, Captain Barbeta promised that he would permit nobody on any pretext to violate them and that if the undertakings were not observed he would act with the greatest energy, regardless of what individuals or organisations were the offenders.

The rest of the day was quiet, but the next day at dawn, as early as 3 o'clock in the morning, the assault guards and the police took possession, by violence, of the offices of the Defence Council — under orders from above — as they said.

Then, as if this was an agreed signal, they set to work to assassinate the militants of the CNT and the FAI, breaking the word of honour given the evening before by the authorities.

The environs of the town are now strewn with the corpses of our comrades. Here are the names of some of those seen: Mario Beruti, Baltasar Vallejo (Trade Union of Maritime Workers), Mato Freixas (Transport Workers' Union), Jose Gallisa (Black-Coat Workers' Union), Julian Martinez, Ramon Alvarez (Republican National Guard), Jose Castellvi (Trade Union of Office Workers), Francisco Molina and four other corpses which up till now have not been identified.

Furthermore the well-known militant, Rua, a young Uruguayan anarchist who had been in Spain to fight on the side of the workers since the beginning of the military plot of July, was also assassinated. ■

## 6. With the International Brigade

By Robert Martin\*

WHAT I heard over the wireless, read in the newspapers and saw on the films made me decide to go to Spain to fight for the workers. I joined the International Brigade. Before doing so I had to get recommendations from a member of the Communist Party. I was told by the Communist Party that the International Brigade was made up of volunteers to fight against fascism and for the workers' revolution but that the workers' revolution could not take place until the war was over. I thought this reasonable but I expected a socialist spirit and practice in the Brigade itself.

I will not give dates or describe in detail how we volunteers got to Barcelona. Despite my experiences, I do not want to give anything away to the British Government. But, in view of what happened afterwards, it is necessary to say that both in Paris and in Spain we were strongly warned against the anarchists. Indeed, we were led to the conclusion that the anarchists are as much the enemy of the Spanish workers as are the fascists.

*"The contrast between the conditions of the men and the officers was one of the first things to disturb me."*

We went by sea to Barcelona. We were told that we could not go by land because the anarchists were at the border and would shoot us. Our boat was sunk by a submarine — it was said to be an Italian submarine. When the torpedo hit the ship I went over the side and was picked up by a fishing boat after twenty-five minutes in the water. Sixty-five men went down with the ship. I was deeply stirred by the way in which the boys who were left on the boat sang the *Internationale* as the ship went down. Among them was my friend, Robert MacDonald, who enlisted me.

My first surprise was to find that the fishermen who rescued me in their boat were anarchists. I had been warned that the anarchists were our enemies as well as the fascists and that they would shoot us. Yet

here they were rescuing me and the other comrades who were in the water. When I reached the shore I was treated by these anarchist fisherfolk with a sympathy and care which I shall never forget. After receiving treatment in hospital I was taken to the home of an anarchist and treated with the utmost kindness.

That night we went by train to Barcelona, arriving late at night. Again we were warned about the anarchists. We were told that we could not be taken into the city by the main streets because we would be shot by the anarchists. We were directed through the back streets and alleys and told to keep very quiet. We were taken to the Karl Marx Barracks and put up there for the night and warned that we must not leave the building. We stayed there for two days.

From Barcelona we went to Valencia, where Robert Minor, the American correspondent of the *Daily Worker* addressed us. He repeated the warning against the anarchists. I began to feel that this was being undone.

Next we went to Albacete and then on to the Headquarters of the International Brigade at Madrigas. The conditions here were bad. I did not expect an easy time and would have put up with these without complaint if all of us had had to share them in a way which I expected in a Communist brigade. But, whilst the billeting and food provided for the privates were wretched, the officers were billeted in the best building in the town and had excellent food, including meat, butter and eggs. We could never get any English or American cigarettes, although the officers had plenty. We could not get sufficient food or any meat, while the officers had everything for their comfort. I myself went to their building and saw the contrast of treatment.

The contrast between the conditions of the men and the officers was one of the first things to disturb me. This did not seem to me to be a workers' army, with its differences between the privates and the officers. It was an army which maintained class differences. I had received an entirely different impression from the Communist Party in Glasgow. I had been told that we would be comrades together and equals.

When the boys were sent to the front I was not included. I was told that I was to go back to Albacete and to be sent to the front from there. When I reached Albacete I was taken before Commandant Lamont. I asked when I was to go to the front. He said that I was not going to the front; I was going to gaol. I asked the reason for this. He said he did not know, but he had orders to put me in prison.

\* Robert Martin was a politically unaffiliated socialist who went to fight in Spain. This article first appeared in the September 1937 issue of *Controversy*.

**The Negro Peoples of America battalion**

I was then placed in prison and found myself with seventy other comrades of the International Brigade. Among these were comrades who had been at the front for months. They had become disillusioned and had asked to be sent home. They had been placed in prison instead. One of them had been shot badly in the arm; several others had been wounded.

I asked to see the Political Commissar to find out why I was in prison and why I should not be released. He came to see me eight days later and told me that he would do his best to get me out but he could not do much. I was too dangerous a man to be sent to the front. He was a Welsh Communist.

That afternoon the guard came along and took me to the Commission of Justice, composed of Commandant Lamont and another officer who spoke French, but who, I was told afterwards, was a Russian. This was told me by another Russian, who had known the officer before being imprisoned.

I asked for the Political Commissar to be present with me, but this was not allowed. When I asked why I was in prison I was told that I was a provocateur and was suspected of belonging to Mosley's fascists in England. I was asked to what party I belonged. I told them I did not belong to any party but was an anti-fascist and a class-conscious worker. They then told me that I was a criminal wanted by the police and that I had come to Spain only because I was afraid that I would be put in gaol. When I dared to ask why members of the Communist Party had been put in prison and why the workers of Catalonia were being shot down I was told that this was provocation and proved to them that I was a fascist. They gave orders for me to be locked up.

We went on hunger-strike in the prison because we were not given enough food. Again let me say that we would not have complained of lack of food if there had been a shortage. The leaders of the hunger-strike were removed. I did not know what happened to them. The rest of us were distributed to different cells. Cells infested with vermin. Nothing was done to try to keep the cells clean. We asked for water

and disinfectant and brushes to clean the cells, but without result. The heat and the stuffiness were terrible. There were about thirty-five men in one room with only two little windows. One night a comrade was brought in. He was very ill — had pains in his stomach and was in agony. He was in such a bad condition that we battered on the doors to attract

the guards and to ask them to take the comrade to hospital. He was not attended to for three days. Then the doctor ordered that he should be removed to hospital. Owing to the bad food, the heat and the vermin, other men were sick all the time. They received no proper attention they were just given pills.

We were there for eighteen days. Some men had been there for months. After we had been there ten days some of the comrades were taken away by ambulance and told that they were being sent home. These included two Canadians, Fred Walker and James Bradley, and some French comrades. They were given a cordial farewell by the Communists, who shook their hands, cried "Salud, camerads," and gave them the sign of the clenched fist. The boys were happy to know that they were going home and, of course, this gave us hope as well.

Eight days later the same thing happened to us. We were taken from the prison at night-time, our army gear was taken away from us, we were given civilian clothes, and our identification cards as members of the International Brigade were torn up. We were told that we had finished with the Brigade. We were going to Barcelona and from there to Marseilles.

Before we left, Commandant Lamont said, "Well, fellows, you are going home," and he gave us a kind of sarcastic salute which made me wonder. He told us not to get "tough" with the guard or we should have to walk from Barcelona to Perpignan (across the Frontier).

We were taken away in an ambulance very late at night so as not arouse interest. There were fifteen of us; one armed French officer went with us in the ambulance.

We went to Valencia and then through to Barcelona. We were taken to the International Brigade Headquarters at the Karl Marx Barracks. We were told to wait there until our passports were put in order — they had been taken from us when we were imprisoned in Albacete. Finally we were told to get back into the ambulance so that we could be taken by road to Perpignan.

We were not taken to Perpignan. We were taken instead to the Calle Corsiga, which is

the central police station in Barcelona. We asked what was happening and were again told that it was all right — we were being sent home. We were ordered to enter the police station. We noticed with some doubts that guards had been placed at the door. Our names were taken, our ages and the names of our relatives.

We were returned to the ambulance and driven to the Hotel Falcon with an armed escort. By now we all had reason to doubt the truth of the story that we were being sent home. The Hotel Falcon was originally one of the buildings of the POUM. It had been converted into a prison.

It was full with prisoners — and we found there some of the comrades who had left Albacete eight days before we left and who, we thought, had been sent home. Among them were the two Canadians and the French comrades. We heard that in different prisons in Barcelona there were many members of the International Brigade.

When we asked the Captain why we were there, he said he did not know. We asked why he could not set us free. He said he had orders to keep us there. On the fourth day we were told to go down below, and that the police were going to take us to some other place. We were again taken to the Calle Corsiga, where we were asked many questions by the police. We had our photographs and fingerprints taken. Even now we hoped that this might be for passport purposes and that we were going to be set free.

At the Hotel Falcon we were treated like criminals. I was told by the guards that everybody there was a fascist or a suspected fascist — some undoubtedly were fascists. We continually asked the Captain when we were going to be released and he said he did not know. With me were a number of French comrades who belonged to the Communist Party and they refused to believe that their party could have been responsible for putting them in gaol. I wrote a letter to the Communist Party in Barcelona demanding

**Tom Mann battalion**





POUM youth serving in the Maurin battalion.

our release. When no reply came even the most loyal Communists began to doubt.

Among the prisoners in the Hotel Falcon was a comrade who had come to Spain as the son of Ras Imru, the Abyssinian prince. He had been lauded to the skies by the Communists and had immediately been made a Commandant in the International Brigade. Photographs of him and interviews with him had appeared in the Communist papers, and here he was a prisoner!

The food ration at the Hotel Falcon meant semi-starvation. We only had two meals a day — the first at 3 p.m. and the second at 10.30 at night. They both consisted of one plate of soup — watery soup with a few potatoes — and a piece of dry bread. The boys were always hungry. Many of the other prisoners had friends in Barcelona who brought them food, but the members of the International Brigade were without friends. No one in Barcelona knew they were in prison. The Communist Party refused to help them and they were in a desperate condition.

I realised that it might be months before we would be freed. Many of the prisoners had been confined for weeks. There seemed no reason to expect liberty before the war ended. I, therefore, sought an opportune time to make my escape.

The Hotel Falcon was carefully guarded, but during heavy rain, when I noticed that the guards were taking shelter, I dropped from the veranda on the first floor on to the street. Everyone was running because of the rain and I just ran with them and got away.

I obtained shelter from Spanish workers who were sympathetic to the anarchists. Once more it was these anarchists who were going to shoot me who helped me.

I knew I could not leave the country unless I got leave. I therefore decided to go to the Karl Marx Barracks and ask for my papers. When they knew I had no papers they called the police, so I "beat it".

Under these conditions I was forced to go to the British Consulate to obtain an identi-

fication paper to get out of the country. He told me that there were men coming to him every week from the International Brigade for assistance in getting out of the country. I got on a French ship to Marseilles and returned home.

In Paris I asked for help from the Communist Party. They would give me no help, but when I pointed out that I had left my belongings with them when going to Spain and demanded these they gave me some clothes.

When I got to London I was penniless and went to the ILP. From them I got money to return to my home in Scotland. In Scotland the folk were astonished by my story.

This had been a bitterly disappointing experience. I went to Spain as a worker to fight the fascists. I responded to the appeal of the Communists. Instead of enabling me to fight the fascists, the Communists put

me in prison. I must say the treatment I received might have been expected from fascists, but I never expected it from Communists. My only offence was that I protested against the differentiation of treatment between men and officers in what was supposed to be a workers' army.

I don't want to write anything which may make the task of defeating Franco more difficult, but it is necessary and right that what is happening to many comrades in the International Brigade should be known. I cannot forget good comrades of mine — splendid, class-conscious workers — still imprisoned under conditions which must break their bodies if not their spirits, in Barcelona. I write this record in the hope that it will lead to something being done for them and in order that many good comrades whom I know in the Communist Party may understand what their Party is doing in Spain. ■

## 7. The fate of the Spanish Revolution by Leon Trotsky

Though Trotsky's writings on Spain fill a large volume he wrote no concise overview of the Spanish revolution. This "diary" is culled from the commentaries he produced all through the last decade of his life: the last item here is dated 20 August 1940, the day Trotsky was assassinated.

25 May, 1930

THE Primo de Rivera dictatorship has fallen without a revolution, from internal exhaustion. In the beginning, in other words, the question was decided by the sickness of the old society and not by the revolutionary forces of a new society...

The workers' struggle must be closely linked to all the questions that flow from the national crisis. The fact that the workers demonstrated with the students is the first step, though still an insufficient and hesitant one, on the proletarian vanguard's road of struggle toward revolutionary hegemony.

Taking this road presupposes that the communists will struggle resolutely, audaciously, and energetically for democratic slogans. Not to understand this would be to commit the greatest sectarian mistake. At the present stage of the revolution, the proletariat distinguishes itself in the field of political slogans from all the "leftist" petty-

bourgeois groupings not by rejecting democracy (as the anarchists and syndicalists do) but by struggling resolutely and openly for it, at the same time mercilessly denouncing the hesitations of the petty bourgeoisie.

By advancing democratic slogans, the proletariat is not in any way suggesting that Spain is heading toward a bourgeois revolution. Only barren pedants full of pat, ready-made formulas could pose the question this way. Spain has left the stage of bourgeois revolution far behind.

If the revolutionary crisis is transformed into a revolution, it will inevitably pass beyond bourgeois limits, and in the event of victory the power will have to come into the hands of the proletariat. But in this epoch, the proletariat can lead the revolution — that is, group the broadest masses of the workers and the oppressed around itself and become their leader — only on the condition that it now unreservedly puts forth all the democratic demands, in conjunction with its own class demands...

The peasantry will inevitably link the slogan of political democracy with the slogan of radical redistribution of the land. The proletariat will openly support both demands. At the proper time, the communists will explain to the proletarian vanguard the road by which these demands can be achieved, thus sowing the seeds for the future soviet system.

Even on national questions, the proletariat defends the democratic slogans to the hilt, declaring that it is ready to support by revolutionary means the right of different national groups to self-determination, even to the point of separation.



**Going to the front: UGT/CNT train**

But does the proletarian vanguard itself raise the slogan of secession of Catalonia? If it is the will of the majority, yes; but how can this will be expressed? Obviously, by means of a free plebiscite, or an assembly of Catalan representatives, or by the parties that are clearly supported by the Catalan masses, or even by a Catalan national revolt. Again we see, let us note in passing, what reactionary pedantry it would be for the proletariat to renounce democratic slogans. Meanwhile, as long as the national minority has not expressed its will, the proletariat itself will not adopt the slogan of separation, but it pledges openly, in advance, its complete and sincere support to this slogan in the event that it should express the will of Catalonia...

By supporting all really democratic and revolutionary movements of the popular masses, the communist vanguard will be leading an uncompromising struggle against the so-called republican bourgeoisie, unmasking its double-dealing, its treachery, and its reactionary character, and resisting its attempts to subject the toiling masses to its influence.

The communists never relinquish their freedom of political action under any conditions. It must not be forgotten that during a revolution temptations of this sort are very great: the tragic history of the Chinese revolution is irrefutable testimony to this. But while safeguarding the full independence of their organisation and their propaganda, the communists nonetheless practice, in the broadest fashion, the policy of the united front, for which the revolution offers a vast field.

#### **21 November, 1930**

SPAIN may go through the same cycle as Italy did, beginning with 1918-1919: ferment, strikes, a general strike, the seizure of the factories, the lack of leadership, the decline of the movement, the growth of fascism, and of a counter-revolutionary dictatorship?

#### **24 January, 1931**

THE appearance of the Spanish proletariat on the historic arena radically changes the

situation and opens up new prospects. In order to grasp this properly, it must first be understood that the establishment of the economic dominance of the big bourgeoisie and the growth of the proletariat's political significance definitely prevent the petty bourgeoisie from occupying a leading position in the political life of the country. The question of whether the present revolutionary convulsions can produce a genuine revolution, capable of reconstructing the very basis of national life, is consequently reduced to whether the Spanish proletariat is capable of taking the leadership of the national life into its hands. There is no other claimant to this role in the Spanish nation. Moreover, the historic experience of Russia succeeded in showing with sufficient clarity the specific gravity of the proletariat, united by big industry in a country with a backward agriculture and enmeshed in a net of semi-feudal relations...

To aim the weapon of the revolution against the remnants of the Spanish Middle Ages means to aim it against the very roots of bourgeois rule...

Only pedants can see contradictions in the combination of democratic slogans with transitional and purely socialist slogans. Such a combined program, reflecting the contradictory construction of historic society, flows inevitably from the diversity of problems inherited from the past. To reduce all the contradictions and all the tasks of one lowest common denominator — the dictatorship of the proletariat — is a necessary but altogether insufficient, operation. Even if one should run ahead and assume that the proletarian vanguard has grasped the idea that only the dictatorship of the proletariat can save Spain from further decay, the preparatory problem would nevertheless remain in full force: to weld around the vanguard the heterogeneous sections of the working class and the still more heterogeneous masses of village toilers. To contrast the bare slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the historically determined tasks that are now impelling the masses towards the road of insurrection would be to replace the Marxist conception of social revolution with

## **Glossary**

**Manuel Azaña:** Republican President from May 1936 to 1939.

**Nikolai Bakunin:** founding anarchist, popular in Spain from the 1870s onwards.

**Largo Caballero:** Socialist Prime Minister from September 1936 to May 1937. Known as 'the Spanish Lenin', Caballero used Marxist rhetoric and backed the suppression of the movement.

**Catalonia:** distinct, industrialised, region in eastern Spain with own language, history.

**CNT (National Confederation of Labour):** the anarcho-sindicalist trade union federation. Founded 1910. It was won and lost by the Communist Party during the 1920s.

**FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation):** the anarcho-sindicalist political organisation, founded 1925.

**Luis Companys:** leader of the Catalan nationalists.

**"Dictatorship of the proletariat":** a Marxist term meaning the state after the workers have taken power, which will defend — if necessary by repression — the workers against capitalist resistance and reorganise society along democratic and socialist lines.

**Generalitat:** Catalan regional and autonomous government.

**Julían Gorkin:** leader of the POUM  
**Left Opposition:** name taken by followers of Trotsky. The Spanish LO had around 4,000 members when they split from Trotsky in 1935.

**Martov:** right-wing Russian socialist, leader of the "Menshevik" faction.

**Joaquín Maurín:** leader of the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, and then the POUM.

**Negrín:** right-wing socialist who becomes Prime Minister in May 1937.

**POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification):** formed in September 1935 by a fusion of former-Left Oppositionists and the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc.

**Republicans:** general term for those who supported the Popular Front government.

**Alfred Rosmer:** former syndicalist, follower of Trotsky until 1930.

**SAP (Socialist Workers Party of Germany):** party formed from left of Social-Democracy and right-wing faction of Communist Party known as the "Brandlerites".

**Victor Serge:** former anarchist, was expelled from Stalinist Russia in 1936, was loosely associated with Trotskyists for a short time.

**UGT:** Socialist Party controlled trade union federation. The Socialist Party was the largest single party in Spain at the time of civil war.

Bakunin's. This would be the surest way to ruin the revolution.

Needless to say, democratic slogans under no circumstances have as their object drawing the proletariat closer to the republican bourgeoisie. On the contrary, they create the basis for a victorious struggle against the leftist bourgeoisie, making it possible to disclose its anti-democratic character at every step. The more courageously, resolutely, and implacably the proletarian vanguard fights for democratic slogans, the sooner it will win over the masses and undermine the support for the bourgeois republicans and socialist reformists. The more quickly their best elements join us, the sooner the democratic republic will be identified in the mind of the masses with the workers' republic...

In reality, in spite of the mighty sweep of the struggle, the subjective factors of the revolution — the party, the mass organisations, the slogans — are extraordinarily behind the tasks of the movement, and it is this backwardness that constitutes the main danger today.

The semi-spontaneous spread of strikes, which have brought victims and defeats or have ended with no gains, is an absolutely unavoidable stage of the revolution, the stage of the awakening of the masses, the mobilisation, and their entry into struggle. For it is not the creams of the workers who take part in the movement, but the masses as a whole. Not only do factory workers strike, but also artisans, chauffeurs, and bakers, construction, irrigation, and, finally, agricultural workers. The veterans stretch their limbs, the new recruits learn. Through the medium of these strikes, the class begins to feel itself a class.

However, the spontaneity — which at the present stage constitutes the strength of the movement — may in the future become the source of weakness. To assume that the movement can continue to be left without a clear programme, without its own leadership, would mean to assume a

perspective of hopelessness. For the question involved it is nothing less than the seizure of power. Even the stormiest strikes do not solve this problem — not to speak of the ones that are broken. If the proletariat were not to feel in the process of the struggle during the coming months that its tasks and methods are becoming clearer to itself, that its ranks are becoming consolidated and strengthened, then a decomposition would set in within its own ranks...

Anarcho-syndicalism disarms the proletariat by its lack of a revolutionary program and its failure to understand the role of the party. The anarchists "deny" politics until it seizes them by the throat; then they prepare the ground for the politics of the enemy class...

Practical agreements with revolutionary syndicalists are inevitable in the course of the revolution. These agreements we will loyally fulfil. But it would be truly fatal to introduce into these agreements elements of duplicity, concealment, and deceit. Even in those days and hours when the communist workers have to fight side by side with the syndicalist workers, there must be no destruction of the principled disagreements, no concealment of differences, nor any weakening of the criticism of the wrong principled position of the ally. Only under this condition will the progressive development of the revolution be secured...

For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party!

## July 1936

FOR the second time in five years, the coalition of the labour parties with the radical bourgeoisie has brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss. Incapable of solving a single one of the tasks posed by the revolution, since all these tasks boil down to one, namely, the crushing of the bourgeoisie, the Popular Front renders the existence of the bourgeois regime impossible and thereby provokes the fascist coup d'état. By lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions, by paralysing their will to struggle, the Popular Front creates the favourable conditions for the victory of fascism. The policy of coalition with the bourgeoisie must be paid for by the proletariat with years of new torments and sacrifice, if not by decades of fascist terror.

## 27 July, 1936

THE Popular Front government in Spain was not a government, but simply a ministry. The real government resided in the General Staff, in the banks, etc. The French Radicals were authorised to form an alliance with the workers on condition that they did not touch the officer corps. But as the workers continue to press their demands, the entire state machine will ultimately come down upon their heads. The SAPists consider the Popular Front an enrichment of proletarian tactics. If they cannot see its class character, that is because they are good for nothing. The Radicals are seen only as the right wing of the Popular Front;

in reality they are there to represent the ruling class, and it is through them that finance capital maintains its rule, both within the Popular Front and over the proletariat...

Today we can also grasp more clearly the crime committed at the beginning of this year by the POUM leaders Maurin and Nin. Any thinking worker can and will ask these people: "Did you foresee nothing? How could you have signed the Popular Front program and have us put our confidence in Azaña and his associates, instead of instilling in us the greatest distrust in the radical bourgeoisie? Now we must pay for your errors with our blood." The workers must feel particular anger towards Nin and his friends because they belonged to a tendency that a few years ago, had provided a precise analysis of Popular Front politics, concretising and clarifying it at each stage. And Nin cannot invoke ignorance as his excuse — a wretched excuse for any leader — because he ought to have at least read the documents he once signed.

## 30 July, 1936

SOME people (for example, Rosmer) consider my sharp critique of Nin's policies to be sectarian. If it is sectarianism, then all of Marxism is only sectarianism, since it is the doctrine of the class struggle and not of class collaboration. The present events in Spain in particular show how criminal was Nin's rapprochement with Azaña: the Spanish workers will now pay with thousands of lives for the reactionary cowardice of the Popular Front, which has continued to support with the people's money an army commanded by the executioners of the proletariat. Here it is a question, my dear Victor Serge, not of splitting hairs, but of the very essence of revolutionary socialism. If Nin today were to pull himself together and realise how discredited he is in the eyes of the workers, if he should draw all the necessary conclusions, then we would help him as a comrade; but we cannot permit the spirit of chumminess in politics.

## 30 July, 1936

EVEN now, in the midst of civil war, the Popular Front government does everything in its power to make victory doubly difficult. A civil war is waged, as everybody knows, not only with military but also with political weapons. From a purely military point of view, the Spanish revolution is much weaker than its enemy. Its strength lies in its ability to rouse the greater masses to action. It can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to seriously and courageously advance the program of the socialist revolution.

It is necessary to proclaim that, from now on, the land, factories, and shops will pass from the hands of the capitalists into the hands of the people. It is necessary to move at once toward the realisation of this program in those provinces where the workers are in power. The fascist army could not resist the influence of such a program for twenty-four hours; the soldiers would tie their officers hand and foot and turn them



Andres Nin



**Conditions on the land were extremely poor prior to the revolution**

over to the nearest headquarters of the workers' militia. But the bourgeois ministers cannot accept such a programme. Curbing the social revolution, they compel the workers and peasants to spill ten times as much of their own blood in the civil war. And to crown everything, these gentlemen expect to disarm the workers again after the victory and to force them to respect the sacred laws of private property. Such is the true essence of the policy of the Popular Front. Everything else is pure humbug, phrases and lies!...

The workers' party that enters into a political alliance with the radical bourgeoisie by that fact alone renounces the struggle against capitalist militarism. Bourgeois domination, that is to say, the maintenance of private property in the means of production, is inconceivable without the support of the armed forces for the exploiters. The officers' corps represents the guard of capital. Without this guard, the bourgeoisie could not maintain itself for a single day. The selection of the individuals, their education and training, make the officers as a distinctive group uncompromising enemies of socialism. Isolated exceptions change nothing. That is how things stand in all bourgeois countries. The danger lies not in the military braggarts and demagogues who openly appear as fascists; incomparably more menacing is the fact that at the approach of the proletarian revolution the officers' corp becomes the executioner of the proletariat.

To eliminate four or five hundred reactionary agitators from the army means to

leave everything basically as it was before. The officers' corps, in which is concentrated the centuries-old tradition of enslaving the people, must be dissolved, broken, crushed in its entirety, root and branch. The troops in the barracks commanded by the officers' caste must be replaced by the *people's militia*, that is the democratic organisation of the armed workers and peasants. There is no other solution. But such an army is incompatible with the domination of exploiters big and small. Can the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois republicans agree to such a measure? Not at all. The Popular Front government, that is to say, the government of the coalition of the workers with the bourgeoisie, is in its very essence a government of capitulation to the bureaucracy and the officers. Such is the great lesson of the events in Spain, now being paid for with thousands of human lives.

But here we are interrupted by the exclamation, "How can one dissolve the officers' corps? Doesn't this mean destroying the army and leaving the country disarmed in the face of fascism? Hitler and Mussolini are only waiting for that!" All these arguments are old and familiar. That's how the Cadets, the Social Revolutionaries, and the Russian Mensheviks reasoned in 1917, and that's how the leaders of the Spanish Popular Front reasoned. The Spanish workers half-believed these rationalisations until they were convinced by experience that the nearest fascist enemy was to be found in the Spanish fascist army. Not for nothing did our old friend Karl Liebknecht teach: "The

main enemy is in our own country!"

#### **August 16, 1936**

THE question most on my mind concerns relations between the POUM and the syndicalists. It seems to me it would be extremely dangerous to let oneself be guided exclusively or even primarily by doctrinal considerations. At all costs, it is necessary to improve relations with the syndicalists, despite all their prejudices. The common enemy must be defeated. The confidence of the best syndicalists must be won in the course of the struggle. Before October we made every effort to work together with the purest anarchists.

The Kerensky government often tried to use the Bolsheviks against the anarchists. Lenin resolutely opposed this. In that situation, he said, one anarchist militant was worth more than a hundred hesitating Mensheviks. During the civil war the greatest danger is lack of decisiveness, a spirit of equivocation, in a word — Menshevism.

#### **25 February, 1937**

ONE does not demonstrate one's friendship for a revolutionary organisation in a difficult situation by closing one's eyes to its mistakes and the dangers arising from them. The situation in Spain can be saved only by an energetic, radical, and heroic comeback of the left wing of the proletariat; thus an immediate regroupment is necessary. It is necessary to open up an implacable campaign against the bloc with the bourgeoisie, and for a socialist program. It is necessary to denounce Stalinist, Socialist and anarchist leaders precisely because of their bloc with the bourgeoisie. It is not a question of articles more or less confined to the columns of [the POUM journal] *La Batalla*. No. It is a question of marshalling the masses against their leaders, who are leading the revolution to complete destruction.

The policy of the POUM leadership is a policy of adaptation, expectation, hesitation, that is to say, the most dangerous of all policies during civil war, which is uncompromising. Better to have in the POUM 10,000 comrades ready to mobilise the masses against treason than 40,000 who suffer the policies of others instead of carrying out their own. The 40,000 members of the POUM (if the figure is accurate) cannot by themselves assure the victory of the proletariat if their policy remains hesitant. But 20,000, or even 10,000, with a clear, decisive, aggressive policy, can win the masses in a short time, just as the Bolsheviks won the mass in eight months.

#### **20 March, 1937**

THE different intermediate groups (between the Stalinist Communist International and Trotskyist), terrified by their own inconsistency, seek support at the last minute from the Spanish revolution. All the leaders of the ILP and SAP, in supporting Nin against us, have done everything they could do to hamper victory in Spain. They think now they can hide their definitive bankruptcy in the shadow of the heroic ♦



Spanish and Catalan proletariat. In vain. Victory is possible only by the road that we have indicated time and again. Either Nin, Andrade, Gorkin must change their policy radically, that is to say, change from the path of Martov to that of Lenin, or they will lead the POUM to a split and perhaps even to a terrible defeat. Revolutionary words (editorials, solemn discourses, etc.) do not advance the revolution a step. The struggle of the POUMist workers is magnificent, but without resolute leadership it cannot bring victory. It is a question of rousing the masses with supreme courage against the traitorous leaders. There is the beginning of wisdom.

Break with the phantom bourgeoisie who stay in the Popular Front only to prevent the masses from making their own revolution. That is the first order of the day. Rouse the anarchists, Stalinists, and Socialists against their leaders, who do not want to break with the bourgeois ministers, those scarecrows protecting private property. That is the second step. Without that, everything else is verbiage, prattle and lies. They have wasted five years for Leninist policy. I am not sure that they still have five months or five weeks to try to correct the errors committed.

## 23 March, 1937

FOR six years, Nin has made nothing but mistakes. He has flirted with ideas and eluded difficulties. Instead of battle, he has substituted petty combinations. He has impeded the creation of a revolutionary party in Spain. All the leaders who have followed him share in the same responsibility. For six years they have done everything possible to subject this energetic and heroic proletariat of Spain to the most terrible defeats, and in spite of everything the ambiguity continues. They do not break the vicious circle. They do not rouse

the masses against the bourgeois republic. They accommodate themselves to it and then, to make up for it, they write articles from time to time — on the proletarian revolution.

Do not tell me that the workers of the POUM fight heroically, etc. I know it as well as others do. But it is precisely their battle and their sacrifice that forces us to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. Down with diplomacy, flirtation, and equivocation. One must know how to tell the bitterest truth when the fate of a war and of a revolution depend on it. We have nothing in common with the policy of Nin, nor with any who protect, camouflage, or defend it.

## 23 April, 1937

THE longer the politics of the Popular Front keep their hold over the country and the revolution, the greater the danger of the exhaustion and disillusionment of the masses and of the military victory of fascism.

The responsibility for this situation rests entirely upon the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and anarchists, more precisely, on their leader, who, on the model of Krensky, Tserelli, Ebert, Schiedemann, Otto Bauer, and the like, subordinated the revolution of the people to the interests of the bourgeoisie...

"What kind of revolution do you have in mind," the philistines of the Popular Front demand of us, "democratic or socialist? The victory of Largo Caballero's army over Franco would mean the victory of democracy over fascism, that is, the victory of progress over reaction."

One cannot listen to these arguments with a bitter smile. Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism.

However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.

Any other policy is a criminal and hopeless attempt to use the blood of the workers as cement to hold together a bourgeois democracy that is inevitably doomed to collapse regardless of the immediate outcome of the civil war.

"But you ignore the peasantry!" cries some muddlehead. The Spanish peasantry has shown well enough its eager desire to stand shoulder to shoulder with the prole-

tariat. All that is necessary is for the proletariat to actually enter the road of expropriation of the landed exploiters and usurers. But it is precisely the Stalinists and their new pupils, the "Socialists" and the "anarchists", who have prevented the proletariat from putting forward a revolutionary agrarian program.

The government of Stalin-Caballero tries with all its might to imbue its army with the character of a "democratic" guard for the defence of private property. That is the essence of the Popular Front. All the rest is phrase mongering. Precisely for that reason, the Popular Front is preparing the triumph of fascism. Whoever has not understood this is deaf and blind.

Is a military victory of the democratic guardian of capital possible over its fascist guard? It is possible. But since in the present epoch the fascist guard corresponds much more to the requirements of capital, the military victory of Stalin-Caballero could not be firm or lasting. *Without the proletarian revolution the victory of "democracy" would only mean a roundabout path to the very same fascism...*

Nin says: "From the time that we were expelled from the Catalan government, reaction has intensified." In fact it would have been appropriate to say: "Our participation in the Catalan government more readily provided the bourgeoisie with the chance to strengthen itself, drive us out, and openly enter the road of reaction." The POUM as a matter of fact even now partly remains in the Popular Front. The leaders of the POUM plaintively try to *persuade* the government to take the road to socialist revolution. The POUM leaders respectfully try to make the CNT leaders understand at last the Marxist teaching about the state. The POUM leaders view themselves as "revolutionary" advisors to the leaders of the Popular Front. This position is lifeless and unworthy of revolutionaries.

It is necessary to openly and boldly mobilise the masses against the Popular Front government. It is necessary to expose, for the syndicalist and anarchist workers to see, the betrayals of those gentlemen who call themselves anarchists but in fact have turned out to be simple liberals. It is necessary to hammer away mercilessly at Stalinism as the worst agency of the bourgeoisie. It is necessary to feel yourselves leaders of the revolutionary masses, not advisors to the bourgeois government...

A military victory paid for with the blood of the workers would raise the self-consciousness and determination of the proletarian vanguard. In other words, *the victory of the republican army of capital over the fascist army would inevitably mean the outbreak of civil war in the republican camp.*

In this new civil war, the proletariat could conquer only if it has at its head a revolutionary party that knows how to win the confidence of the majority of the workers and the semi-proletarian peasants. If such a party is not present at the critical moment, the civil war with the republican camp threatens to lead to a victory of Bonapartism



Guernica. Bombed by the Nazis.



**Food shortages in Madrid after the fascists had taken over**

that would differ very little in character from the dictatorship of General Franco. That is why the politics of the Popular Front are a round-about path to the very same fascism...

It is necessary to break sharply, decisively, boldly — the umbilical cord of bourgeois public opinion. It is necessary to break from the petty-bourgeois parties including the syndicalist leaders. It is necessary to think the situation through to the end. It is necessary to descend to the masses, to the lowest and most oppressed layers. It is necessary to stop lulling them with illusions of a future victory that will come by itself. It is necessary to tell them the truth, however bitter it may be. It is necessary to teach them to distrust the petty-bourgeois agencies of capital. It is necessary to teach them to trust in themselves. It is necessary to tie your fate to theirs inseparably. It is necessary to teach them to build their own combat organisation — soviets — in opposition to the bourgeois state.

Can one hope that the present leadership of the POUM will carry out this turn? Alas, the experience of six years of revolution leaves no room for such hopes. The revolutionists inside the POUM, as well as outside would be bankrupt if they limited their role to "persuading," "winning over" Nin, Andrade, Gorkin, the way the latter try to win over Largo, Caballero, Companys, et al. The revolutionists must turn to the workers, to the depths, against the vacillations and waverings of Nin. Unity of the proletarian front does not mean capitulation to the centrists. The interest of the revolution are higher than the formal unity of the party....

Forty thousand members with a wavering and vacillating leadership are able only to disperse the proletariat and thereby to pave the way for catastrophe. Ten thousand, with a firm and perceptive leadership, can find the road to the masses, break them away from the influence of the Stalinists and Social Democrats, the charlatans and loudmouths, and assure them not just the

episodic and uncertain victory of the republican troops over the fascist troops, but a total victory of the toilers over the exploiters. The Spanish proletariat has shown three times that it is able to carry out such a victory. The whole question is in the leadership!

#### **May 12, 1937**

IT seems that the [Barcelona] insurrection was "spontaneous" in character, that is, it broke out unexpectedly for the leaders, including those of the POUM. This fact alone shows what an abyss had been dug between the anarchist and POUM leaders, on the one side, and the working masses, on the other. The conception propagated by Nin that "the proletariat can take power through peaceful means" has been proven absolutely false. We know nothing, or almost nothing, of the real position of the POUM at the time of the insurrection. But we do not believe in miracles. The position of the leaders of the POUM at the decisive moment must have been a simple continuation of their position during all the preceding period. More exactly, it is precisely in a decisive moment that the inconsistency of left centrism must be revealed in the most striking and tragic fashion. Such was, for example, the fate of Martov in the events of 1905 and 1917...

What is the meaning of the armistice in Barcelona that the dispatches mention: the defeat of the insurgents determined primarily by the inconsistency of the leadership, or the direct capitulation of the leaders, frightened by the pressure of the masses? We do not yet know. For the moment the struggle seems to be continuing outside Barcelona. Is a resumption of the offensive in Barcelona possible? Will not the repression on the part of the Stalinist-reformist scum give a new impulse to the action of the masses? We refrain from predicting here for lack of accurate information. Criticism of the leadership in any case retains its decisive importance, whatever the immediate course of events may be. In spite of the mistakes and weaknesses

of the insurrection, we remain before the outside world indissolubly bound to the defeated workers. But this does not mean sparing the leadership, hiding its inconsistency, and keeping silent about its mistakes under the pretext of a purely sentimental solidarity.

#### **8 August, 1937**

WHEN Andres Nin, the leader of the POUM, was arrested in Barcelona, there could not be the slightest doubt that the agents of the GPU would not let him out alive. The intentions of Stalin were revealed with exceptional clarity when the GPU, which holds the Spanish police in its clutches, published an announcement accusing Nin and the whole leadership of the POUM of being "agents" of Franco.

The absurdity of this accusation is clear to anyone who is acquainted with even the simplest facts about the Spanish revolution. The members of the POUM fought heroically against the fascists on all fronts in Spain. Nin is an old and incorruptible revolutionary. He defended the interests of the Spanish and Catalan peoples against the agents of the Soviet bureaucracy. That was why the GPU got rid of him by means of a well-prepared "raid" on the Barcelona jail. What role in this matter was played by the official Spanish authorities remains a matter for speculation.

Quite apart from the differences of opinion that separate me from the POUM, I must acknowledge that in the struggle that Nin led against the bureaucracy, it was Nin who was right. He tried to defend the independence of the Spanish proletariat from the diplomatic machinations and intrigues of the clique that holds power in Moscow. He did not want the POUM to become a tool in the hands of Stalin. He refused to cooperate with the GPU against the interests of the Spanish people. This was his only crime. And for this crime he paid with his life.

#### **24 August, 1937**

THE July days of 1936, when the Catalan proletariat with correct leadership could, without additional efforts or sacrifices, have seized power and opened the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat throughout Spain, ended, largely through the fault of the POUM, in a regime between the proletariat (committees) and the bourgeoisie, represented by its lackeys (Stalinist, anarchist, and Socialist leaders). The interest of the workers was to do away with the equivocal and dangerous situation as rapidly as possible, by handing over all power to the committees, that is, to the Spanish soviets. The task of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was to do away with the committees in the name of "unity of power". The participation of Nin in the government was a corporate part of the plan of the bourgeoisies, directed against the proletariat...

In Spain the May events took place not after four months but after six years of revolution. The masses of the whole country have had a gigantic experience. A long time ago, they lost the illusions of 1931, as

well as the warmed-over illusions of the Popular Front. Again and again they have shown to every part of the country that they were ready to go through to the end. If the Catalan proletariat had seized power in May 1937 — as it had really seized it in July 1936 — they would have found support throughout all of Spain. The bourgeois-Stalinist reaction would not even have found two regiments with which to crush the Catalan workers. In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalan proletariat, would have isolated the fascist army and brought about its irresistible disintegration. It is doubtful whether under these conditions any foreign government would have risked throwing its regiments onto the burning soil of Spain. Intervention would have become materially impossible, or at least extremely dangerous.

## 17 December, 1937

THE anarchists had no independent position of any kind in the Spanish revolution. All they did was waver between Bolshevism and Menshevism. More precisely, the anarchist workers instinctively yearned to enter the Bolshevik road (19 July 1936 and May days of 1937) while the leaders, on the contrary, with all their might drove the masses into the camp of the Popular Front, i.e. of the bourgeois regime.

The anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its tasks by seeking to limit themselves to their own trade unions, that is, to organisations permeated with the routine of peaceful times, and by ignoring what went on outside the framework of the trade unions, among the masses, among the political parties and in the government apparatus. Had the anarchists been revolutionists, they would first of all have called for the creation of soviets, which unite the representatives of all the toilers of city and country, including the most oppressed strata who never joined the trade unions. The revolutionary workers would have naturally occupied the dominant position in these soviets. The Stalinists would have remained an insignificant minority. The proletariat would have convinced itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would have hung suspended in the air. One strong blow would have sufficed to pulverise this apparatus. The socialist revolution would have received a powerful impetus.

Instead of this, the anarcho-syndicalists, seeking to hide from "politics" in the trade unions, turned out to be, to the great surprise of the whole world and themselves, a fifth wheel in the cart of bourgeois democracy. But not for long; a fifth wheel is superfluous. After Garcia Oliver and his cohorts helped Stalin and his henchmen to take power away from the workers, the anarchists themselves were driven out of the government of the Popular Front. Even then they found nothing better to do than jump on the victor's bandwagon and assure him of their devotion. The fear of the petty

bourgeois before the big bourgeois, of the petty bureaucrat before the big bureaucrat, they covered up with lachrymose speeches about the sanctity of the united front (between the victim and the executioners) and about the inadmissibility of every kind of dictatorship, including their own. "After all, we could have taken power in July 1936..." "After all, we could have taken power in May 1937..." The anarchists begged Stalin-Negrin to recognise and reward their treachery to the revolution. A revolting picture!...

The conditions for victory of the masses in a civil war against the army of exploiters are very simple in their essence.

1. The fighters of a revolutionary army must be clearly aware of the fact that they are fighting for their full social liberation and not for the re-establishment of the old ("democratic") forms of exploitation.

2. The workers and peasants in the rear of the revolutionary army as well as in the rear of the enemy must know and under-

*"The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses."*

stand the same thing.

3. The propaganda on their own front as well as on the enemy front and in both rears must be completely permeated with the spirit of social revolution. The slogan "First victory, then reforms" is the slogan of the oppressors and exploiters from the Biblical kings down to Stalin.

4. Politics are determined by those class and strata that participate in the struggle. The revolutionary masses must have a state apparatus that directly and immediately expresses their will. Only the soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies can act as such an apparatus.

5. The revolutionary army must not only proclaim but also immediately realise in life the more pressing measures of social revolution in the provinces won by them: the expropriation of provisions, manufactured articles, and other stores on hand and the transfer of these to the needy; the re-division of shelter and housing in the interests of the toilers and especially of the

families of the fighters; the expropriation of the land and agricultural inventory in the interests of the peasants; the establishment of workers' control and soviet power in place of the former bureaucracy.

6. Enemies of the socialist revolution, that is, exploiting elements and their agents, even if masquerading as "democrats", "republicans", "socialists" and "anarchists" must be mercilessly driven out of the army.

7. At the head of each military unit must be placed commissars possessing irreplaceable authority as revolutionists and soldiers.

8. In every military unit there must be a firmly welded nucleus of the most self-sacrificing fighters, recommended by the workers' organisations. The members of the nucleus have but one privilege: to be the first under fire.

9. The commanding corps necessarily includes at first many alien and unreliable elements among the personnel. Their testing, retesting and sifting must be carried through on the basis of combat experience, recommendations of commissars and testimonials of rank-and-file fighters. Coincident with this must proceed an intense training of commanders drawn from the ranks of revolutionary workers.

10. The strategy of civil war must combine the rules of military art with the tasks of the social revolution. Not only in propaganda but also in military operations it is necessary to take into account the social composition of the various military units of the enemy (bourgeois volunteers, mobilised peasants, or as in Franco's case, colonial slaves); and in choosing lines of operation, it is necessary to rigorously take into consideration the social structure of the corresponding territories (industrial regions, peasant regions, revolutionary or reactionary, regions of oppressed nationalities, etc). In brief, revolutionary policy dominates strategy.

11. Both the revolutionary government and executive committee of the workers and peasants must know how to win the complete confidence of the army and of the toiling population.

12. Foreign policy must have as its main objective the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness of the workers, the exploited peasants, and oppressed nationalities of the whole world.

## 20 August, 1940

THE extent to which the working class movement has been thrown backward may be gauged by the condition not only of the mass organisation, but also of the ideological groupings and those theoretical inquiries in which so many groups are engaged...

These critics of Bolshevism are all theoretical cowards, for the simple reason that they have nothing solid under their feet. In order not to reveal their own bankruptcy, they juggle facts and prowl around the opinions of others. They confine themselves to hints and half-thoughts as if they just haven't the time to delineate their full wisdom. As a matter of fact they possess no



**The Stalinists were responsible for Franco's victory**

wisdom at all. Their haughtiness is lined with intellectual charlatanism...

In May 1937 the workers of Catalonia rose not only without their own leadership but also against it. The anarchist leaders — pathetic and contemptible bourgeoisie masquerading cheaply as revolutionists — have repeated hundreds of times in their press that had the CNT wanted to take power and set up their dictatorship in May, they could have done so without any difficulty. This time the anarchist leaders speak the unadulterated truth. The POUM leadership actually dragged at the tail of the CNT, only they covered up their policy with a different phraseology. It was thanks to this and this alone that the bourgeoisie succeeded in crushing the May uprising of the "immature" proletariat...

Why did the working class as a whole follow a bad leadership?...

The secret is that a people is comprised of hostile classes, and the classes themselves are comprised of different and in part antagonistic layers that fall under different leadership; furthermore every people falls under the influence of other peoples who are likewise comprised of classes. Governments do not express the systematically growing "maturity" of a "people" but are the product of the struggle between different classes and the different layers within one and the same class, and finally, the action of external forces — alliances, conflicts, wars, and so on. To this should be added that a government, once it has established itself, may endure much longer than the relationship of forces that produced it. It is precisely out of this historical contradiction that revolutions, coups d'état, counterrevolutions, etc. arise.

The very same dialectical approach is

necessary in dealing with the question of the leadership of a class. Imitating the liberals, our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere "reflection" of a class or the product of its own free creativeness...

The Marxist interpretation, that is, the dialectical and not the scholastic interpretation of the interrelationship between a class and its leadership, does not leave a single stone unturned of our author's legalistic sophistry.

Yet during a revolution the consciousness of a class is the most dynamic process directly determining the course of the revolution. Was it possible in January 1917 or even in March, after the overthrow of czarism, to give an answer to the question whether the Russian proletariat had sufficiently "matured" for the conquest of power in eight to nine months?

The working class was at that time extremely heterogeneous socially and politically. During the years of the war it had been renewed by 30-40 percent from the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, often reactionary, from backward peasants, from women, and from youth. The Bolshevik Party in March 1917 was followed by an insignificant minority of the working class, and furthermore there was discord within the party itself. The overwhelming majority of the workers supported the Mensheviks and the "Social Revolutionaries", that is, conservative social patriots. The situation was even less favourable with regard to the army and the peasantry. We must add to this: the general low level of culture in the country, the lack of political experience in the provinces, let alone the peasants and soldiers.

What were the advantages of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought-out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had authority among the advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin's political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These advantages worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond with Lenin's conception; to correspond, that is, with the actual course of the revolution. Thanks to this, it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basing itself upon the development of the revolution, the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority, organised into soviets, was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants.

How can this dynamic, dialectical process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin's slogans to find their way to the masses, cadres had to exist, even though numerically small at the beginning; the cadres had to have confidence in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one's calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the "relationship of forces"; because the development of the revolution precisely consists of the incessant and rapid change in the relationship of forces under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of the backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal...

The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties that paralysed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUM simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility. This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programmes, parties, and personalities that were the organisers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action. ■