

In Defense of Marxism: The Spanish Revolution

The Spanish Revolution 1931-37

1995 introduction by Rob Sewell

The release of Ken Loach's new film *Land and Freedom* has generated renewed interest in the Spanish Revolution of 1936. 1996 also marks the sixtieth anniversary of the victory of the Popular Front, Franco's uprising and the revolutionary events of the civil war. As a consequence, we are reproducing this work on the Spanish Revolution by Ted Grant as well as a short article by Leon Trotsky analyzing these events and explaining the reasons for the ultimate defeat of the Spanish working class. The article by Ted Grant was originally published in 1973 as part of the discussions that were taking place in the Spanish underground movement against Franco. It summed up the lessons of the Spanish revolution and served as a contribution to the rearming of the new generation of workers and youth in the Spanish young socialists, the UGT and the PSOE. At that time, they were faced with the immanent collapse of the Franco regime and a new revolutionary offensive of the Spanish working class. Again, the Spanish 'Communist' Party, which played such a disastrous role in 1936-37, was also attempting to resurrect the old class collaborationist policies of popular frontism.

By the 1970s, the Spanish proletariat had grown in renewed strength and confidence. The whole of the Iberian peninsula was experiencing new revolutionary upheavals. The overthrow of Caetano dictatorship in Portugal in the mass movement of April 1974, pushed the revolution forward. Every attempt by the bourgeois to reestablish its control resulted a greater swing to the left. But, with the lack of a clear Marxist leadership, the leaders of the Socialist Party and the CP used their authority to side track the movement and prepared the way for counter-revolution. In Spain, after the death of Franco, the movement reached new heights. Nevertheless, as the bourgeois representatives rushed to throw of their fascist uniforms and collect their 'democratic' credentials, the leaders off the

workers parties moved rapidly to the right, seeking an accommodation with the new regime. The trade unions looked for a pact with the employers, while the CP defended the monarchy and the national flag! They gave credence to the new 'democratic' capitalist parties. This led to colossal disillusionment amongst the militant layers of the working class. As a result, the general elections called in 1977 saw the victory of the 'Centre' Parties. This provided only a temporarily respite, and they were forced to call new elections only two years later, which again were won by the 'Centre'. The workers parties offered no alternative. However, the attempted military coup led by General Tejero in 1981, reflected the fragile nature of Spanish 'democracy'. Yet, given the class balance of forces, the coup failed to gain support and turned into a comic affair. Rather than prepare the way for reaction, it led in 1982 to a landslide victory for the PSOE in the general election.

In power, the PSOE leaders moved rapidly to the right. Given the weak nature of Spanish capitalism, the PSOE government abandoned its reforms and moved to counter reform. Gonzales, the once 'radical' leader, turned into an extreme right-winger. However, the boom of the eighties and the disarray amongst the bourgeois parties, together with the worn but deep seated loyalty of the workers, kept the PSOE in office throughout the 1980s.

Unemployment at officially 23% is the highest in Europe. The employers' offensive and the attacks of the government against the Spanish workers has led to a number of bitter clashes and a series of general strikes. Recently, there have been violent protests over the attempt to closure steel plants and shipyards. A new School Students Union has sprung up which has given militant leadership to important struggles affecting millions of youth.

The recent scandal of government ministers being involved in the creation of death squads used against ETA in the 1980s, has rocked the PSOE. The withdrawal of parliamentary support by the Catalan nationalists has prepared the way for new elections in which the PSOE is likely to be defeated. A new bourgeois government, as in France, will be met with grave economic and social difficulties. Given

the pent up frustration of the workers and the revolutionary traditions of the Spanish workers, the scene is being set for mighty class battles. This new period corresponds with a new volatile period internationally. Weak Spanish capitalism cannot afford the reforms of the past. On the contrary, counter reforms are on the order of the day. Many workers on the basis of their experience in the post war period never believed that they would witness war on the mainland of Europe. But the bloody conflict in former Yugoslavia has brought home the nature of the new period. The mighty revolutionary events of the past also will return. The need for a militant fighting leadership for the workers' organizations will be posed again and again. At the same time, the weakness of the CP, which has splintered into a number of groups, will mean that they will not be able to play the same role as in the past. For the new generation of worker activists, it is necessary nevertheless to learn the lessons of history, especially the lessons of 1931-37, and prepare ourselves for the future.

The release of the film *Land and Freedom* which highlights the treacherous role of the Stalinists during the civil war, has provoked a series of major articles in the *Morning Star* regurgitating all the old lies and arguments of the 1930s. They are attempting to cover up their disastrous role in 1936 and 1937. They are a blatant attempt to rewrite history.

Distortion

In the *Morning Star* [The paper of the British Communist Party] of 1st September 1995, Michael O'Riordan, chairman of the Irish Communist Party and former International Brigader lambasted the film as a "distortion" under the title "Damn good anti-Communist stuff". He says the film is based on George Orwell's book, *Homage to Catalonia*, and proceeds to deride him: "Orwell went up to the hills, fires a few shots in the air and, with his book under his arm, left for Britain to be embraced by the Tory establishment..." In fact the picture described by Orwell is derived from his own personal experiences and is a crushing blow against the actions of the Stalinists in Spain, and its view is backed up by many historians, notably Hugh Thomas, as well as the classic

contemporary account by Felix Morrow.

This is a complete distortion. A quick glance at the press of the CNT, POUM, FAI and even UGT will show you that these organizations had been demanding a general offensive on all the fronts as the best way to help Madrid, but the Republican government consistently refused to act. The Aragón front had been boycotted (arms, ammunitions, food, etc.) by the republican government because it was composed mainly by CNT and POUM militias which were conducting a semi revolutionary war by collectivizing the land. Despite this sabotage, the Aragón front was very active. In fact Orwell was wounded during an offensive on the road to Jaca. This was part of the offensive to take Huesca, which failed because the Republican government refused to provide the promised air cover.

Orwell stayed four months on the Aragón front. After being wounded (he was shot through the neck) during the Huesca offensive, he was sent back to Barcelona on the 17/18th June. A day earlier, the POUM had been illegalized, all its buildings occupied by the police, the leadership imprisoned and all its members were under threat of arrest. Orwell had never been a member of the POUM, but had fought in the 29th Lenin Division of the POUM and as a result was on a police “suspects” list. He stayed in Barcelona until the 23rd June, sleeping in the streets (all boarding houses had to report about foreigners), and hiding during the day. That was the reason why he left Spain, not because he had “a book under his arm”. In fact the picture described by Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia* is derived from his own personal experiences and is crushing blow against the actions of the Stalinists in Spain. It is a view backed up by many historians, notably Hugh Thomas, as well as the classic contemporary account by Felix Morrow.

In the *Morning Star*, O’Riordan stands things on their head. He accuses the anarchists of “antagonizing the peasantry” by “a forcible collectivization of peasants’ land down to the last shovel”. In reality, the anarchists favoured voluntary collectivization. It was the Stalinists in the USSR that carried out a program against the warnings of the Left Opposition of forced collectivization between 1928-30 which led to the death of millions of people in the famine which followed. In fact, Soviet agriculture never recovered fully from this debacle. And now the Stalinists have the temerity to suggest it was the policy of their opponents!

Another critic, Bill Alexandre, writes in the *Morning Star* (7th October

1995): “Orwell and the small ILP group remained without serious fighting until, on April 27 1937, they turned their backs on the enemy, leaving the front open, to retreat to Barcelonan to guard the POUM headquarters”.

Slander

This is another slander. We have already commented on the “lack” of fighting on the Aragón front. Let us remember that during the offensive on Huesca 3,000 people died! Orwell and the small ILP group left the front on *official* leave permits. At that time those permits were only issued every 3 months. When they arrived in Barcelona they became involved in the May Days, and played an important role in defending the POUM headquarters from Stalinist attacks (what Bill Alexander doesn’t explain is why it was attacked). After the May Days, they went back to the front line to participate in the Huesca offensive and did not leave until mid-June when the POUM had been illegalized, the 29th Lenin Division disbanded by the Republican Army and most of their members arrested.

The only troops that left the front during the May Days were the government troops. Six thousand soldiers were sent from Valencia to disarm the workers in Barcelona. Companys, the Catalan president, even asked for the air force to bomb the CNT headquarters in Barcelona. The 29th Lenin Division (POUM) and the 23rd Division (CNT) at the Aragón front wanted to go to Barcelona to defend their comrades from being slaughtered but were prevented by their own leaders in Barcelona.

The *Morning Star* 4th August attacks Loach’s film for denigrating communists and the International Brigade. “Without the room to catalogue all the film’s calumnies,” states the article, “from the assertion that the communists didn’t organize volunteers into Spain (who asserted this?) to the charge that they murdered and tortured their allies - suffice to say that they are lies born of Trotskyite dogma.” This is no ‘Trotskyite dogma’, it is a fact. Leopold Trepper in his memoirs, *The Great Game*, who was the head of Soviet intelligence in occupied Europe during World War Two, reveals what was happening: “I saw General Berzin again after his return from Spain, and he seemed a different man. He had learned there that Tukhachevski and his staff had been liquidated. He knew that the ‘evidence’ gathered against them was false, and he had been stunned.

“Further, he was too lucid to nourish

any illusion about his own fate: the wave of repression that had swept away his comrades would drown him also. In spite of danger, he had come back, on his own initiative, to protest to Stalin against the massacres of communists that had been perpetrated by the GPU (later known as the NKVD and ultimately the KGB) in Spain.” (Page 87) This is not an isolated example, thousands of Stalinists who came back after fighting in Spain were liquidated by Stalin in case they had been infected by the revolution.

This is no invention, but was simply the continuation of the great Purge Trials of 1936-38 where millions were sent to their death as “enemies of the people”. Trepper recalls: “The members of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, who were on assignment in Paris or fighting in Spain, were summoned to Moscow ...they arrived suspecting nothing. The united anti-fascist front ended, for them, in the cellars of the NKVD, where old militants like Adolf Varsky or Lenski, who was known as the ‘Polish Lenin’, disappeared forever. The liquidation of Bela Kun and the leaders of the Polish party was confirmed to me, with details I had not known, by survivors who shared my cell in Lubianka after the war....

“Yugoslavs, Poles, Lithuanians, Czechs - all disappeared. By 1937, not one of the principal leaders of the German Communist Party was left, except for Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht. The repressive madness had no limits. The Korean section was decimated; the delegates from India had disappeared; the representatives of the Chinese Communist Party had been arrested. The glow of October was being extinguished in the shadows of underground chambers. The revolution had degenerated into a system of terror and horror; the ideals of socialism were ridiculed in the name of a fossilized dogma which the executioners still had the effrontery to call Marxism....

“And yet we went along, sick at heart, but passive, caught up in machinery we had set in motion with our own hands. Mere cogs in the apparatus, terrorized to the point of madness, we became the instruments of our own subjugation. All those who did not rise up against the Stalinist machine are responsible, collectively responsible. I am no exception to this verdict.” (pp. 53-55).

These methods were imported into Spain by large numbers of GPU ‘advisers’, who established murder squads, torture chambers, and underground prisons to carry through Stalin’s counter-revolutionary policy in Spain. As Ted Grant explains, Stalin feared the Spanish revolution because it could act as an impulse to the Russian working class

and the overthrow of Stalinism. On the other hand, Stalin wanted to prove to the Western powers that he could act in a respectable fashion - the sabotaging of the Spanish revolution was part of this strategy.

In early 1936, Roy Howard, an American journalist, interviewed Stalin.

“Howard: Does this statement of yours mean that the Soviet Union has to any degree abandoned its plans and intentions to bring about a world revolution? Stalin: Weneverhadanysuchplansorintentions. Howard: You appreciate, no doubt Mr. Stalin, that much of the world has for long entertained a different impression? Stalin: This is the product of misunderstanding. Howard: A tragic misunderstanding? Stalin: No, comic. Or perhaps tragicomic.” (Communist International, March/April 1936)

The attempt to woo the imperialist democracies failed miserably. Instead, Stalin turned to Hitler, cementing a pact with him in August 1939. As the deal meant the abolition of Poland, Stalin got around this little problem earlier by dissolving the Polish Communist party and murdering practically all its leaders as “fascists”!

The Morning Star (4th August 1995) berates the Loach film for daring to suggest the betrayal of the revolution was “an actual criminal conspiracy hatched in the evil mind of Joseph Stalin...” It is as if Stalin, who had butchered millions, could not rise to such an ‘evil’ deed! The Soviet archives in Moscow were opened and examined by Spanish journalists who discovered evidence that the GPU kidnapped and later murdered Andreu Nin, the leader of the POUM, in Alcalá, just outside Madrid. Michael O’Riordan (Morning Star 1/9/95) repeats the old Stalin lie that Durruti, the anarchist leader, “was shot by one of his own column after he tried, in a threatening last vain effort, to make them (the anarchists) stay at their post.” Historian, Huger Thomas, says there is no truth in this Stalinist rumor: “there is no proof, nor is it likely.” The anarchists made many mistakes and blunders, but murdering one of their own was never their method. On the contrary, it was always the method of the Stalinists to murder opponents and blame it on their own supporters.

Durruti

The case was not only of Durruti, but Nin and Trotsky also. With the outlawing of the POUM after the ‘May Days’ in Barcelona, the GPU kidnapped and assassinated Nin and then blamed his murder on his so-called fascist collaborators. This was recounted by

Jesus Hernandez, the Communist Minister of Education in the Negrin government. He revealed in *La Grande Trahison*, that Nin was tortured to the limits and then, according to a scheme devised by Vidali (alias Contreras) “liberated” by supposed agents of the Gestapo disguised as members of the International Brigade, leaving behind “evidence” indicating that he was a German spy. Even Santiago Carrillo, the CP youth leader at the time, who describes himself as “a sort of Minister of the Interior, at Madrid, in the Junta of Defence”, says it was “possible that he was executed in our (Soviet) zone.” (Dialogue on Spain, p. 53).

But Carrillo, whose supporters ended up on the right-wing of the PSOE, has much to hide. He and other Stalinists were charged in April 1937 by Rodriguez, CNT member and Special Commissioner of prisons, of illegally seizing workers arrested by Cazorla, but acquitted and “taking said acquitted parties to secret jails or sending them into communist militia battalions in advance positions to be used as ‘fortifications’.”

They were carrying through Stalin’s orders. On 7th December 1936, *Pravda* declared: “As for Catalonia, the purging of the Trotskyists and the Anarcho-syndicalists has begun: it will be conducted with the same energy with which it was conducted in the USSR.”

Carrillo was asked to comment on this in his book *Dialogue on Spain*: “It has often been said that the Soviet political police - the GPU, as it was called in those days - had ramifications in Spain, its own secret prisons. There are even issues of *Illustration* which show photographs (whether genuine or bogus) of the dungeons of the GPU in Barcelona in 1938.” All Carrillo could say was: “Perhaps there were some later; perhaps there were some even then...I personally have no proof that there were and I never saw one, even though I believe the Soviet people (!) must have had certain services in Spain, connected with the presence of their volunteers who were fighting at the front.” (Pages 51-52)

The Stalinist justification for the suppression of the revolution was “first win the war, then the revolution”. Under this slogan they carried through the reestablishment of the bourgeois state apparatus, ended the workers’ control of the factories, opposed the collectivization of land, dissolved the worker’ militias - in a word - carried through the counter-revolution. As Carrillo admitted: “In that period we didn’t talk about socialist revolution, and we even criticized those who did.” In fact, they not only criticized but

murdered those who advocated revolution. He continued: “If we didn’t talk about it, this was primarily because of the international context. We wanted to neutralize the bourgeois forces in the European democracies... It is obvious that during that period the Soviet Union was interested in an alliance with the parliamentary powers against fascism. In my opinion that policy was correct.” It was this policy that strangled the revolution. The limited arms that arrived from the USSR came after three months delay, and came with a political price. Stalin wrote to Caballero directly urging him not to harm the interests of private property. “To sum up on this,” says Carrillo, “it is clear that at that time the European bourgeoisie would not have tolerated a situation in which a small isolated country like Spain could victoriously carry through a socialist revolution.” (pp 160-61). Whenever have they ‘tolerated’ a socialist revolution?

From these statements it is absolutely clear that the policy of the Stalinists was the subordination of the revolution to the foreign policy needs of the Kremlin. It is a confirmation of the criticisms Trotsky made at the time. Those who refused to comply with this policy were denounced as Trotsky-fascists, and accomplices of the Fascist powers. That is precisely why the POUM militias were deprived of arms.

Following the May events in Barcelona, the forerunner of the Morning Star, the *Daily Worker*, published an article from its Spanish correspondent, Cockburn, entitled “Trotskyist Rising As Signal”, in which it stated: “We know now that the German and Italian agents, who poured into Barcelona ostensibly in order to ‘prepare’ the notorious ‘Congress of the Fourth International’, had one big task. It was this:

“They were - in co-operation with the local Trotskyists - to prepare a situation of disorder and bloodshed, in which it would be possible for the Germans and Italians to declare that they were ‘unable to exercise naval control on the Catalan coasts effectively’, because of ‘the disorder prevailing in Barcelona’, and were, therefore, ‘unable to do otherwise’ than land forces in Barcelona...In the past, the leaders of the POUM have frequently sought to deny their complicity as agents of a fascist cause against the People’s Front. This time they are convicted out of their own mouths as clearly as their allies, operating in the Soviet Union, who confessed to the crimes of espionage, sabotage, and attempted murder against the government of the Soviet Union.” (*Daily Worker*, 11 May 1937)

The POUM was never a Trotskyist

organization, as the Stalinists maintained. The policy of the POUM as bitterly criticized by Trotsky as being centrist - revolutionary in words, but in practise trailing behind the coat-tails of the CNT and the republican government. Nevertheless, all who opposed the Stalinists were labelled Trotskyists or Anarchists, and had to be eliminated. The events in Barcelona in May 1937 were deliberately provoked by the Stalinists who attempted to seize control of the CNT-run telephone exchange. It was used as the pretext to ban the POUM and arrest and murder its leaders.

The Stalinists are still today trying to portray these events as fascist inspired and organized. This time they use the old edition of Huge Thomas' book as evidence. "In fact, as Hugh Thomas reminds us, Hitler's ambassador to Franco Spain, Wilhelm von Faupel, admitted that 'Franco had confirmed' that the counter-revolutionary events in Barcelona in 1937 were sparked by his own agents who were eager to exploit the divisions between the anarchists and communists", states Jeff Sawtell in the Morning Star (4 August 1995). Whereas Hugh Thomas in the first edition of his book The Spanish Civil War accepted this view as plausible, in his third revised and enlarged edition he dismisses the idea: "But spies are boastful, and that one may have attributed the spontaneous outbreak of the fighting to his own intrigues. Franco must also have been anxious to suggest the efficacy of his intelligence services to the Germans." (P 656, 1977 edition)

Revolutionary

As Ted Grant explains, the war against Franco could only be won as a revolutionary war, where the factories are owned and controlled by the workers and the peasants are given the land. On military terms, Franco was in a stronger position. Trotsky made the same point repeatedly: "I believe that I have expressed it in many interviews and articles: The only way possible to assure victory in Spain is to say to the peasants: 'The Spanish soil is your soil.' To say to the workers: 'The Spanish factories are your factories.' That is the only possibility to assure victory. Stalin, in order not to frighten the French bourgeoisie, has become the guard of private property in Spain." (The Case of Leon Trotsky, p 294).

The new generation of young workers and youth should learn the lessons of history. The tragedy of the Spanish revolution is a painful lesson of cynical betrayal. In Leopold Trepper's memoirs he

states: "Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves." He goes on to say: "Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'confess', for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism." We must learn from the defeats as well as the victories of working people to prepare ourselves for the mighty events that lie ahead. To this end, we hope this work will assist and also create a thirst to study the more detailed classic writings on the Spanish civil war, most notably Felix Morrow's Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain, and Leon Trotsky's Spanish Revolution 1931-37.

The Spanish Revolution 1931-37

By Ted Grant

Spain is in the first stages of a movement in the direction of revolution. The Fascist regime is completely undermined. The working class has recovered from the terrible defeat inflicted by the forces of reaction in the Civil War. The middle class is filled with hatred for the dictatorship and looking with sympathy to the struggle of the workers. The bourgeoisie is looking for a way out as it feels the pressure of the masses. The repressive machine of the dictatorship has been enfeebled as it loses all mass support. From a totalitarian fascist state, it has been transformed into a military police state relying on the state machinery of oppression and repression - consequently it has become transformed into a Bonapartist rather than a Fascist regime. This marks the beginning of its downfall.

Once the workers, peasants and middle class begin to move into action on a concerted national scale, the hour for the collapse of the regime will have arrived. The great revenge of the working class will begin. By what regime will the Franco dictatorship be replaced? That is the immediate burning question facing the Spanish proletariat and the Socialist Party and Young Socialists of Spain.

The British Marxists, in the spirit of international solidarity, (the Spanish Revolution is also their revolution, as is every revolution in the world) are turning out some material on the Spanish question

for discussion within their ranks and internationally. This study of the origins and course of the revolution of 1931-1937 is not intended to be comprehensive but to deal with some of the highlights of this period of history of the Spanish workers' movement. Unless the Spanish Socialist Marxists have a clear conception of these events, they will not be able to orient the movement and prepare policies in line with the perspectives of Spain at the present time. The lessons of history, if they are not learned, point to the situation where there can be an even more terrible debacle for the proletariat.

Marx and Engels worked out their theoretical conceptions on the basis of the experience of the working class, which they generalized into theory. The conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was worked out by Marx on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune.

Lenin and Trotsky prepared the victory of the revolution of October 1917 in Russia by the study of the lessons of the Paris Commune and the defeated revolution of 1905. Without this, the success of the Russian Revolution would have been impossible. Similarly, without a thorough study of the lessons of the defeated Spanish revolution, it will be impossible for the victory of the Spanish Socialist revolution to be prepared in the coming days. The history of Spain is rich in lessons. "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." That is why, especially with the difficulties of the Spanish comrades in illegal conditions to have access to the necessary material, we make no apologies for turning out material for discussion in Spain. We consider it our imperative, fraternal and internationalist duty to discuss together with the Spanish comrades the class issues of the coming revolution in order to try to assist, however modestly, in arming the cadres of the Spanish Socialists for the tasks looming ahead. A victorious Spanish revolution would be a victory for the working class of the whole of Europe and would prepare the collapse of capitalism in Latin America and in parts of Africa. It has world-wide implications. Spain is the key to the international situation. Therefore, the responsibility of the leadership of the Spanish proletariat is all the greater. But the key to victory in Spain lies in understanding the lessons, of the revolution of 1931-37. Trotsky once explained that the heroism of the Spanish workers was such as to have made ten victorious revolutions in the period of 1931-37. Therefore a study of the lessons of this period will arm the cadres against repeating the mistakes of the past.

Spain even today remains a

backward country where the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution have not been carried out. The bourgeois-landlord regime with a narrow economic base, and without mass support, was defeated in its colonial war against Moroccan independence in 1921-1925 and had to be rescued by the armies of French Imperialism. This inglorious and expensive adventure, with the exposure of the corruption and incompetence of the Monarchist regime, led to the setting up of the Bonapartist-Military Police dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. This, like all Bonapartist dictatorships, tried to balance between the classes in order to maintain the power of the ruling class. The C.N.T. Unions, the C.P. and the Anarchists were illegalized, but the Socialist Party and the U.G.T. were allowed to maintain a legal existence. Caballero, leader of the U.G.T., even became a Privy Councillor under the dictatorship!

With the world economic slump of 1929, the basis of the regime was undermined and in an attempt to save the Monarchy the King dismissed Primo de Rivera in 1930. But the deepening of the slump hit Spain hard, and the bourgeoisie and landlords tried to unload the burden on to the shoulders of the workers and peasants. There was terrible suffering and hunger among the workers and peasants as their already low standards and wages were cut by the ruling class.

In the Municipal elections of April 1931 the towns, especially the big towns, with the exception of Cadiz, voted overwhelmingly for the candidates of the Socialists and Republicans.

In a rigged poll, in the countryside, under the pressure of the aristocracy and landlords, Monarchists gained the majority. But this did not reflect the real feelings of the peasants as events were to demonstrate - it merely showed the terror of the landlords and their agents the Caciques.

In the towns, mass demonstrations of the workers took place when the election results were announced. Spain was moving towards revolution; so powerful was the movement that the Monarchy had to be sacrificed by the ruling class. Hurriedly Alfonso abdicated and fled the country. The Republic was proclaimed. The revolution had begun. A "glorious, peaceful, democratic era of reconciliation of the people had begun" according to the Socialist and Republican leaders. After the elections which followed, a coalition of Republicans and Socialists was formed. This coalition, because of the world capitalist crisis and the crisis of capitalism and landlordism in Spain, was unable to carry out its promises. A whole

series of strikes of the workers were broken and repressed. Attempts by the peasants to seize the land were answered by using the police and troops to suppress these "illegal activities". The consequence of this was the growth of despair, apathy and inertia among the working class, and especially among the peasants. The C.N.T. and Anarchists engaged in a whole series of isolated seizures and local insurrections which were bloodily repressed.

ULTRA -LEFTISM

The Communist Party, in common with all the parties of the then Communist International, had the insane line of "Social Fascism", denouncing all other tendencies in the labour movement as Social Fascists, and declaring the Republican-Socialist coalition government to be a "Fascist government". Thus they added to the confusion and disorganization of the labour movement by this infantile and ultra-left policy.

This coalition or "Popular Front" government, as the "Communist" Party nowadays terms it, failed to solve a single one of the basic tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Spain. (At the present time, by changing the name of such a coalition with the liberals, the C.P. pretend to change the reality of class relations.)

Today, within the ranks of the revolutionaries, within the Socialist Party in Spain, there is still a lack of clarity in our opinion on this question of the "bourgeois-democratic revolution" in Spain, so it is necessary to make a short analysis of the question which is borne out by Spanish experience. For a hundred years the incapacity of the Spanish capitalists to carry the bourgeois revolution to a conclusion has always ended in the defeat of the revolution and the victory of reaction.

The Spanish bourgeoisie developed late on the scene like the Russian bourgeoisie. By the time it was fully formed it was already being challenged for the supremacy and leadership of the nation by the proletariat. It had many links with the landowners and even the aristocracy. The banks had mortgages on the land. The landowners invested in industry. The church was simultaneously the biggest landowner and the biggest capitalist. Consequently the main task of the bourgeois revolution, the re-distribution of the land and the expropriation of the landlord class, as in Russia, could not be carried out by the capitalists without undermining the capitalist system. Faced with this situation, the Republicans, like the Cadets (Constitutional Democrats) in Russia, preferred always to do a deal with reaction.

As the description of events in Spain will show, the Republicans, representatives of capitalism, could not solve the tasks of the bourgeois revolution.

Lenin and Trotsky, especially the latter, in a country with a similar social structure, understood this problem. They led the workers to have an implacable and irreconcilable attitude towards the cowardly, liberal representatives of capitalism.

With the theory of "Permanent Revolution" advanced by Trotsky even before the 1905 Revolution, he explained that because the capitalists, in consequence of their vested interests, could not give the land to the peasants, take action against the Church and the monarchy - the bureaucratic semi-feudal state, but would always attempt to compromise with it, against the workers and peasants, then the task of carrying out the bourgeois revolution falls to the proletariat. But the proletariat, having come to power, abolished the monarchy and assisted the peasants to take the land, would not stop there. The proletariat, having carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution with the support of the peasants and petit-bourgeoisie, would not abandon power but would pass on to the socialist tasks by dispossessing the capitalists, but socialism cannot be built in one country. With the accomplishment of the revolution in Russia, the revolution would spread to the most advanced countries in Europe where the proletariat would be affected and stirred by the Russian Revolution.

The revolution in Russia developed as worked out theoretically by Trotsky. It provoked revolution in Germany, Austria and Hungary, and a revolutionary situation in France, Britain and Italy.

For many reasons which cannot be dealt with here, none of these revolutions and revolutionary situations ended in victory, and consequently the revolution in Russia was isolated. This led to the reaction of Stalinism which was to take a terrible toll of the revolutionary movement in the world, especially in Spain.

The Republican-Socialist coalition government of 1931-1933 was unable to solve the problems facing the Spanish people because it was a government including representatives of the capitalists. Peasants driven by hunger attempted to seize the land and were met by bloody repression by the police and army. Workers striking for higher wages were met by repression and force by the government. The despair and disillusionment of the workers and peasants, paved the way for reaction, especially in the countryside.

In the journal of the Communist Party, International Press Correspondence, while defending the policy of Popular Frontism, on Page 94 in its issue of 1st August 1936 there is an article entitled "Secrets of Spain" which admits the failure of the Republicans to solve the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

"Que te da de comer la Republica?" (What is the Republic giving you to eat?) ask the peasants. This is one of the great questions in Spain. Where the land problem dominates politics, because out of 4 Spaniards 3 are peasants (at that time E.G.) ... Extreme misery is without doubt a characteristic of them all ... About 1931, 1,173,000 peasants owned 6 million hectares and 105,000 landowners 12 million hectares. 5 million land workers (agricultural proletarians) owned nothing ...

"In 1873 the first Republic promised the peasants land. It was overthrown because it did not keep its promise. In 1931 the Republic of 14th April renewed the promise ... The law was passed on 15th September. It affected a large number of tracts of land, which were to be taken over with or without compensation... Also the feudal or non-feudal properties of the Jesuits, as well as those of the Spanish grandes and the monarchists who took part in the coup d'etat of Sanjurjo, were taken over without compensation - farms cultivated or poorly cultivated - with compensation - in other words, the land was not given to the peasants as freehold property: it was and is granted to them on lease, for which they pay rent to the Institute (of Agrarian Reform) ... This law was a compromise between the claim of the socialists and the resistance of the bourgeoisie; ... 5 years after the establishment of the second Republic agrarian reform had hardly started..."

Caballero, leader of the left socialists, later condemned the socialist coalition with the capitalists in the first years of the Republic, but did not draw all the necessary conclusions from it.

By the time of the next elections in October 1933, reaction had taken advantage of the failure of the Republicans and Socialists. Women had been enfranchised and came under the pressure of the priests to vote for reactionary candidates. In the general disillusion, the right republicans of Lerroux and the clerical fascists of Gil Robles made big gains. The latter engaged in the usual demagoguery of the fascists.

But the coming to power of Hitler in 1933, the crushing of the Austrian workers in February 1934 alarmed the international working class. They saw the suppression of the workers' organizations and the taking

away of the hard-won rights of the German and Austrian workers. They were reduced to the condition of slaves. The Spanish workers were determined that the same thing would not happen to them.

Under the influence of this mood, Caballero secretly organized the importation of arms, and armed many socialist militants. Caballero issued a warning, as the Lerroux government moved further towards reaction and began discussions with the leader of the C.E.D.A. of clerical fascism, Gil Robles. The working class would never tolerate the coming into the government of the fascists as this would mean a move towards the destruction of their organizations and rights. Lerroux vacillated and then took the C.E.D.A. representatives into the Cabinet. The Socialist Party replied by organizing a general strike, and in the Asturias and in Catalonia, armed insurrection.

This resulted in the seizure of Asturias by the workers, and the organization of the Asturian Commune. This could have succeeded were it not for the stupidity of the anarchists. Arguing that this was a "struggle between politicians" and had not the Republican-Socialist coalition suppressed and even shot them, they blacklegged and even transported on the railways the troops sent to crush the Asturian Commune. The Moors of the Foreign Legion under General Franco brutally crushed the movement.

Many workers were executed and tens of thousands imprisoned, but because the workers had fought arms in hand, the spirit of resistance remained uncurbed. Unlike the betrayal of the German workers by the Communist and Socialist Party leaders, it was impossible to consolidate a fascist regime.

There followed the Bienio Negro (The Two Black Years), but the struggle of the workers continued. The Communist Party, at the behest of the Stalinist regime in Moscow, had changed the "line". They dropped the Stalinist theory of "Social Fascism" without explanation. In its place they put the discredited theory, implacably condemned by Lenin, of coalition with the "Liberal" bourgeoisie, which they refurbished, in order to make it more palatable to their members and the working class, as the theory of the "People's Front" or "Popular Front".

The bourgeoisie in Spain found themselves in difficulties. They could not maintain the reactionary government in power. They felt the rising tide of resistance of the workers and of the peasants. Under these conditions they had recourse to the "Strike-breaking conspiracy" of the "People's Front" as Trotsky termed it. The POUM and

the Anarchists joined with the Socialist Party, Communist Party and "left" Republican Parties to form the Popular Front.

Because of the experience of the workers of the "left" Republicans in the period of 1931-1933, they were distrustful of the Republicans, and the leaders of the Communist and Socialist Parties, behind the scenes to their members, presented the People's Front as a "manoeuvre" where they were "using" the liberal leaders. That is the way they persuaded their members to accept it.

However, in the elections of February 1936, because of the rising tide of radicalization of the workers and of the peasants, the Popular Front slate was victorious. As a result of the Popular Front agreement the left Republicans were given far more seats to contest than their real support in the population would warrant, with the result that their number of deputies as compared with the workers' parties was inflated. The Popular Front secured 268 seats, of which the bourgeois left republicans held 153. The Communist Party won 16 seats and the Socialist Party 98. The right wing parties secured 157 seats, and the so-called centre parties 48 seats. However, the vote for the right was inflated by the terror and intimidation especially in the villages. So in reality the Popular Front victory was much greater.

The working class, which had learned to distrust the liberals through bitter experience between 1931 and 1933, immediately moved into action. Within days, by direct action they carried out the Popular Front programme: holidays with pay, 44 hour week and wage increases were imposed on the employers. Without waiting for an amnesty the workers marched to the jails, tore down the walls where necessary, and released the 30,000 political prisoners still languishing there as a result of the general strike and the Asturian insurrection. They imposed conditions on the employers not in the Popular Front programme.

The reason for the Popular Front victory in the elections is indicated in the International Press Correspondence of 4th April 1936, Page 461.

"...Not one of the questions raised by the Bourgeois-Democratic revolution has been solved. On the contrary, they have become more acute. The unbearable political, social and economic situation which the parties of the right, by their reactionary and fatal policy, have created for the toiling masses, the workers, peasants, clerks, small shopkeepers, etc.

"The great experience which

the masses have acquired in all their former struggles, and above all, from the insurrectionary movements of October 1934, the heroic deeds of the workers of Asturias.

WORKERS UNDER ATTACK

“...The 2 years of government of the Radicals and the C.E.D.A. were characterized by a constant state of emergency. The workers and peasants were deprived of all their achievements. The strikes and movements of the workers and peasants for their demands and for immediate improvements were brutally throttled and suppressed. Attacks upon and murders of workers by the Fascist gangs, who were protected by the Government were a ‘normal’ everyday occurrence in Spain. Workers’ organizations were persecuted and dissolved and their premises closed, meetings and conferences of workers were prohibited.

“...100 death sentences, 30,000 imprisoned and tortured ... The landowners and capitalists reduced the wages and worsened the already miserable living conditions of the workers ... The wages of the workers in the towns were reduced from 10-12 pesetas to 4-5 pesetas. Wages in the countryside were reduced from 8-9 pesetas to 1.50 pesetas for men and 60 centimes for women for a working day lasting from sunrise to sunset ...

“Unemployment increased from 536,100 in 1933 to 780,242 in 1935. As a matter of fact, however, there are more than 11 million unemployed in Spain. The Budget for 1933 provided 873 million pesetas for public works, but the 1935 Budget provided only 628 million...”

In its issue of 29th February 1936, the I.P.C. deals with the results of the election victory.

“...But Spain shows also something else, namely that the People’s Front is not a Parliamentary Coalition (?!).

“...The working people of Spain, however, gathered in the streets and shouted out with firm resolution ‘We are not going to wait until Parliament meets and repeals or does not repeal the reactionary laws! Open the workers’ clubs and meeting places at once! Open the prison gates at once!’

The armed forces appeared on the scene. But like the glorious fighters of the Commune and every people’s revolution, the masses fraternized with the troops; they won them over to their side ...

“...The fate of the coup d’etat (being prepared by Franco and the Generals) was thereby sealed. Of course the gates of the prisons were opened, just as the doors of

the workers’ clubs and meeting places had already been opened...

“...The state and municipal employees and also other workers who had been dismissed during and after October 1934 for having taken part in the fighting were reinstated and on the other hand, many employees who had acted as strikebreakers in October were dismissed (in the Madrid municipality alone over 1,000). The reactionary agrarian measures were rescinded.

“...We read in the London Sunday papers that the Chief of the General Staff, General Franco, the friend of Gil Robles, and General Goded the Chief of the Air Force, who were at the head of the proposed military coup d’etat were simply removed from their positions instead of being stood up against the wall. It is highly probable that all the authorities, all the judges who took part in crushing and sentencing the October fighters are still holding their positions.”

INDEPENDENT ACTION

The masses moved independently. What was necessary was to organize them, to increase and strengthen their distrust of the Liberal Government. As the Liberal News Chronicle of July 20th 1936 announced of the programme of Azana’s Government “...With the support of the left (who still refused actually to join the Government) his (Azana’s E.G.) Government announced a programme which was nothing more radical than a return to the constitution of 1931, with quite ordinary reforms such as schools, public works and the revision of the banking system”. It was necessary to begin the setting up of independent committees and prepare the taking of power by the masses. They clearly were not prepared to rely on the discredited liberals. In the same issue of I.P.C. on page 294 in a letter from Spain, it reports in a way that unconsciously condemns root and branch the whole policy of Popular Frontism.

“...The masses of the people are reaping the fruits of their victory in a way very different from what happened after the fall of the monarchy in 1931. While at that time the masses poured on to the streets with a great deal of noise and rejoicing their action now is much calmer and more far-reaching ...

“In general the movement of the masses all over the country is aimed at independent action. All the efforts of the Government and its press to hold the masses back have only had the effect of increasing their militant spirit and strengthening their desire to act on their own”.

‘Claridad’, the organ of the Left Socialist Largo Caballero, writes as follows:

“We shall be on the side of the Government in order to help it to carry out the Joint Programme with all the necessary determination, even if this programme does not satisfy us entirely. We will, however, not give the Government our unreserved confidence as we did from 1931-1933. The lesson was too hard, and we will not renounce our right to criticize in order to maintain the vigilance of the working class, which is now marching forward to the final goal of our class, and, at the slightest sign of weakening, to set the working class itself against its present allies.”

This course, dictated by the distrust of the “Liberal” capitalist representatives by the masses, and their pressure, was nevertheless false. It should have been the duty of the “Left” Socialists to put no trust in the lying promises of the Liberals in the circumstances of Spain at that time. They should have reinforced and strengthened the distrust of the masses and prepared for the inevitable struggle by constructing organs of an incipient character even at that stage. That was what the masses were striving for even if inarticulately and in a certain sense unconsciously, as indicated by the attitude and actions of the workers parties.

Behind the screen, under the protection of the Popular Front government, the conspiracy of the Generals, monarchists and fascists began immediately. A comedy of musical chairs began. Franco was transferred to the Canary Islands, General Sanjurjo and Del Llano were moved to Balearics and Morocco and to Seville. The Army Command was shuffled around.

The Syndicalist, Socialist and even Communist Party press were warning of the danger of a fascist or military uprising. But the Socialist Party and C.P. all exhorted the Government “to take action”.

This was impossible, if one accepts the Marxist analysis of class society. The power of capitalism depends on the power of the state machine, such is composed of the Army, police, courts, prisons, etc. The ruling class, both in its liberal and conservative or fascist form depends on the support of army generals and officers of the army caste, police officers and the top civil servants, who have been specially selected and picked and educated to serve the capitalist system. To take action against these would be to undermine and destroy the whole basis of the capitalist state. To ask the liberals to do this is like asking a tiger to turn vegetarian. For class reasons this is impossible!

That is why, right up to the

insurrection, the bleats of the workers' leaders about the Government "taking action", if it had any effect, merely tended to lull the working class and to prevent them from taking the necessary action themselves. The Popular Front Government did not take any action against the Fascist Army Officers. How could they when it meant the destruction of the state machine on which the ruling class relies?

At the same time the big capitalists, lavishly supplying them with funds, unleashed their reserve weapon: the Fascist bands against the organizations of the working class. A little over two months after the "Great Victory", Cesar Falcon was complaining in the International Press Correspondence pages:

"Since the electoral victory of the people, the Fascist gangs, recovered from the momentary dismay...incited by the reactionary leaders, and especially by the big landowners, have started a campaign of provocation and assault extending-all over the country...Madrid ... villages...with the full co-operation of the Fascist elements in the Army and in the Civil Guard ... They relied mainly on the passivity of the Popular Front Government".

"The Ministry of the Interior which had pledged itself to a constitutional and tolerant attitude, hesitated (?) to take those vigorous measures which both the nature of the offence and popular opinion were demanding ... assault on the Socialist Deputy for Madrid ... The young students belonging to the Spanish Falange tried to murder Largo Caballero and bomb the home of Ortega y Gasset - Liberal...The leniency of the Government only drove the Fascists further. Jimenez Asua - S.S.P. Madrid Deputy - The Fascists immediately replied by murdering a judge...What speedy and drastic steps were then taken against the Fascist provocateurs and criminals? Not one"

Constantly up to the period of the Army uprising in July 1936, the workers parties were appealing to the "Popular Front" Liberal Government to "Take action" They behaved as the Social Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders behaved after the February Revolution in 1917. Also the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Kamenev and Stalin, up till the arrival of Lenin, used the formula "support for the Provisional Government in so far as..." It was Lenin's April Theses opposing this and demanding preparations for a new revolution, patiently explaining this to the masses, which won the overwhelming support of the rank and file, making the victory of the Russian revolution possible.

Adoption of this standpoint of the Spanish C.P. and S.P. would have resulted in the shipwreck of the revolution. The policies of the leaders of these parties were as if plagiarized from the policies of Menshevism and Social Revolutionarism. More correctly they were a helpless response to the pressures of class conflict and their failure to implement clear class policies.

OFFICERS' TREACHERY

After gaining the promises of the Government to take action and dissolve the Fascist organizations, two months later in the issue of June 4th of I.P.C., Vincent Uribes writes, "the courts of justice, before which the Fascists are brought, either acquit them, or sentence them to two months imprisonment, a mere parody of justice. In innumerable cases Fascists have been acquitted of charges of murder. This mildness and complicity where Fascists are concerned contrasts vividly with the barbarous penalties imposed on the workers during the period in which reaction was in power, and with the punishment still dealt out by the courts to workers found with arms in their possession".

The courts, the police, the army and the Civil Service top layers are the basis of the State, and consequently it was baying at the moon to expect the Liberal politicians who represent the bourgeois to destroy their own state machine and leave themselves entirely without defence from any assault by the masses, especially as the army officers had gone over overwhelmingly to the reaction In its issue of July 4th the I.P.C. reported in an article entitled "Secrets of Spain": "There are only a few Republican officers. I was told that there were 3% ... then an officer who works for the chief of staff told me..." Your informant is an optimist ... there are perhaps 100 officers of whom one can be fairly sure'..."

Army generals and officers ignored orders, fraternized with Fascists and provoked the workers into conflicts. They ceaselessly prepared a bloody settlement with the workers.

Meanwhile, the Popular Front was incapable of carrying out fundamental reforms - in the interests of the workers and peasants. The land question had bedevilled Spain for more than a century and a half.

The Liberals were incapable of solving the problem of the Bourgeois democratic revolution.

Castrillo Santos in his book "Four years of Republican experiment 1931-35" declared: "95% of the total agricultural undertakings in Spain .comprise only about

5 million hectares of land, whilst 0.35% of the total comprise 9m. hectares. One million owners possess 6m. hectares, whilst 100,000 owners possess 12 million hectares. These statistics represent in the last resort the social problems of Spanish agriculture..."

I.P.C. says in its issue of June 4th : "30,000 landowners own two thirds of Spain" and commenting on the role of the Spanish capitalists says:- "Sabotage of the agrarian revolution when it has gained office with the assistance of the revolutionary forces, and then a repentant return to the camp of reaction in order to crush with its assistance the rebellious workers and poor

In the 6 months of the Popular Front, 190,000 landless peasants gained land. This was two and a half percent of the peasants.

In the articles "Secrets of Spain" continued in the issue of August 1936 page 27, it deals with the attitude of the capitalists and big landowners ... "In words they declared their readiness to reconcile themselves to the democratic republic which had been created in Spain. But actually they began with economic sabotage and underhand intrigues immediately after the overthrow of their government.

"The financial oligarchy began to transfer its capital abroad. The most despicable stock exchange sharks began to undermine the standard of the Peseta ... the big manufacturers demanded the annulment of the government measures which were intended to alleviate the want of the broad masses of the people, failing which they threatened lock-outs."

The big landlords, supported by the big bankers, threatened a "strike" by declaring that unless the government desisted from its plans for agrarian reform... they would not proceed with the autumn sowing ... the government displayed extreme tolerance towards the reactionary elements who had suffered a common defeat at the elections. Despite the warnings and advice of the workers organizations, the leaders of the monarchists and the Fascists were allowed to remain in freedom, even remaining in high positions in the army, the navy and inside the state machine..."

"The condition of the peasants and the land workers was that of starvation and semi-starvation. Less than one in forty received any land as a result of land reform: 190,000 out of 8 million, ... There are villages in Hurdes in La Mancha ... where the peasants in absolute despair revolt no longer. They eat roots and fruit ... Thirty miles from Madrid, the villagers exist on soup made from bread, water, oil and vinegar..."

"The Caciques still have some

power ... the usurers are still carrying on their rapacious business and not all the big landowners have been dispossessed. One has seen how in Almedralejo, in the province of Badajoz, twenty millionaires are systematically starving one of the richest corners of Spain by refusing even to discuss the question of the wages of the land workers...Not all the land is under cultivation.

“...What has the Republic given you to eat? Things should be speeded up to the starved peasants it seems ... The peasant leaders calculate that the agrarian law plans 50,000 settlements a year, which means that it will take 20 years to settle a million peasants: more than a century to give land to all”.

In Russia, before the October revolution, the bourgeoisie reckoned that it would take about a quarter century to measure out and divide the land and therefore land reform was impractical. The peasants under the leadership of the working class and of the Bolshevik Party achieved the agrarian revolution in days by seizing the land.

In Spain too, the peasants began to seize the land, but unlike the Bolsheviks, neither the Socialist or Communist Party leaders made it their policy to carry out the agrarian revolution.

The peasants provide the broad infantry of the revolution. The working class under modern conditions is the decisive class and the driving force in the revolution. In Spain the gains in wages made by working class militancy were cancelled out by inflation. There were constant clashes between workers and employers. The police and the Fascists were used by the bosses to try and terrorize the working class. All these attempts failed. The workers were tempered and fired in the struggle. They were not demoralized by the failures of the trade union and Socialist and Communist leaders to press home the attack. The reaction grew more and more alarmed.

DAILY CLASHES

After the murder of Calvo Sotelo, spokesman for monarchist reaction and Fascism, by civil guard policemen in reprisal for the murder of their Socialist police lieutenant by the Fascists, both the Fascists and Monarchists withdrew from parliament. This was in preparation for the Fascist rising.

This incident merely precipitated the preparations being made by the army generals since the February elections. The capitalists were thoroughly alarmed by the

mood and combativity of the working class. Economically, financially, politically, they could see no other way out than the crushing of the organizations of the working class.

Daily clashes were taking place between the workers and the Fascists. On July 5th 1936 the Times reported: “Two Fascists were murdered on Thursday ... As a reprisal men armed with a sub-machine gun opened fire on Friday night on a group of men who were leaving their union headquarters, killing two and injuring five”.

On July 13th the Times reported that on the previous day “six armed men entered the union broadcasting station at Valencia ... and after having overpowered the speaker and his assistant, one of them announced through the microphone that Fascist forces had seized all the strategic points of the town. The men had disappeared before the police could arrive.

“In spite of the lateness of the hour, Republican (?) and other left groups organized a demonstration of protest, which paraded the streets. The mob set fire to the headquarters of the Regional Party, which is the principal party of the right, and the building was destroyed. (There was an) attempt to burn the buildings of the newspaper ... The house of the right politician Senor Lucia and the furniture of one of the largest cafes ... several political clubs of the right wing were set on fire”

The economic situation is indicated in the report of the Times of July 14th 1936 almost on the eve of the insurrection. “The budgetary deficit has become chronic. The Peseta is sinking whilst trade languishes owing to the rising costs of production and failure to pay imports.”

SHOWDOWN

The capitalists felt the need to crush the trade unions and workers organizations so that they could drive down the living standards of the workers. Because of the economic and political impasse in which they found themselves, one conflict after the other had been taking place between the workers and the bosses in industry and on the land. There were 113 general strikes and 228 partial strikes between February and July in the cities and towns of Spain. Therefore the capitalists were demanding that “order” must be restored, i.e. that terror must be used to subjugate the working class.

The classes were preparing their forces for the showdown. The Times of July 15th 1936 reported that “the monarchists and traditionalists issued a statement: Senor Calvo Sotelo’s murder was a true ‘state

crime’ without precedent in Spain.”

“.. It (murder) had become possible as a result of the incitement to violence against deputies of the right expressed in parliament. The note adds that the Monarchists cannot continue to collaborate in state plunged in anarchy.”

On the other hand Lieutenant Castillo’s funeral was arranged for 6 a.m. by the authorities to try and prevent demonstrations. In spite of this there were immense crowds. The body was saluted with clenched fists. The coffin was draped in a red flag ... Socialist militias with banners paraded.

The stage was being set for a struggle to the death between the workers and forces of capitalism and landlordism. The entire false policy of the leaders of the labour movement from February and throughout the civil war was indicated in the statement of Largo Caballero in an interview with the London News Chronicle on July 9th 1936, “Do you believe that the change from this Republican government to a Socialist government will be accomplished by a ballot? ... That I do not know, really there would be no Republicans without us. We are their strength and if we withdraw our support they are gone.”

Significant words when one considers the course of the civil war and the actions of Largo Caballero and other workers’ leaders in the ensuing conflict.

The army generals and officers had been preparing the rising from the first days of the Popular Front government. From July 17th the rising began in Morocco and the Canary Islands. The Popular Front Government tried to hide the news from the Spanish people. When it could no longer be suppressed, Quiroga the prime minister, and the government tried to pretend that this did not affect the mainland. The Madrid radio under the control of the government announced on July 18th that “no-one, absolutely no-one on the Spanish mainland, has taken part in this absurd plot, which would be quickly suppressed”.(The Times 20th July 1936)

The news of the revolt had been radioed to the workers by the sailors of the Spanish fleet who seized the ships in the Moroccan harbours.

100,000 workers in Madrid demonstrated demanding arms. Quiroga, the primer minister refused announcing that “anyone who gave arms to the workers without his orders would be shot”. Meanwhile, throughout Andalusia according to the arrangements of the conspirators, risings began. Even according to Hugh

Thomas, the academic “historian” of the Civil War: “nearly everywhere on the 18th of July the civil governors in the large towns followed the example of the government in Madrid, and refused to cooperate fully (!) with the working class organizations who were clamoring for arms”. (page 185 of “The Spanish Civil War”)

In Seville, Granada and Cordoba the Fascist officers were successful, because after demonstrating and demanding arms the workers were persuaded by the S.P. and C.P. leaders to go to their homes. The same night the officers armed with lists went to the workers quarters and summarily executed every T.U. secretary, C.P. secretary, S.P. secretary and prominent militants on whom they could lay their hands.

Quiroga’s government tried to reach a compromise with the Fascist Generals. The Quiroga government resigned and an even more right wing government of Martinez Barrios took their place.

COMPROMISE

They wanted to make an agreement with the Fascist officers that a right-wing government could make a compromise.

Had it depended on the liberals the position would have been lost to fascism without struggle. They feared the movement of the masses far more than they feared the coming to power of Franco. This was a class question. Without the treachery of the bourgeois liberals, the fascists would never have been able to seize any of the towns in Spain. The insurrection would have been stillborn. But much as they feared a fascist Spain, the liberal politicians feared an armed working class a thousand times more.

The Government remained passive in the face of the onslaught of the army. The pathological class fear of the liberals of an armed working class is shown by the reports from all over Spain. It is best indicated by the situation in Valencia more than two weeks after the insurrection. Out of the report of the Communist Party official journal IPC itself in its issue of 5th August 1936 page 987 under the heading: “VALENCIA”

“For fourteen days, since July 18th, a mutineer troop of the 18th cavalry regiment had kept the town in constant insecurity. The workers of Valencia, half of them members of the UGT, half of them CNT had been demanding for days that the population should be armed. In order to reinforce the militia and the regulars (how many? EG) making them strong enough to storm this fascist nest. The Government members of the national Republican Union of Valencia

(the moderate republican trend of Martinez Barrios) vacillated and finally refused to distribute arms. There upon the workers declared a General Strike, which had already gone on two days before the pressure of the masses finally made the Government and the military leaders decide on open action to take the cavalry barracks ... within a few minutes the workers created barricades of motor lorries..the anti-fascist militia, the soldiers and the workers strengthened their positions and were ready to storm in spite of the irresolution of the leaders ... the workers stormed into the barracks and took the rifles without asking anyone.”

This speaks volumes for the attitude of the bourgeois “Peoples Front” “Allies” of the Communist Party. It hardly requires comment.

However, to the insurrection and counter revolution of the fascists the revolution of the working class came in reply. Beginning with the immortal workers of Barcelona the working class took the initiative.

Responding to the call of the sailors, who, in many cases had thrown the fascist officers overboard, the Barcelona workers marched against the army.

Quoting again the Stalinist correspondent of the IPC in the same article under the heading of “BARCELONA”

“Events have completely refuted the reformist theory according to which it is impossible for the working class in towns with modern broad streets to stand up to an army equipped with modern weapons. The masses of the people of Madrid, Barcelona and dozens of other towns in Spain, with a few pistols, daggers and their bare fists, have rendered an army hors de combat ... Barcelona ... the workers told us how the first machine gun was captured: they ran across the huge square with only a small force in the middle as cover, in the front ranks against a raging fire, the workers in the front ranks fell dead or wounded, but no one wavered, the advance continued till the workers captured the machine gun...when the artillery batteries appeared in the street ... the workers mounted light motor lorries and drove suddenly from side streets, at speeds of 120 km.p.h. into the flank of the artillery.”

“Madrid”

“With the exception of the flying corps, the whole garrison mutinied and it was the masses of workers the Young Socialists, Communists and Republicans who mobilize with amazing rapidity and determination and captured the main positions of the fascist uprising.”

According to the reports of the

bourgeois correspondents the courage and ingenuity of the workers was unsurpassed. They marched against the barracks with legs of chairs, table knives and a few sporting guns snatched by breaking into sporting shops.

The Times of July 24th 1936 reports from Barcelona... “San Marti... streets swarming with men...carrying army carbines and pistols ... armed women... in some lorries ... we have taken all the arms from the San Andreu barracks”.

Whole books could be written about the way in which an unarmed working class spontaneously, without guidance from their leaders marched into action against the threat of fascism and defeated the fascists in most of the towns and in two thirds of Spain. Without the vacillation of the Communist Party and Socialist Party leadership in the South, it would have been all of Spain.

But now in so called Republican Spain the army was smashed. The police had disappeared and there was only one decisive armed force - the working class.

In the analysis of society made by Marx and Lenin they explained that the power of the state can be reduced to armed bodies of men and their appendages: courts, prisons, etc. In that sense the workers had smashed the capitalist state. They held the power: the “Republican Government” was suspended in midair. Most of the factory owners had fled and were supporting Franco. The workers seized the factories and began operating them without the capitalists.

The workers were instinctively trying to change society and begin the Socialist revolution. The capitalist class supported Franco. Azana and company represented nothing. The leaders of the proletariat refused to accept this initiative of the masses. They made a coalition not with the capitalists but with the shadow of the capitalists: as Trotsky put it, the lawyers, M.P.’s etc. of the liberal parties who in this situation represented nobody but themselves

The capitalists understood the situation clearly. The before quoted correspondent in the same despatch continued his report to the Times by stating what one of the armed workers said to him: “A man told me ... many officers got away and the others were arrested. The soldiers were told they could go where they liked. Is it not nice that the workers should have arms and power.” This rank and file worker understood as undoubtedly did instinctively the mass of the workers that the power was de facto in their hands. It was the leaders of their own organizations who blocked the path of the Socialist revolution and thus betrayed

the revolution and led it on the road of a terrible defeat.

The spokesmen of the capitalist class understood clearly what was at issue. They posed the problem in serious terms, if from the opposing pole of the class struggle as the Marxists did. On July 23rd 1936 an article in the Times commented soberly: "An armed proletariat was in possession of the city (Barcelona). Who was to disarm them? What would the sequel be? Had the uprising of military and armed forces merely paved the way for proletarian rule in Catalonia? Such were the questions on every tongue, and at the government "war" headquarters it was evident that this question was of paramount concern".

Again indicating the real situation, the Times of July 25th reported: "Barcelona: revolutionary committees composed of anarchists and communists have intervened in factories to an extent that seems nothing short of their seizure...the office and technical staff are working under the watch of the proletarians ... Catalan government issued decree declaring their intention to intervene in all banking in the region...appointing a banking commission" (Thus they prevented the workers from seizing control of the banks, a vital measure without which the developing socialist revolution could not go forward. Marx pointed out that the failure of the Paris Commune to seize the banks as a first step, was one of the main factors in its downfall. One of the first steps of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution was the taking over of the banks.)

DUAL POWER

"...Your correspondent has just obtained permission from the revolutionary committee at Puigcerda to return to Barcelona..."

This shows the existence of what Marxists have termed dual power. The government in Barcelona and Madrid had no armed forces on which they could rely. They were suspended by a thread. They could only exist by the toleration of the leadership of the workers parties who were not prepared to brush them aside and thus betrayed the revolution. For the time being they had to tolerate the workers incipient power. Participating in this betrayal or lack of understanding, was the leadership of all the workers parties: the socialists, anarchists, POUMists and above all, as the main force of counter revolution in the workers camp, the leadership of the Communist party. They resisted all the strivings of the workers and aborted the growing revolution.

In an article in the liberal News Chronicle of July 21st the correspondent relates: "My night's journey by car from Madrid to Barcelona...we were stopped every few miles by either gendarmes or pickets of workmen or peasants.

"... They (men of the Popular Front) attribute the collapse of their people in the southern cities partly to the fact that in Seville and Granada, for instance, the local authorities failed to act on the instructions (?) of the central Government and arm the workmen." (As we have already quoted Casares Quiroga, there were no instructions by the central Government. The liberal republicans found themselves without police or armed forces).

The Chronicle correspondent continued... "The part of Catalonia adjoining the French border is in the hands of a revolutionary committee composed partly of anarchists and partly of communists . The Soviet flag (Red Flag) is flying on the town hall of Puigcerda... Popular Front composed partly of workmen, partly of peasants..."

On July 23rd the News Chronicle wrote of "Crews of practically all the war ships seize control..." On the same date this journal of the Liberal capitalists in Britain, blood brothers of the Republican Bourgeois party in Spain wrote in fear and trepidation "Whatever might have been the menace of communism (i.e. the socialist revolution. EG) before the fascist generals chose it as a pretext to rise against the republic, it is a reality now".

"Socialist and Communist militia and their elements in the army and navy have been the backbone of the defence against the fascist onslaught. They are fighting for the republic and the Popular Front but under the red flag.

"The red flag flies from Malaga as well as banners marked "Union Hermanos Proletarios" - the sign made famous by the proletarian insurrection in the Asturias.

"If the generals are beaten will the crews of the warships that have had a taste of blood and the troops that have worsted their officers be prepared to knuckle down even to republican officers and the workers of the cities be reconciled to a bourgeois republic which they practically alone defended?"

REVOLUTION BETRAYED

The same issue contained the following item "In Northern Catalonia yesterday communists, socialists and anarchists, armed with weapons captured from defeated rebel troops, are in control. At Puigcerda the workers army seized the

town hall, took control of the city." On July 24th the correspondent reports... "Talking with these members of the workers militia ... hardened labourers, skilled artisans, young apprentices ... Algeciras ... fire set on fascist homes by workers ... though town occupied by fascist army...the Republicans see the regime already smashed. The Popular Front is ancient history now.

It is hard to imagine the socialist, communist and syndicalist elements that have borne the brunt of the fighting for the defence of the republic in the South continuing under the tutelage of a handful of purely bourgeois republicans."

This "handful of bourgeois republicans" was to retain decisive control because of the policy of the leadership of all the workers organizations - anarchists, POUMist, socialist and communist. In one way or another they betrayed the heroic spontaneous reaction to the fascist uprising. They betrayed the elementary class movement of the workers, by collaborating with the rotten republican bourgeois leaders, who by this time represented nobody but themselves.

In this dirty work of "Democratic" counter revolution the leadership of the Communist Party played the principal part. They did this under the instructions of Stalin. By this time the parties of the Communist International had become agents of the foreign policy of the Russian bureaucracy. The latter was terrified that a successful socialist revolution in Spain, or in any other country of Western Europe would undermine their power and lead to their overthrow, and the restoration of workers democracy in Russia. In fact the revolution in Spain stirred the Russian workers more than any event since the usurpation of power by Stalin. In attempting to maintain their power, through Stalin, the bureaucracy were compelled to launch the "Witchcraft trials", murder practically all the leaders of the revolution and the old Bolsheviks, murdering hundreds of thousands of the rank and file of the Communist Party. This was due partly to the repercussions of the revolution in Spain. Victory to Spanish socialism would have sounded the death knell for the Soviet bureaucracy.

In addition to which the bureaucrats were not concerned with revolutionary diplomacy, as under Lenin, but purely nationalist considerations. They wanted at that time, to placate the capitalists of Britain and France, to gain an alliance against Germany. They did not wish to upset this by a revolutionary conflagration which would have spread to France and destroy entirely

the world political and social equilibrium.

In Spain the Communist Party set the pace for the betrayal of the revolution and thus the terrible defeat of the working class. But the Communist Party was not the decisive element. Far more powerful were the anarchists and the socialist party, the CNT and the UGT.

The anarchists betrayed every principle of anarchism, let alone of socialism. They tenets not to support any Government by entering the Bourgeois Government at a time when the basis of such a Government, in the real relationships of class forces had disappeared.

The Prieto right wing socialists stood for collaboration with the republican bourgeoisie, but at that moment would have carried little weight with the rank and file, had Caballero and the left wing of the socialist party stood firmly against such a course, as did Lenin and Trotsky in Russia in 1917, the situation would have changed fundamentally. The position was far more favorable objectively than in Russia after the revolution of February 1917, The workers were practically the only armed force. They endeavoured to seize industry, as the peasants endeavoured to seize the land. Thus the workers heralded the attempt at socialist revolution that they were instinctively trying to undertake.

Had Caballero and the left socialists organized committees of workers or Soviets, in the factories and districts and advocated the setting up of a workers Government, getting rid of the remnants of the capitalists and the representatives of the republicans - capitalist politicians who no longer reflected, directly at least, their class: There was nothing to stand in the way of organizing a workers Government and thus a victorious working class who could then have waged a socialist struggle against Franco.

The POUMists in Catalonia dragged at the tail of the anarchists and entered the Bourgeois Government in Catalonia. Thus preparing their terrible fate at the hands of the Stalinists.

Caballero, surrendered to the pressure of the Stalinists and instead of launching the struggle for power - this is an exaggeration, it would have been only a question of brushing aside the discredited republican representatives only of themselves - by calling on the workers to set up their revolutionary juntas and organizing socialist power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Stalinists would have been unable to resist. Had they done so they would have lost the overwhelming majority of their worker followers. The anarchists would have been

compelled to follow this lead. The POUM (centrists standing between reformism and Marxism) would have supported and the Prieto wing of the socialist party would have been isolated and incapable of resistance. A workers Government could then have begun a revolutionary socialist war against Franco and appealed to the international working class for support. Caballero and the left socialists failed to understand the opportunity and the dangers and thus inevitably prepared the way for the crushing of the revolution and then the victory of Franco.

The Daily Worker of July 27th 1936, reported a speech by the leader of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollitt:

“In the light of present events it can now be seen that a great mistake was made in not removing all the army officers opposed to the people’s front.

“... the aim (of the counter-revolution) undoubtedly was to destroy the people’s Spain and to safeguard the interests of the landlords, feudal families, big capitalists and monarchists, and to check any further possibility of the workers advancing.”

“... The workers of the World behind the Spanish people means victory...”

Thus the futile demand that the bourgeois Republicans dismantle the bulwark of Bourgeois rule - the guardian of its domination and property rights - the Army; is repeated just when the spontaneous movement of the proletariat has demonstrated its stupidity, its lulling of the Proletariat - leaving them defenceless before the reaction. As well ask the capitalists to voluntarily donate their property to the proletariat, as was done by the Utopian Socialists’ as ask them to dismantle the apparatus of their rule - the State machine armed bodies of men and their various appendages.

The actions of the Fascists were determined by the interests of the landlords, feudal families, and big capitalists, says Pollitt, and was repeated ad nauseum by the leaders of the Communist Parties of the world. But to overthrow them was precisely the task of the Socialist Revolution. To “defend property” and “order” was to defend the interests of the organizers and financiers of the Fascist counter-revolution. The words of the C.P. leaders were hopelessly in contradiction. They betrayed the workers while making, anti-capitalist statements inconsistently.

WORKERS’ MILITIA

On July 27th 1936 Frank Pitcairn, the correspondent of the ‘Daily Worker’ in

Barcelona, wrote: “...Among the demands already put forward by various organizations, however, are the immediate nationalization of the entire merchant marine, and the handing over of a number of vital factories to the trade unions...”

“...The workers armed militias will remain a permanent defence corps, taking over most of the functions of the army. Large numbers of soldiers sent officially on leave to be beyond the influence of Fascist officers have already enrolled in the militia.”

And again on July 29th: “...Everywhere I found calm confidence and swift progress as the workers develop their control of affairs in the defence against Fascism.”

“...For example, at Tarrega the President of the local committee told me ‘The Socialization of all essential products has been an accomplished fact here since last Wednesday.’ ‘Corn, olives, wine, and all the other main agricultural produce of the area are now the property of the workers, through their co-operatives. This years crops will be entirely owned by the poor peasants. It was first necessary to carry out the reorganization of the landowner’s co-operative which, until last week, consisted of both poor and rich peasants with the latter naturally dominating policy. Now the big landowners...have been rejected ... the co-operative, which is entirely in the hands of the poor peasants, has taken over all the crops.’

“These co-operatives were under the supreme control of the defence committee, on which the Labour Alliance, and the small bourgeois parties, are also represented...”

“...We are now working not for the rich, but for ourselves and for the workers of Barcelona and other cities of Catalonia.”

“...Barcelona ... there is strict control of prices and heavy fine are imposed for profiteering.”

“...The Anarchists have issued instructions for the formation of flying squads to deal with looters.”

These quotations in the early days of the Revolution show the situation developing in Spain - the workers wanted to make the Revolution and the peasants of Catalonia and Aragon - following their lead seized the land going further than the Russian peasants in the early days of the Revolution - and collectivized the land.

Harry Pollitt, writing in the ‘Daily Worker’ of July 29th from Paris:

“...The Fascists had made their preparations well. When the signal for the revolt was given a fortnight ago only one regiment in the whole of Catalonia had refused to join.”

“But the initiative and daring of the masses quickly made itself felt. Seizing what arms were available, the workers took the field and, in 36 hours, had crushed the Fascist rising in and around Barcelona.

“The workers militia stormed the barracks, captured rifles and artillery, improvised primitive tanks, captured the radio centres and quickly passed from the defensive to the offensive.

“Soldiers in the rebel regiments began to desert to the side of the workers militia. Those who were captured were interned in the barracks and workers were sent to fraternize with them and explain the foul work for which their officers had tried to use them...”

Thus the class lines were clearly drawn. All it required was for the workers, under Marxist leadership, to organize their own state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and begin a revolutionary war against Franco. Yet the C.P., in obedience to the dictates of their Stalinist masters in Moscow, deliberately muddled the issues. In the ‘Daily Worker’ of July 27th it states:

“Ever one can now see that the Fascists in Spain were able to organize a military revolt not because the Government was too ‘revolutionary’, but precisely because it believed (like, the Labour leaders) that it could ‘shape and adapt the state to its democratic purpose’.”

If the Spanish government had driven the Fascist officers out of the armed forces, if they had dismissed the Fascist officers in the police force, if they have created a workers militia to defend the government and to enforce its decision, there would have been no Fascist military revolt and thousands of lives would have been saved. (their emphasis) But the people of Spain had learned their lesson even if the British Labour leaders are too blind to see the meaning of the heroic struggle in Spain.”

The blind leading the blind! Thus the Stalinists refused to pose the problems in class terms. They preferred to regard the Bourgeois Republican measures of the Casares Quirogas, of the Azanas and Companys as “mistakes” rather than motivated by class interests and ideology. Thus they abandoned completely the Marxist method. Marx, Lenin and Trotsky constantly emphasized the need to abandon abstract rhetoric and to mercilessly expose the flaws in the arguments of the Bourgeois Democrats.

At a time when real power was in the hands of the working class the Socialist and Communist leaders preferred to hand back power to the discredited representatives

of the Republican Bourgeoisie, while the Bourgeoisie itself had gone over overwhelmingly to the side of Franco - in that lay the tragedy of the Spanish Revolution and the Spanish Civil War.

If there was not social revolution in Spain, what is a social revolution supposed to look like? The few lawyers, doctors and M.P.’s on the side of the Republic constituted a tiny minority - the early victories over the Fascists were obtained by the workers fighting for workers objectives.

The Communist Party in Spain was the fighting vanguard of the democratic counter-revolution in Republican Spain. They drew the Anarchists and the Socialist leaders behind them. The S.P. leadership not having a worked out perspective, were dragged behind the C.P., the right wing wholeheartedly supporting and the left wing round Caballero protestingly. But the Caballero wing were not prepared to stand firm. Had they done so events in Spain would have taken an entirely different course and a socialist victory would have been possible.

The P.O.U.M. was the most left organization, parading itself as Marxist, and it followed the Anarchists in Catalonia into the Government and prepared the way for their destruction. They had jumped from a party of 1,000 - 1,500 to 30,000 in six weeks. According to some reports this rose to 60,000 members. In proportion to population they were thus stronger than the Bolsheviks were in the early days of the Russian revolution. Moreover, the situation in Spain was far more revolutionary.

The workers militia remained organized as a workers’ army. But the C.P. of Spain had had its orders. On August 5th 1936, a little more than a fortnight after the attempted counter-revolution and the answering movement, it issued the following declaration:

“The control committee of the Communist Party of Spain...the Spanish people, in their struggle against the rebellion, are not striving for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat BUT KNOW ONLY ONE AIM: The defence of the Republican order while respecting property.

“...This work ... has the co-operation ... of such conservative parties as the Basque Nationalist Party, whose members are Catholics. This fact gives lie to the declaration made by General Franco on the ‘Marxist Danger’ in Spain, and demonstrates the duty imposed on all order loving people, without exception, to take sides with the defenders of order, in Spain.” Reported in the Manchester Guardian of August 6th, the traditional Liberal paper in Britain.

What an inspiring and morale

building appeal to the Spanish masses: they should take no action against the property of the millionaire landowners and industrialists, who had prompted and financed the movement of the Fascists and the insurrection of the army Generals. This was even to the right of the position of the left Republicans. Jose Giral, the Prime Minister in Madrid, maneuvering under the pressure of the workers and fearful that they would seize the banks, is reported without comment in the Daily Worker of August 8th:

“Explaining the measures for the control of industry and the banks Senor Giral said ‘It is necessary to undermine the economic basis of Fascism. Big banks and big industry have been the pay-masters of Fascism, supplying funds with which the Fascist Generals have been able to carry out a criminal attack on our people. That is why the most vigilant control is now necessary.’” What an annihilating argument for the expropriation of the landowners, bankers and capitalists! What did the ‘control’ amount to? It merely preserved the basis of capitalism till better times came or the victory of Franco. It was not for this that the workers so self sacrificingly and heroically shed their blood. Take a few random despatches from the liberal paper the Guardian dealing with the measures taken by the Spanish workers. On the 23rd July 1936 the Guardian reports from Madrid:

“A committee of syndicalist organizations today took over the control of all railway services in Madrid, dismissed the director, sub-directors, and officials of the Northern Railway Company, and replaced them by proved Republicans.”

Then a despatch from Barcelona on 27th August 1936: “A government decree issued this weekend makes effective a 40 hour week and a 15% increase of wages for industrial workers earning less than 600 pesetas a month. P.S.U.C. (United Socialist and Communist Party of Catalonia) and Anarchist proposals ... a 36 hour week. 10% increases in wages below 500 pesetas a month. A 25% decrease in rents. Payment for strike days, indemnity for the unemployed. Control of production by workers. A clean-up of various army sections. The continuance of the popular militias. A summary court-martial of the military chiefs of the present insurrection.”

This was - in words - accepted by the Catalan President Companys as he maneuvered desperately and powerlessly for a time in the hope that the situation would improve.

In the same issue it is reported by foreigners fleeing from Barcelona:

“The travellers said that the strike was the workers counter-stroke to the Fascists...Next day there were no servants in the hotel and little food.”

In the Guardian of 29th July 1936 there is an interview with a French garage proprietor in Barcelona who had fled to Toulouse:

“...No-one in Barcelona obeys the government any longer, or, rather what is left of the government. Power has passed into the hands of workers’ groups, who are often guided by their political and social passions. The people obey the leaders of these various groupings, many of which are Anarchist and Communist. It is rather curious to find that the Mairie of Port Bou is the only one left that still functions normally under the control of the civil guard. Everywhere else local committees have been set up in other buildings and the Mairies have been abandoned. In the countryside the peasants continue to work in the fields and they are paid for poultry, cattle and other provisions in bonds. Most of these bonds are signed by the Communist Party or the United Trotskyist Workers’ Party (In reality the P.O.U.M. composed of ex-Trotskyists and Catalan Nationalist former Communist Party members - E.G.) ... The banks are open and they receive signed cheques but do not pay them...”

And then again on August 3rd and 4th from Barcelona:

“The public services are running efficiently under the direction of syndicalists, who are now controlling all transport including the Catalan railways and certain important industries.”

And again on the 4th August 1936:

“All public services such as water, gas, electricity, tramways and railways, are now administered by the workers. The former managers and technical experts are, however, retained and consulted where necessary. But whereas the salaries of the workers have been raised by 30%, those of the technical services are strictly limited to 1,500 pesetas a month.”

Sometimes the essence of an event can be discerned in-trifling things, that are symptomatic of deeper processes. Thus the Daily Worker of August 7th 1936 reports about the same time as the Spanish central committee of the Communist Party is babbling about order and the defence of democracy and property.

“Towns held by Spanish government troops are having the street names changed. Names which have any connection with Capitalism are being taken down. Proletariat ‘liberty’ and Karl Marx streets replace

them.”

This report from the Stalinist press itself shows the real wishes and aspirations of the armed working class at the time. They were trying to impose a revolutionary policy on the leadership which was too blind or cowardly - or in the case of the C.P. leadership and that of the right-wing socialists too sceptical, cynical and treacherous to understand the realities of the situation. In the same issue of the Daily Worker their correspondent from Madrid reports:

“... The aircraft factory at Cuatro Vientos is working directly under control of a workers committee, composed of representatives of workers of all branches...” “...Similarly the majority of factories, railways, tramways and powerplants are working under the control of factory committees...”

... All banking operations too are under the strict control of committees composed of representatives of the clerks union, thus ensuring the impossibility of wealthy Fascists putting across any operations harmful to the Republican cause.”

These few quotations and the material in the former pages can give only a pale reflection of the magnificence of the revolution - of the workers revolution - let us call it by its right name - the socialist revolution which was unfolding in Spain. The workers were trying to break capitalism, in small things and on the question of power. The leadership of their organizations, and through them the organizations themselves, blocked their path. There was no party, or faction in the parties, prepared to make a stand, as did the Bolsheviks in Russia, or Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany.

The Bolsheviks, from a small minority, became the majority of the Russian Revolution and led the workers to victory. In Spain in an exceptionally favorable situation, more favorable than in Russia before the October 1917 Revolution, there was no party or leadership capable of making a correct estimate of the situation, drawing the necessary conclusions, and leading the workers firmly to take power. All that was necessary in the situation was to explain to the workers the real relationship of forces, the necessary and vital steps and to show them how their leaders and organizations stood in the way.

Power was in the hands of the workers, but it was not centralized or organized. Committees, Juntas or Soviets, the name does not matter, should have been organized in every factory and district, elected by the workers, housewives and

all sections of the working population, including the peasants and of course the workers militias. These in turn should have been linked by delegates to form area, regional and an all National Committee. This could have formed the framework of a new Regime pushing aside the contemptible and powerless Government and establishing the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

REVOLUTIONARIES ISOLATED

The mood and actions of the working class would have gained an overwhelming response. Outside Spain, day by day, Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyists, made the correct analysis but at that time in Spain they had neither the authority nor the organization to influence events. The overwhelming majority of the active militants, the S.P., the C.P., the P.O.U.M., and the anarchist militants unfortunately had no access to the material issued by the Trotskyists, and thus could not react to it. That was the tragedy of the Spanish revolution, which doomed it to defeat and prepared the way for the victory of Franco in the Civil War.

The events of the civil war can only be given in a sketchy form and even a synopsis here. If necessary we will return to this theme with the necessary documentation. However, Felix Morrow has written a Marxist classic: “Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain” which is an invaluable record of the facts. We hope that it will become available in Spanish for the benefit of the Y.S. and Socialist Party comrades.

Jose Giral, as Prime Minister of a cabinet composed exclusively of Left Republicans, became more and more incompatible with the real relationship of forces. Consequently Giral resigned on September 14th and handed over to Caballero, who formed a government consisting of Socialists - left and right - Communists, Left Republicans and even right Republicans. Thus instead of dismantling the bourgeois state, Caballero and the Left Socialists collaborated with the Stalinists in shoring it up with the ‘correct’ parliamentary forms.

They represented neither the decisive sections of the bourgeoisie nor even a sizeable section of the proletariat. They hung in limbo, without even the normal basis of a bourgeois state - control of the armed forces. The workers militias were under the control of the workers organizations and looked to them for guidance and leadership.

Instead of encouraging the workers in their endeavours to take control, Caballero promised a better world...After the war! In the Cortes he announced: “...It is important to

state at once that the structure of the country will be changed after our victory and that the first article of the constitution according to which Spain is a republic of the toiling masses can at last be realized..." (Page 1260, International Press Correspondence, 19th September 1936).

But the whole essence of a civil war is that the masses cannot wait! A change in the social structure has to be carried out immediately if it is to have an effect on the workers, and especially the peasants. They have been deceived so many times, that they become sceptical and indifferent to promises. Statements of social changes especially when couched in such vague, indefinite phrases can have no appeal, especially to peasants.

They want deeds not words in a situation where words are punctuated by bullets. Lenin explained long ago that "an ounce of experience is worth ten of theory". Especially where promises are concerned. If the masses are to make great sacrifices of blood and suffering it must be for a worthwhile aim - and not that of the discredited bourgeois "republic" which had prepared the way for the Fascist counter-revolution.

Gilding the "republic" as was done by Caballero can carry no conviction to the peasants. They think in terms of the land. That is the reality to them. When propaganda by loudspeakers to the rebel army was conducted in the trenches, the reply of the conscripted peasants in Franco's army to appeals to come over to the republic was "what has the republic ever done for us?" To them it was a struggle between generals. They didn't want to fight but they could see no fundamental difference between the two sides. Why risk reprisals to their families and risk their own lives by coming over? Consequently they fought for their own enslavement as well as that of the workers and peasants of all Spain.

Just to make sure that there were to be no real social changes the general secretary of the "Communist" party Jose Diaz wrote in the same issue... "In order to alarm international opinion (whose opinion?, that of the capitalists, E.G.) its enemies have asserted that it is a socialist-communist government; in reality it is nothing more nor less than the continuation of the republican and democratic ministries." This is for once correct, and we have seen the record of these ministries! "Where the peasants en masse have taken up the armed struggle against the rebels and are now organizing a guerrilla struggle at the rear of the reactionary bandits..."

Hunting for examples of that

mythical creature under modern conditions the "revolutionary bourgeoisie" the communist party writer continues... "The considerable success of the party of Martinez Barrios at the elections (of February 1936) cannot be explained otherwise than by the anti-fascist sentiments of part of the bourgeoisie ... (after the July fascist insurrection)" Jose Giral, Francisco Barnes, Casares Quiroga (his role is sufficiently dealt with in his threats to give instructions to shoot anyone arming the workers), Enrico Kames and Manuel Blasque Garon - Industrialists and landowners who form part of the ministry of Jose Giral..." In fact they represented not their class but themselves as individuals - within the republican camp desperately maneuvering against the socialist revolution.

Apart from the fact that in the early days and hours of the fascist uprising, before they had lost control of events, the Liberal government tried to compromise with the Franco gangsters. The article, continues with grisly and unconscious humour: "...Had the development of events been different it is possible that some of these people would have sought for a compromise with reaction..."

The article continues: "...There can be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the bourgeoisie sympathise with the insurgents, and support them, but there are groups of the bourgeoisie, especially among the national minorities, therefore these groups must not be left out of account in the antifascist camp ... A wide social basis at a moment of such sharp struggle is one of the factors guaranteeing the success of the revolution...the Spanish antifascist people's front, as a pacific form of the unification of various classes in face of the fascist danger ... At the same time the peculiarity of the Spanish people's front ... the relatively slow pace at which the masses of the peasantry are being drawn into the armed struggle..."

To "add" fire to petrol hardly increases ones forces. To have the support of the remnant of the bourgeoisie was, as events were to demonstrate to weaken and undermine, not strengthen the struggle against Franco. Action expropriating the landowners and capitalists would have strengthened the workers camp a million times more. But in reality the Stalinists, at the instructions of Moscow, were desperately trying to restore the bourgeois republican regime. In Catalonia, and Spain, as the party that stood for "law" "order" "the defence of private property" they became the party of the middle class in the towns and the rich peasants in the countryside. At that time two thirds of the membership were composed of

shopkeepers, foremen, small businessmen, rich peasants, top levels of the technicians, etc. Only one third was composed of workers - mostly the most backward section of the working class.

WORKERS' OR CAPITALIST ARMY?

The Stalinists as defenders of the "revolutionary bourgeoisie" were trying to restore the situation in republican Spain as it existed before the revolution. This required counter revolution - bloody and vile - within the republican camp.

As early as October 1936 they prevailed on Caballero to begin the process of transforming the militia into a "regular army". Now it is clear that in a civil war centralized command is necessary. But the whole point of an army in modern society is in whose interests it is organized, what class basis it possesses, what is its motivation, which class does the general staff and the officers come from, whose interests do they represent, what class basis does the army fulfil? No mythical appeals to anti-fascist unity can avoid the class issues while class society remains.

Trotsky and the Bolsheviks built an army also from scratch. But it was the army of the workers in power. They used tens of thousands of the officers of the Tsarist army, but they were under the strict control of workers commissars loyal to the workers state and to the ideals of the socialist revolution.

If a centralized army is to be built it can only be the tool of a workers or capitalist state - it cannot be a non-class army - a mythical class neutrality is impossible. Consequently, afraid or incapable of consummating the socialist revolution, Caballero and the other leaders assisted in carrying through the organization of a capitalist army. This again was to have disastrous consequences for the civil war.

As already shown the overwhelming majority of the officers and generals went over to the fascists, far more apparently than even in Russia. In a purely military struggle they would clearly have the advantage. But war, and even to a magnified extent civil war is the continuation of politics by forcible means. In war, says Napoleon, the moral is to the physical as 4 is to 1.

By creating an army not on the model of the Red Army of 1918-20 but of a capitalist army, the whole basis of the workers struggle was undermined. Systematically in Barcelona and Madrid the Stalinists toiled to recreate the bourgeois state. The first great successes had all been achieved by the

methods of social revolution. The militias in the first rush conquered Aragon. The land was seized in Catalonia and Aragon. Advancing further than the Russian revolution in its early days in response to generations of anarchist propaganda the land was collectivized by the peasants themselves. The militia stood at the gates of Huesca, Teruel and Saragossa.

But the central government starved this front of arms and supplies for fear of the social revolutionary consequences that victory on this front would mean. Caballero allowed himself to be blackmailed by the C.P. under threat that the Russians would cease to supply arms, the bulk of which were being sent to the Madrid front, where the C.P. played an important role.

It was the growing conflict between the aspirations of the workers and the gradual return to bourgeois "normality" which precipitated the crisis which came to be known as the "May days of 1937".

Every revolution has seen similar movements of the workers when they felt the revolution being betrayed. The June days of France in Paris in 1848, the July days in Russia of 1917 and the January days in Germany in 1919. The masses feel power slipping out of their hands. They rise convulsively in protest against the "sell out" to the bourgeoisie in an elemental movement.

POWER IN WORKERS' HANDS

The immediate cause of the uprising of the working class in Barcelona and Catalonia was the attempt of the Stalinists to seize control of the telephone exchange for the Catalan government. This had been under the control of the workers in the C.N.T. since the first days of the revolution, and represented an element of workers control.

The Stalinists in the Generalitat, the autonomous Catalanian government, sent some tanks and troops to seize control of the exchange. The workers replied with a general strike. Barricades appeared in Barcelona and other Catalanian towns. The government was powerless. An attempt to send assault guards from Valencia and to send the international brigade to put down the movement of the workers collapsed because of the refusal of the troops to be moved to take action against the workers.

Once again, power was in the hands of the workers! There were no troops in Barcelona or elsewhere on which the government could rely to put down the movement.

Here the C.N.T. and the P.O.U.M. came to the rescue of the revived Bourgeois state. Arguing that it was impossible to start a

Civil War within a Civil War these "Marxists" appealed to the workers to return to work. Some way of ending the conflict would be found by agreement between the workers and the Government. For four days the workers controlled the streets. HAD THE P.O.U.M. ISSUED THE CALL TO TAKE POWER THERE WAS NO FORCE TO STOP THEM! The anarchists and the P.O.U.M., prevailed on the workers to "Go back to work." The crisis was over! The opportunity to transform the situation was lost.

Had the P.O.U.M. taken power they could have offered a united front against Franco to the Government in Madrid. The Government had no troops on which it could rely. Very rapidly the masses in Madrid, Valencia and at the fronts would have rallied to the banner of socialism in Barcelona. The power of the Madrid Government would have crumbled and disappeared.

The P.O.U.M. failed to act. They had entered the Catalanian Bourgeois Government with the Anarchists and hoped for miracles. In words they were against class collaboration, in deeds they collaborated with the shadow of the capitalist class.

Within six weeks they received the reward for their cowardice and lack of perspective. In a revolution the masses learn fast, but these "leaders" had learned nothing. The Stalinists seized the opportunity provided by the fact that the masses had been reduced to passivity and despair. Using the pretext that the P.O.U.M. were involved in a plot with Franco they were declared illegal. Nin and other leaders were murdered by G.P.U. agents in Spain. The Party disappeared from the scene.

Caballero had refused to agree to the suppression of the P.O.U.M. Consequently he had to be removed. The C.P. hatched a plot with Prieto and the right wing socialists and with the bourgeois Republicans in the cabinet. Caballero was replaced by Negrin, who was more pliant in the hands of the Stalinists. Passionaria hailed this as the "Government of Victory!" There were some military victories. Very few! But by transforming the struggle into a purely military one the seeds for defeat had been sown. The bourgeois officers who had the military training were not reliable.

After the dissolution of the militias, Malaga and the Basque country were betrayed by a section of the staff into the hands of the Fascists.

But in any event, as a purely military struggle the war could not be won. The general excuses, if they deal with the subject at all, to explain the defeat by the reformists and Stalinists, is foreign intervention and the Moors! Hitler and Mussolini supplied

troops, 100,000 Italians and 20,000 to 60,000 Germans, tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Moors were in Franco's Army.

But in the Russian Revolution, too, there was intervention from foreign troops. Twenty-one armies, of all the Great Powers, intervened. Russia was blockaded. In the early stages of the Civil War only one province with Petrograd remained in the hands of the Bolsheviks. The rest of Russia was in the hands of the White Guard and the armies of intervention.

The Bolsheviks won not because of superior military arms, or skills but because they waged the civil war as a social struggle. Land to the peasants, freedom for the oppressed nationalities, factories to the workers and Proletarian Internationalism was the method of the Bolsheviks. Consequently, every Russian Army sent against the Bolsheviks and Russian Workers and Peasantry, and their power, mutinied and had to be withdrawn. Behind the capitalist and Imperialist lines the peasants and workers sabotaged the struggle. They supplied the Red Army with invaluable information about their enemies. They organized Guerrilla war. The White Guard Armies, feeling the hostility of the people, became demoralized. Tens of thousands conscripted, deserted to the Reds. The Russian workers were victorious in the Civil War.

In China Mao Tse-Tung and the Chinese C.P., waging a semi-revolutionary war, gained victory. The Civil War started with an overwhelming majority of Chiang Kai-Shek forces, militarily and numerically. They were supplied with the most modern equipment in tanks, planes and guns, by American Imperialism. The greater part of China was in their hands. But giving the land to the peasants, reserving a piece of land to the soldiers of Chiang's Armies, in the villages from where they came, won over the troops. By hundreds of thousands; and by whole divisions, they deserted to the Red Army. Waging a social war - a semi-revolutionary war - resulted in military victories too, because of the high morale of the troops, from the peasant officers to the smallest corporal and private, that is the way - though lacking sophisticated material - which was brought over by the soldiers deserting to their side - though the military odds seemed to be overwhelmingly against them in territory, numbers and material, they were victorious.

When the Spanish Civil War is examined the opposite process is to be seen. The magnificent initiative of the workers, gains dazzling victories of an unarmed working class in two-thirds of Spain. The

fleet comes over to the side of the workers. Part of the Air Force and Artillery.

But the revolution is not consummated. Inch by inch the workers are blasted back. The Democratic counter-revolution in the rear undermined the struggle at the front. The land in Catalonia and Aragon is repossessed by the landlords. The factories are gradually re-gained by the capitalists. The Bourgeois state and Bourgeois army are restored. Power is in the hands of "Democratic Capitalism."

What are the consequences? The Moors were Franco's crack troops. Why did they fight for enslavement for themselves and their Spanish brothers, the workers and peasants? Abd El Krim, who led the struggle for Moorish independence from Spain and France, was in exile in an island in the Mediterranean. He offered the Republican Government to come to Spain and appeal to the Moors to come over to the side of the Republic. All he asked in return was autonomy for Morocco. But to give autonomy to Morocco would offend the "democracies" of Britain and France by undermining their Empires in Africa. Moreover, was not the Popular Front Government pledged to maintain all the Spanish Land? Not waging the war by revolutionary means the offer was rejected. Throughout the conflict the Moors remained the fiercest and best troops. The crowning irony of this particular fact is that later, fearful of the collapse of his regime were he to wage a Colonial War, Franco conceded - not autonomy - but independence" Thus the Fascists gave at the first risk what the miserable Popular Front Government was not prepared to concede when it was fighting for its life!

It is true that Mussolini and Hitler supplied enormous quantities of material and also troops to Franco. But these troops were Italian peasants and workers, German peasants and workers. They could be reached - they could only be reached by an International Socialist appeal as with the Bolsheviks in Russia. But in spite of all, foreign troops and Moors were auxiliaries. The main body of Franco's troops were Spaniards, mainly peasants conscripted into Franco's army. They could only be won over by showing the fundamental social differences between the armies. Land to the peasants, factories to the workers, freedom for the oppressed nationalities in Spain and in Africa that was the only programme for victory. The programme of transforming the power back to the landlords and capitalists could have no effect on the troops in Franco's army. Militarily superior in officers, tanks, on this level all the advantages were

on the side of Franco. Waging the struggle as a "military war" - not a social war waged by arms - guaranteed defeat. "Popular Front" France and "Democratic" Britain starved "Republican" Spain of arms with the hypocritical farce of "non-intervention." Stalinist Russia participated in this farce. Only after precious months had been lost did they supply arms, and then only on condition of halting the social revolution.

The policies of the workers parties in the revolution and civil war guaranteed defeat. But let us assume for a moment that by some fantastic miracle military if not social victory could have been obtained. What then? Power had been handed back to the capitalists and landlords. The remnants of the old officer caste and middle class had taken over the officers jobs in the reconstructed bourgeois army. The country was ruined and had been laid waste in the terrible civil war.

The repression of the initiative of the workers and their nascent control of the factories had demoralized and thwarted the ideals of the working class. The generals, placed in full command of the renewed army, decided everything. Towards the end of the struggle it was apparent that victory was far away.

The uncontrolled army command, of the refurbished regular army, seized power to try and propose a compromise with Franco (!), General Casado and General Miaja. Miaja with a Communist Party membership card in his pocket - established a military dictatorship! As a reward for being the fighting vanguard of democratic counter-revolution, within the revolution, the "Communist" Party was made illegal and forced underground. There were now two dictatorships in Spain - on both sides of the trenches!

Even had "Republican" Spain won the civil war there would have been a military police state in Spain! This was the final condemnation of the policies of all the workers organizations.

Spain, after more than three decades of dictatorship is moving once again towards revolution. The C.P. leaders, having learned nothing, play the same perfidious role.

It is the task of the Spanish Young Socialists to carry the lessons of the civil war to the working class, and of course to the rank and file fighters of the Communist Party. Internationally and nationally the perspective is favorable. Anarchism is discredited in its former "Last Latin hide-out" and is very weak. The Socialist Party and the Communist Party are the two real forces within the working class. The CP rank and file will respond to a bold lead from the

S.P. and the Y.S. if it is based on the ideas of Marxism.

Victory of the Socialist revolution in Spain can transform the international situation. The only road for the Spanish Workers to ensure the success of the revolution is to learn the lessons of the Spanish revolution of 1931-1937 and of the civil war. Without this understanding they would be doomed to make similar mistakes and suffer the fate of their fathers and grandfathers.

Autumn 1973

Lessons of Spain

By Ted Grant and Ralph Lee

Under the transparent disguise of the 'Peace Alliance' agitation, the popular front of Britain now makes its first steps towards entering the political arena. The Liberals cock their ears attentively, the Labour Party heads strenuously oppose the project and the Communist Party, the initiator of the agitation, is utilizing every resource it possesses to bring the popular front into being. It now becomes urgently necessary for British workers to draw conclusions from the events in Spain, to examine the experience of popular frontism as it appears in practice in the civil war in order to face up to the problems of tomorrow.

Leon Trotsky, who in a series of articles and pamphlets on the Spanish situation, has consistently pointed the road which the Spanish masses must travel if fascism is to be conquered, has called insistently for the only guide along that road, the revolutionary workers' party, to take up its position at the head of the awakening Spanish masses. Trotsky concludes his pamphlet *The Revolution in Spain*, written in 1931, with these words: 'For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party.'

The conditions for a workers' victory over reaction, thus epigrammatically summed up, are still unfulfilled: this is the lesson that must be brought to the consciousness of the working class in Britain as in Spain.

While the Spanish fascists openly prepared, with aid from abroad, to strike their blow, the Popular Front government conspicuously failed to make that counter preparation which would have destroyed the enemy swiftly and easily. The army was left undisturbed in the hands of the reactionaries; under the noses of the Popular Front

government they consolidated a powerful basis among the Moors who, finding the chains of the new government no less galling than those of the monarchy, fell an easy prey to Franco's specious promises. On the other hand, the workers were prevented by their reformist leaders from taking those measures which would have frustrated the fascist plans - the setting up of workers' militia and factory committees. When, in spite of the entreaties of their leaders who begged them not to 'provoke' the reaction, not to 'antagonize' their republican-capitalist partners in the Popular Front, the workers struck and the peasants seized land, the government answered by arresting strikers, breaking up workers' meetings, censoring workers' papers, shooting down peasants. Such is the story related by the press dispatches and the official communications in the months of Popular Front power leading up to the civil war. In this way the Popular Front in the months preceding Franco's uprising gagged and tied the masses and drove numbers into the opposite camp to join the Moors in opposing a 'democratic' government that perpetuated their misery and oppression.

Neither the Popular Front nor any other capitalist government could solve the basic problems of modern Spain. Five million peasant families with insufficient land, three million of them with no land at all, were squeezed by taxation and were starving. Only the expropriation of the big landowners and the redivision of the land among the poor peasants could relieve their famine. But this solution was impossible under capitalism, because the whole structure of Spanish banking rests on the land mortgages, so that the ruin of the big landowners would mean the ruin of the capitalists and bankers. Only a Spanish 'October' could, by dealing a death blow at the capitalist and land-owning classes alike, relieve the hunger of the perishing masses of the countryside.

The conditions of the workers in the cities likewise presented a problem insoluble under capitalism. Spanish industry, born too late to compete with the cheap goods which a well-developed foreign industry is able to pour into jealously guarded markets, is unable to find even a home market because of the impoverished peasant population. Marx and Lenin taught that there is no way out for the workers from their prison of meagre wages and growing unemployment except by smashing down the barriers of capitalism and placing the control of industry into the hands of the working class.

In the first months of the civil war the workers of Spain spontaneously sought this way out as an essential part of their

struggle against reaction, for it is not by military method alone that Franco can be defeated. Measures necessary to rouse the masses, by giving them something to fight for, were put into operation: factory, village and shop councils, and workers' tribunals were set up; a workers' police force and militia were initiated. The beginnings of a workers' state thus came into being to conduct a revolutionary war against the fascists, and existed side by side with the Popular Front, challenging its authority and wresting away its functions.

The Communist and Socialist parties came to the rescue of the capitalist government thus threatened with extinction. They entered the Popular Front government and Caballero, hailed as 'the Spanish Lenin', became the prime minister. Step by step the conquests of the workers were filched back in the name of the 'defence of democracy'. The workers' militia was dissolved into the republican army, workers' courts were eliminated, workers' police corps disbanded. The same process went on in Catalonia where the POUM entered the coalition government, proclaiming it the workers' government. But the POUM also proclaimed that the civil war was fundamentally a question of socialism versus capitalism, a truth which undermines the very foundations of the Popular Front. Republicans and Stalinists united in a vile campaign of calumny against the POUM accusing it of being in the pay of Franco, driving it from government, suppressing its propaganda and journals, arresting and imprisoning its leaders.

At the beginning of May 1937, the government launched its provocative attack on the workers to regain possession of the factories and buildings which were under workers' control. The resistance of the workers was overcome and full control was regained by the bourgeoisie in the economic as in the political and military fields.

The alternatives that confront the Spanish masses today are on the one hand the victory of Franco initiating a totalitarian regime or on the other hand the now problematic victory of a 'democratic' capitalist regime which in a spent and devastated Spain can only rule by a scarcely veiled dictatorship. In either case the chains will be more securely riveted on the limbs of the workers, peasants and the colonial people, exhausted and cheated.

From its very inception, the Popular Front disavowed in its programme not only socialist but even semi-socialist measures. It was openly and admittedly the guardian of capitalist property, dangling grandiose plans for future reforms before the eyes of

the people to distract their attention from present miseries. The projected popular front in Britain is cut on the same pattern. 'Any idea of real socialism would have to be put aside for the present,' declares Sir Stafford Cripps in the Tribune (14 April, 1938) in pleading for a 'democratic front' government. The *Daily Worker* supports the Liberal candidate in a by-election as against the Labour candidate, and sneered at Labour's 'astonishing "discovery" that Liberals are not socialist, as if Liberals ever made this claim.' (11 May, 1938).

For Britain as for Spain, the struggle against fascism is the struggle for socialism. The arms plans and the food plans, the spy scares and the air raid precautions serve to warn the workers that the 'peace' period draws rapidly to a close. The American recession in industry spreads to Britain; in the first three months of 1938 the decline of new capital issues, £33,000,000 as against £49,505,000 for the corresponding period last year, indicates the dimensions of the coming industrial slump. The increased employment in the armaments industry and the increased recruiting for the army serve for the time being to mask the growth of industrial unemployment, and the shifting centre of gravity in national economy is not visible in the general statistics of trade and industry because the artificial stimulus of war preparations helps to conceal the real process of economic breakdown. The disease that grips the vitals of capitalism in decay produces as its symptom a feverish activity in certain branches of industrial activity, accompanied by that false sense of well-being which must be recognized as pre-war 'prosperity', the delirium before the crisis.

As long as the pre-war boom continues and the British masses continue in a comparatively passive state, the right wing bureaucrats of the trade unions and the Labour Party oppose the popular front. When the masses start to move, as they did in Spain and France, towards a militant socialist solution of their difficulties, the Labour bureaucracy will not scruple to follow the example of its counterparts in Spain and France, to put a bridle on the mass movement and lead it into the safe bye-paths of popular frontism. If today they resist the popular front, it is not because it is the open, treacherous abandonment of even the pretence of socialism, but because they are quite satisfied with their own status in capitalist society, because they fear the inevitable exposure to which the taking of political power will subject them. Today they attack the Liberals as non-socialists, tomorrow they will justify and defend them, and work hand in hand with

them in the 'strike-breaking conspiracy' of the popular front, as their brother reformists of the Communist Party are already doing.

The Communist Party of Great Britain pleads for the popular front and supports the Liberals on a programme of 'arms for Spain', 'defence of democratic liberties,' 'economic and social advancement of the people.' The French Popular Front in power supplied no arms for Spain; the French colonial slaves of North Africa and Indo-China received as their share of 'democratic liberties' - bullets and prison sentences; the French Popular Front government nibbled at the concessions wrested from the ruling class by the direct strike action of the French workers and frustrated their wage gains by currency manipulation. The Liberals and 'progressive' capitalists offer, in place of reforms, grandiloquent 'plans' for reforms:

The past writings of the Communist Party leaders prove that they are well aware of the treacherous role of the Liberals. Today they are able to exploit the reputation for militancy which has been won by the work of party members in the trade union struggle, in order to lead militant workers along the political path mapped out by their paymasters in the Kremlin. Stalin and company are prepared to sacrifice the socialist aspirations of the British working class for the sake of a war alliance with the British bourgeoisie and to this end they have ordered a popular front in Britain. The Communist Party heads leap to obey; they flatly and brazenly contradict their arguments of a few months back, they consciously and deliberately manoeuvre the workers into supporting a coalition government with the class enemy, they blindfold the worker while the Liberals prepare the dagger which will be plunged into his back.

The Communist Party carries out its traitorous work with loud cries of 'Unity! Unity!' But the British working class constitutes in itself two-thirds of the population, and would draw behind itself the majority of the lower middle class if it pressed forward with a bold programme of socialist demands. The workers have no need for an alliance with any section of the class foe, least of all with the decayed, long ago bankrupt Liberals. They instinctively know that unity is an all-powerful weapon in their struggle - unity of the 'working class'. The popular front is a caricature of unity. The genuine united front on a class basis, binding together the workers, their organizations, their parties on a programme of common struggle is the crying need of today, the only means of defending those rights and privileges which the workers have won in

generations of struggle and sacrifice. The successful defence of concessions already gained must lead inevitably to the campaign for full workers' rights, to the struggle for workers' power.

The experience of Spain is a warning and a lesson to the workers of the world, above all to the British workers. Yesterday's drama in Spain is being rehearsed today in Britain. Tomorrow it will be enacted if the British workers have failed to realize the nature of the tasks which history has placed before them. And in preparing to tackle those tasks, the working class has need above all, of 'a party, once more a party; again a party'.

NOTES

[1] The popular front or people's front was a name given to coalitions between workers' parties and so-called liberal or radical capitalist parties. The Communist International adopted the people's front policy in 1935, after the debacle of Hitler's rise to power.

[2] The notes briefly explain terms which may be unfamiliar or give background details of parties and individuals. Terms are only notated the first time they occur. Readers may also wish to consult the index at the back of the book. Terms in the index marked by an 'it' are to be found on the page indicated.

[3] The Arab population of NW Africa. They struggled for years in Morocco for autonomy from Spanish rule. Where the Popular Front government did nothing, Franco promised them independence.

[4] The Russian revolution took place in October 1917 on the old Russian calendar.

[5] Largo Caballero, leader of a left tendency in the Spanish Socialist Party in the 1930s. Prime Minister from September 1936 to May 1937.

[6] Stafford Cripps, Labour MP from 1931, expelled from the party for a period in 1939 for campaigning for a popular front. As Chancellor of the Exchequer 1947-50, he introduced an austere economic programme. Tribune was the paper of the reformist left in the party which Cripps helped to found in 1937.

*Produced by Wellred Books and the
Workers International League*
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