

How the NKVD framed the POUM



An extract of the memoirs of Jesús Hernández, a leading member of the Spanish Communist Party and minister in the republican government during the Spanish civil war, explaining how Soviet secret police framed and persecuted the anti-Stalinist communist group the POUM during the conflict.

Marxists.org editor's note

Hernández was a leading member in the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) during the Spanish Civil War and served as one of the two communist ministers in the Spanish republican government. After the war he challenged the Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria) party leadership and was expelled from the party (1944). After the break between Stalin and Tito he sided with Tito. During the rest of his active life, he worked at the Yugoslav embassy in Mexico City. He died in 1971.

The following text is taken from the memoirs of Jesús Hernández, published in 1953 in Mexico as *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin* (I Was a Minister of Stalin). The memoirs have never been translated in full to english. The sections reproduced below are about the stalinist persecution and suppression of the POUM. They were originally serialised during 1953 in *Labor Action*, the US socialist paper published by Max Shachtman's Workers Party. The translation has been checked against the Spanish text and amended. Notes have been added.

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WHEN I ARRIVED at the ministry, Cimorra handed me a small closed envelope.^[1] Inside was a card. I read: 'Dear friend: If you have nothing more important to do, I expect you for tea at six in the evening. I must speak to you urgently. Greetings, Rosenberg.'^[2] I had spoken with the Soviet ambassador only a few times. Almost always I had visited him about some celebration or official reception. Now his invitation was personal and urgent.

Punctually at six I was at the embassy. 'Go in. He's expecting you', one of the secretaries told me. There in the comfortable office was his excellency, the ambassador of the Soviet Union. 'Thanks for coming', he said, shaking hands.

'I don't know the reason, comrade Rosenberg. But I am at your disposal.'

'Thanks. Have a seat. The tea will be here right away. Or do you prefer coffee?'

'If it's all the same I'd prefer coffee.'

Rosenberg rang a bell and ordered: 'Coffee for the gentleman.' He took out an expensive Russian-lacquer cigarette case with miniature engravings, and offered me a Soviet cigarette with a long cardboard tip. 'It's better tobacco than yours', he said, smiling.

'Tobacco is a matter of habit. Besides, most of our tobacco isn't from this country, it's Cuban', I explained.

'I'm expecting a friend; I'd like to you to meet him. He is very much interested in getting personally acquainted with you', said the ambassador. At that very moment one of the secretaries announced the 'friend'. Rosenberg rose quickly with a haste that showed his respect. The new arrival stretched out his hand to the ambassador and, turning to me, said in Spanish with a French accent: 'Comrade Hernández?'

'Yes.'

'I am ... Marcos. I like the name', he said, smiling. I was already accustomed to the fact that the 'tovarichi' baptised themselves with Spanish names and I attached no significance to it. Afterwards I learned that his name was Slutsky[3] and that he was the chief of the Foreign Division of the GPU[4] in Western Europe.

'I came only a little while ago, not more than a few days ago. I hope that you will excuse me for bothering you, but – it would not be prudent for me to be seen going into your ministry or into the party headquarters. This place is more discreet. And there are so many Russians in Valencia!' [5]

'Yes, another Russian more or less, nobody notices. And besides, I don't believe that anyone has any interest in watching the Russians. Almost all the police are in our hands', I said, laughing.

'But there are agencies that the party does not control. And above all, there is the spy service, Comrade Hernández, the enemy's spies', he said with a certain vehemence.

Tea and coffee were served, and while the smart waiter filled the cups with delicate precision, I observed friend 'Marcos'. He was getting close to fifty. Tall and ungainly. Drooping shoulders and a sunken chest gave him an ape-like look. His sharp-featured face was topped by a shaven head, looking from chin to crown like a vertical melon. Eyes a bit slitted and high cheek bones. 'A true Russian', I thought.

'That's what I wanted to talk to you about, precisely about that, espionage', he went on.

'Well, I'm listening', I said, with some curiosity.

'Our foreign service has become aware that some elements of the POUM are taking steps to bring Trotsky to Spain. Do you know anything about it?'

'That's the first I've heard of it.'

'That shows that the Republic's counter-intelligence services are very deficient.'

'I don't believe they're deficient, except in having little interest in the escapades of the POUM.'

'That's what's serious.'

'I don't see why.'

Our ape-like friend's features contracted, denoting disgust. 'If the responsible party men attach no importance to this band of counter-revolutionaries and agents of the enemy, that helps us understand many things that have happened in the war', he said harshly.

'In Spain Trotskyism has never awakened from sleep. And I don't see what influence the POUM can have on the things that have been happening to us', I replied with the intention of putting him down.

'The POUM has units at the front', explained Rosenberg.

'Not all of them have to be Communist, do they?'

'But if they aren't Communist, we must make sure that they are not enemies', Marcos persisted.

'You can pose the question in that way in Russia, but in Spain nobody would take us seriously if we called the Trotskyists agents of Franco.'

'But they are rabidly anti-Soviet! Don't you read *La Batalla*?'

'Yes, I read it. And they say a lot more about us than about Stalin. They also say a lot about the Anarchists, but that doesn't bring me to the conclusion that our principal aim is to wrangle with them when Franco is shooting impartially at everybody.'

'That's an error! That's it, that's it!' – and the slanting eyes of the old Chekist cast withering looks at me.

Rosenberg smoked in silence, piling up mounds of cigarette ashes in the ashtray, as if he were not present at our conversation.

'I'm talking to you with the authority my experience has given me', said 'Marcos'.

'Tell me, Marcos, why did you call *me* in to tell me all this, instead of explaining it personally to the secretary of our party? After all is said and done, it's he who ought to raise these questions in the Bureau.'

'Because I was told at the "House"[6] that you're a man of action, and for our work we need men who are energetic and determined.'

'I'm grateful for their confidence, but the "man of action" in me is a thing of the past. Everyone has his period, and mine has already been and gone.'

'Where something has been, something always remains', threw in Rosenberg, in suave tones.

'It isn't a matter now of your going to plant a bomb under Prieto's printing press. You knew, Rosenberg?' Marcos said, turning to him with a sly smile. 'Hernández wanted to blow up Prieto's print shop in Bilbao.'[7]

'At that time I wanted to do it – and even more stupid things', I replied in disgust.

'No, now it's entirely a different matter. We want you to understand that it is necessary to take practical measures against Trotskyism, and help us. Your ministerial post can make the job easier for us.'

'My ministerial post has been given me by the party, and I can go ahead only when the party orders me to act along one line or another', I declared with asperity.

'Marcos' caressed his sharp-pointed chin, thinking it over. 'Our services are performed somewhat on the fringe of the party', he said. Rosenberg smiled imperceptibly. 'Marcos' looked at him fixedly. I think', continued Marcos, 'that you realise how much trust in you such a proposition reflects. The "House" gives you a mark of distinction.'

'I don't think it's worth while to insist', I cut in, 'we'll be wasting time.'

Marcos's look immediately became more intense. 'You don't even know what it's about', he said.

'No.'

'It's a question of getting in our hands documents which show the POUM's contacts with the Falange^[8] and we have to act fast.'

'If such documents exist, the procedure is to draw up the report and hand over those responsible to the courts. Once the evidence is verified, we'll have no reason to go about it crookedly.'

'We still have to get some more facts to make sure they don't get away.'

'And how can I be useful to you?'

'For the moment, in no way. That's our agency's affair. But when the time comes to make certain arrests, maybe we'll run into some difficulties with some of the authorities, and at that time your collaboration can be decisive.'

'See me then, when you have all the evidence, and I'm ready to bring the case all the way to the cabinet itself.'

'I knew we'd get together in the end!' he said with visible satisfaction. And, after a pause: 'Orlov and Bielov^[9] are working on this they'll lay it all before you.' And then addressing Rosenberg: 'Have you talked to the president of the Council about this matter?'

'About this ...?'

'I mean, the POUM in general.'

'Yes. Many times. But Largo Caballero^[10] resists taking political measures against the Trotskyists.' 'Did you tell him that this matter is of extraordinary interest to our government?'

'I told him that Stalin himself is interested in it.'

'And what did he answer?'

'That as long as they act within the law, there is no reason to proceed against them, and still less to close down their premises and suspend their press; that his government is a government of the Popular Front.'

'Popular Front, Popular Front! We'll have to take care of it another way', said Marcos angrily.

The Chekist rose. He stuck his hand out to me and, while we took leave, said with an air of confidence: 'Everything will turn out just as we want.'

When he had gone, it seemed to me I observed a change in Rosenberg, something like an inner satisfaction. 'It's a serious matter. All these things are disagreeable, even though they're necessary', he said sadly. I understood that Rosenberg could not put more than that into words, but behind the words was the expression on his face. 'This man's reaction is something like mine', I thought. 'No doubt he feels aversion towards the GPU, or fears it.'

'Friend "Marcos" is a pure-blooded Chekist', I said jokingly. 'Hmm', grunted Rosenberg. I said goodbye. When he put out his hand, nobody could have supposed that this man was already sentenced to die with a bullet in the back of the head fired by one of the 'pure-blooded' gunmen, in the cellars of the Lubyanka in Moscow. [...]

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In the government Dr Negrín had assigned me two cabinet portfolios, education and health.[11] Prieto was minister of national defence; Zugazagoitia,[12] a Socialist, was minister of the interior; Colonel Ortega,[13] Communist, was in charge of the General Security Administration.

Two or three days after the formation of the new government,[14] I was awakened at dawn by the insistent ringing of the phone.

'Who's that?'

'Hello! It's Ortega.'

Then: 'No warrants. Let them come to see me at the ministry. I expect them at ten. *Salud*.'

The NKVD was in operation. The ape-like figure of 'Marcos' came back to my memory. I recalled that he had told me: 'Orlov and Bielov will lay it all before you'. Ortega had just told me that Orlov had shown up at the General Security Administration asking for some arrest warrants against various leaders of the POUM, without telling the ministry anything about it.

Punctually, precise as a chronometer, Orlov came to my office at ten in the morning. He was almost two metres tall, with elegant and refined manners.[15] He spoke Spanish with some facility. He was not more than forty-five years old. At first glance, no one would have suspected that behind that seeming air of distinction was one of the most intransigent and sectarian NKVD operatives. He held the rank of commandant and functioned as immediate aide of 'Marcos', whom I had not seen again after our interview with Rosenberg at the Soviet embassy in Valencia. With the breeziness of a man who was accustomed to fear and respect, he extended his hand to me by way of greeting and took a seat with easy familiarity.

'Comrade Hernández, you've delayed our work this morning', he began, in a tone of admonishment.

'Pardon me, my friend Orlov, but I didn't know what was up – and I still don't know.'

'But you knew it was our agency that had asked for the warrants of arrest', he said in an inquiring tone.

'I knew you were one of those who had asked for it, but what I didn't know was why and against whom these warrants were asked, and also why you had to by-pass the ministry.'

'A while ago "Marcos" informed me that you understood the nature of our job and were ready to remove official difficulties for us.'

'Marcos told me a story about espionage and I offered, if necessary, to raise the case inside the Council of Ministers. That was all.'

Orlov looked at me somewhat ironically and, all the while lighting and extinguishing a handsome cigarette lighter, he exclaimed: 'What's that – the government? Exactly the contrary. The government must not know a word about it until it has been finished.'

'But what's it about?' I asked.

Orlov was silent for a moment. I lit a cigarette and prepared to listen.

'Are you with our agency?' he asked.

'No'. Orlov made a gesture of surprise. I insisted: 'Not now or ever.'

Orlov lit and extinguished his lighter. 'I thought you were one of us. But no matter', he said between his teeth. Then he began to talk.

Since a while back (he told me) he had been following the trail of a Falangist spy ring. POUM elements were mixed up with it. Hundreds of arrests had been made. The most important figure caught, an engineer named Golfín, confessed everything. Nin was seriously compromised, Gorkin, Andrade, Gironella, Arquer, the whole Trotskyist gang.^[16] One Roca acted a liaison man between the POUM and the Falangists in Perpignan. A suitcase full of documents was captured in Gerona from one Riera. Also a hotel proprietor named Dalmau was convicted and confessed.^[17] Everything was ready to strike. I had held it up. The interior ministry must know nothing. Not even the minister himself.

'Tell me, Orlov, why are you afraid of the ministry's intervention?'

'The enemy is everywhere', he replied coldly. And then he added in explanation: 'From the beginning we have rejected intervention by the official police.'

'But the interior ministry can't be unaware of an affair of such importance', I said.

'Zugazagoitia is a personal friend of some of those who have to be arrested', he replied.

'When you present all that evidence ...'

'He will do nothing', Orlov cut me short. 'He's sufficiently anti-Communist.'

'In this case, it's a question of fighting the enemy and not of pleasing the Communists.'

'We'd run the risk of spoiling everything', insisted Orlov.

'In some way or other he'll have to be drawn in and it will always be better to prepare him for it rather than surprise him.'

'I know what I'm talking about, Hernández.'

'And I know what I'm doing', I answered.

'Now is the ideal moment to deliver an annihilating blow against this gang of counter-revolutionaries. We have them by the throat', he said confidently.

'I don't doubt that you have them by the throat, but I think this whole story will end in a big political scandal.'

Orlov looked at me with no little surprise. His lighter sparked but did not light.

'What are you saying? That you don't believe the story?'

'That's not it exactly, but it's close to what I'm thinking', I declared.

'We have a mountain of evidence, crushing evidence.'

'May I speak honestly, Orlov?'

Orlov's face had hardened. Looking at him straight in the eyes, I hazarded the idea that was stirring in my head. 'My impression is that all these proofs are a cleverly prepared photomontage, but I doubt whether they will stand up in evidence before a legal tribunal.'

'We have the scale-plan which shows the military emplacements of Madrid, identified by its maker, Golfín. On this plan there is a message written in invisible ink and addressed to Franco. Do you know who this message is signed by?' he asked me in a triumphant tone. 'By Andrés Nin!'^[18] I broke into a spontaneous and natural burst of laughter. 'What are you laughing about?' he asked, annoyed.

'Man, you can't be serious! Please don't tell such a nonsensical story out there, because people are just going to have a good laugh. In the whole country you won't find a single citizen capable of believing that Nin is such an idiot as to write messages to Franco in invisible ink – in the era of radio.'

'You don't believe it?' he asked angrily.

'No.'

'The you suppose it's all a lie?'

'All – no', I answered coldly. 'I think the plan exists, Golfín exists, that you have statements. I believe in everything divine and human. What I can't believe is the simplemindedness of the message.'

'It's Nin's', he roared in a rage.

'I don't believe it', I insisted, serenely.

'You don't believe that he is a counter-revolutionary Trotskyist, a spy, an agent of Franco?'

'Whatever he may be, the one thing he isn't, because I know him, is an idiot. I've had dealings with more or less all of them, Nin, Andrade, Gorkin, Maurín^[19] and the rest, and I don't believe that they're capable of such stupidity.'

'But if we have mountains of papers and documents signed and sealed by the POUM!', he shouted furiously.

'Then I believe it even less.'

Orlov made an expression of impatience.

'My friend Orlov', I said, 'let's talk seriously. You people want to put on a big trial against the Trotskyists in Spain, as a demonstration of the reason you shot the opposition in the USSR. I know the *Pravda* article, of almost two months ago, in which it was announced that the "purge" begun in Spain will be carried through with the same vigour as in the Soviet Union.^[20] So I understand your interest, perfectly. But let's not complicate life, which is already complicated enough. If you wish, we can devote a special page in our newspapers, every day, to denounce them as a gang of enemies of the people, but let's not stage sensational spectacles, because nobody will believe them.'

'But if we have the proofs!' exclaimed Orlov.

'If I know your "apparatus", I'm aware they are able to manufacture dollars out of wrapping paper.'^[21]
'That's an absurdity – and an impermissible opinion', muttered Orlov, obviously angry and upset.

'If it upsets you, then consider that I've said nothing', I said ironically.

'You have said, and you are saying, very serious things', he said threateningly.

'You are a specialist in matters of espionage and counter-espionage? What would you do with an agent who sent you documents of the greatest importance written on official stationery, signed with his name and, to cap it all, validated with a stamp of the GPU?'

He looked at me a bit perplexed. Rallying, he answered: 'They don't have our techniques or experience.'

'Almost all of them are acquainted with illegal work and lived through the underground period of the Communist Party. If they had committed such a simple indiscretion as signing their name even on an unimportant communication we would have expelled them as provocateurs, or as imbeciles. How do you expect me to believe that in the midst of war they sign documents addressed to Franco?'

'We have the testimony and statements of the arrested men themselves', he replied.

'If you managed to get these confessions, for me they have no more "legal" value, no matter how you got them, than the written, signed and sealed documents.'

'All these documents and all these statements will go to the court trial, and there will be reason enough and evidence enough to hang all of them.'

'In any case, I insist that the procedure be to get an order from the minister to finish this job. If I'm needed for that, I'm at your service.'

'That way, we'll lose everything', he grunted in a bad temper.

'By the way you want, there'll only be a scandal, a scandal which will damage our party, which is already sufficiently abused.'

'You promised to help us', he said, indignantly.

'I am ready', I declared.

'There's no need to go on', said Orlov. 'I'll talk to Jose Díaz.'^[22]

'It seems to me quite proper', I said, to irritate him, 'that the secretary of our party should know what's going on in Spain.'

Rising, still holding the lighter, Orlov did not see, or pretended not to see, the hand I held out to him in farewell.

With a nod of his head as sole acknowledgement, he went out, a dark expression on his face.

'All men are equal', I told myself, seeing him go out stiffly and elegantly. 'At bottom and openly they despise us and try to humiliate us. They act as if they were in a conquered country and behave like lords to serfs.' [...]

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I immediately went to the private home of our party's general secretary. I found him in bed, surrounded by a litter of medicines. His duodenal ulcer had laid him down. In a few words I informed him of my interview with Orlov. With that strong Andalusian accent of his, Díaz confided his thoughts to me in more detail than ever before. 'I feel disgusted, disgusted at myself and everything. My faith is failing....' I looked at his wasted, drawn face, where moral suffering and physical pain had sunk their claws. I felt sorry for this shattered man. It was a reflection of my own self-pity.

'I would rather have died than have to survive this spiritual death. I've been a man who gave himself with fanatical enthusiasm to the USSR. You know that I was a bakery worker. My revolutionary restlessness pushed me towards anarcho-syndicalism. I joined the action groups because it seemed to me that in this way I was giving more and sacrificing more for my ideals. I was always ready to die for what I believed, for what I had faith in. Later the Soviet Union, Stalin, triumphant socialism, drew me to Communism. I devoted myself with passion, without reserve, convinced that the USSR was our ideal goal. I would have sacrificed my wife, my daughter, my parents. I would have killed, assassinated, to defend Russia, to defend Stalin. And today, what? Everything crumbles, everything is in ruins at my feet. What purpose does our life have? I've made efforts to convince myself that I'm mistaken, understand? Because I want to believe, because I can't admit that everything is a lie. To come to that conclusion is the end, nothingness.'

He took two pills out of a bottle and swallowed them with a sip of water. 'When I think of all that', he said. 'I feel worse.'

'Pessimism and despair won't help us, Pepe', I said to encourage him.

'I know. But the reality crushes my spirit. I can't help it. These days while I suffer in bed', Díaz continued, 'I've permitted myself to think thoroughly about our situation. The conclusion I arrived at is demoralising. The "tovarichi" boss the Political Bureau around as they please. I have a feeling that they will try to get rid of us, you and me, using any of the thousand means at their disposal. It will not be immediately, because no one – not they in the first place – is interested in provoking a crisis of leadership through differences with the method and policies of the USSR. But they will finish with us. It's a question of time, and tactics. As for me, using my illness as their excuse, they don't even take the trouble to keep me informed about what is taking place in the leadership. To find out what's

happening I have to call in one comrade or another, and always it's the same: "We are doing this because Codovilla directed it, because Stepanov ordered it, because Togliatti advised it".^[23]
'It's more than an invasion, it's a colonisation', I said, with an attempt at levity.

'The Kremlin's sepoys, that's what we are, sepoys', he said in anger.

'With apologies to the sepoys!', I said in the same tone.

'I have gone over the whole Central Committee in my mind, and I don't find more than half a dozen men capable of taking a firm position at our side.'

'Far fewer', I observed.

'A half dozen against 300,000 members! And against the tradition. And against the prestige of the Soviet Union', he added, disheartened.

We remained silent. The figures weighed on our hearts like lumps of lead. They crushed us. [...]

'Now let's talk about the scheme of Orlov and Company', Jose Díaz said with a bitter grimace. 'What can we do about it?'

'Little or nothing. I suppose they'll come to see you. It's strange they aren't here already. What intrigues me is why they now want our collaboration when they've done and undone everything without taking us into account', I pointed out.

'Because they expect a scandal – no other reason. Phone Ortega and tell him that I am categorically opposed to any intervention in this affair without advance knowledge by the minister.'

I went to the telephone. Ortega was not in. His secretary informed me that he was with the minister. After leaving a message that Ortega was to get in touch with Díaz at his private residence. I asked the secretary if the 'friends' had been there. 'About an hour ago Ortega was urgently called to the Central Committee by them', he answered.

I hung up the receiver with the vague presentiment that we were faced with an accomplished fact. Orlov could more easily find support from the political delegation and some other members of the Political Bureau than from Jose Díaz. I communicated my fears to Díaz. He shared them.

The telephone rang a few minutes later. It was Ortega. I told him of Díaz's order. Stammering, embarrassed, he told me he was immediately coming to see us.

'What's going on?' asked Díaz.

'What we were afraid of, I think. Ortega is coming now.'

Colonel Ortega appeared five minutes later – an honest man whom we had taken out of the front lines to take care of the General Security Administration, which was an extremely important and responsible post under war conditions. He was thin with an angular face, and kindness and openness were reflected on his thin face. This man, who had never trembled before the prospect of death when he fought in the trenches in our struggle, entered José Díaz's house pale and uneasy. For those who did not know that we were puppets in a show, the authority of the Political Bureau was fearful. And

now it was the head of the party who was questioning him with fire darting from his eyes. Ortega felt crushed.

'A little while ago they called me to the Central Committee', he explained. 'Togliatti, Codovilla, Pasionaria and Checa[24] were there with Orlov. They ordered me to teletype to Comrade Burillo (the Assault Guard commandant who for some weeks had been acting as the head of Public Order in Barcelona)[25] an order for the arrest of Nin, Gorkin, Andrade, Gironella, Arquer and all other POUM elements indicated by Antonov-Ovsëenko or Stazhevsky (the first operated in Catalonia as consul and the second as commercial charge of the USSR).[26] The police patrols they are to use are already in Barcelona.'

A curse rang out explosively. Díaz, furious, jumped out of bed and began to dress. There was a heavy silence. Ortega looked from one of us to the other without being able to understand what had happened. He tried to justify himself: 'I, I couldn't suppose ... Since they ordered me ... Besides, Togliatti, Pasionaria, Checa ... I thought you agreed.' Neither Díaz nor I said a word. Any explanation would have revealed more than he guessed, disagreement among the members of the Political Bureau themselves and our disagreements with the Soviet delegation.

Minutes afterwards, we were on the street. We took leave of Ortega, jumped into my car and headed for the headquarters of the Central Committee. A huge rambling building which occupied one side of the Plaza de la Congregación was the headquarters of the Political Bureau. An armed guard gave us a military salute. He rang the bell to announce the presence of the general secretary of the party. We went up to the first floor. Díaz's personal secretary opened the door of the office for us. There, sitting before an enormous pitcher of orange drink and in his shirtsleeves, was Vittorio Codovilla, an Italian by origin and Argentine by nationality, calmly smoking a small pipe. His enormous corpulence filled the large desk – of the general secretary of the Communist Party of Spain.

On the facing wall was a big photograph of Stalin and a nice war poster of Renau. On the desk there was a mass of papers in disorder. Codovilla threw us a glance over his small eyeglasses and told us, as if addressing subordinates: 'One moment, comrades, just a moment only – I'm finishing.' Ignoring him, Díaz went to the telephone and ordered the operator: 'Tell comrades Pasionaria and Checa to come down to my office immediately.'

Codovilla looked up at Díaz for a moment. Perhaps he expected or sensed the storm. Our faces could scarcely be the faces of friends. He picked up his papers and, taking out an enormous handkerchief, he began to wipe off the stream of sweat that the day's heat had brought out on his mammoth neck. 'Phew, isn't it hot!', he said. There was silence. Turning to Díaz, with the intention of justifying himself: 'I asked for you a little while ago and they told me you were in bed. How hot it gets in my office – yours is much cooler, isn't it?'

Pasionaria entered, followed by Pedro Checa, the party's organisational secretary. Pasionaria theatrically went over to Díaz: 'How good to see you here! You're better?' I observed her. Her smile was forced and her question was officious. Pasionaria hated Díaz. She could not forget that he had made some severe comments on her secret amorous relationship with Francisco Antón, a lad twenty years younger than she and a prototype of the unscrupulous careerist. [...] Without taking notice of the fuss that Pasionaria was making over him, Díaz answered dryly: 'I'm perfectly well.'

Codovilla filled his pipe, pressing down the tobacco with his finger. The situation was awkward, tense. Díaz, making an effort to keep calm, asked: 'Would you like to tell me whether I have been disqualified from doing work just because I'm ill?' Pasionaria, with a hypocritical expression on her face: 'You're joking, Pepe?'

'I'm not in a joking mood. I ask and I want a plain answer.'

'But what are you getting at?' Pasionaria asked again, with feigned ignorance.

'Who ordered Ortega to send orders for the arrest of the POUM men?' asked Díaz, going white with anger on top of his sickbed pallor.

'We did', said Pasionaria. 'There couldn't be any question of bothering you about such an unimportant thing. What importance can there be in the arrest by the police of a handful of provocateurs and spies?' she asked malevolently.

'The POUM arrests are not a police matter, they're a political matter', replied Díaz.

Codovilla smiled with an air of almost sadistic evil. Squeezing the small pipe in both hands, without losing the arrogant expression on his face, he remarked: 'Pepe ought to take a holiday. Overwork and illness have got him excited. Reactions like this show an oversensitive state of mind. It's perfectly understandable that the comrades didn't want to bother you with foolishness, seeing the state of your health. The exaggerated interpretation you give such a little business shows how touchy you've become because of your forced withdrawal from work. In any case I agree that it is necessary to organise the work so that each day you receive a summary of what has been done and what has been decided by the comrades. But I insist: you must take a holiday. The rest will do you good.'

My eyes did not leave the hands of the cynic who pressed the smoking pipe between them. While he was speaking I thought I could interpret the real meaning of his words. It was a warning to Díaz to remove himself for a period from the work of the leadership. The Soviet delegation had begun to take precautionary measures. 'Then I should watch out for myself', I thought.

Since I saw Pepe's chin trembling in agitation and irritation, I intervened lest he explode in a fit of anger and collapse in a heap. 'If the arrests of the POUM men are unimportant, it should have been done legally, that is, by the order of the proper authority – the government. If it can be proved that they are spies, then why be afraid that Zugazagoitia would make himself an accomplice of Franco's agents? That's much too serious a matter for a political person to risk his prestige on it. Zugazagoitia would have neither opposed nor refused to order the arrests if any of us had brought the evidence to him. The way you've gone about it, it will immediately create a scandal, and justifiably so. That's what has made Díaz angry.'

Pasionaria, looking annoyed, glanced around. Checa had been very much affected, and was biting his fingernails, as he always did when he was nervous. Codovilla answered curtly: 'Whatever reasons the comrades of the "special agency" may have had to act as they did, it isn't our business. Their activity takes place on the margins of the party.'

'Very well!' cried Díaz. 'Let them take public responsibility for their actions and then they will have a right to do what they please. But the scandal falls on us. Their activity involves the party. And this POUM affair is very murky.'

Codovilla gave Díaz a vicious look. In a voice that sounded a bit strangled in his throat, he said: 'The comrades of the "agency" are doing a big service for the Republic and for the party by unmasking this Counterrevolutionary rubbish. What are you complaining about?'

Defiantly and aggressively Díaz replied: 'It seems they're helping themselves more than us.'

'That's the same opinion that Hernández has and it reveals an intolerable hostility toward the comrades of the GPU', Codovilla replied irritably.

'It's not true that he has any preconceived hostility towards any comrade from the "House"', I explained. 'Now then, if to express an opinion on this or any other matter is to be considered hostility, then what is the role of the Political Bureau? To say yes to everything? To keep quiet and obey?'

Checa, with a depressed expression, spoke hesitantly: 'No ... I don't believe that the situation should be confronted like this.... No, it's not possible. We ought to unite the Political Bureau, discuss peacefully, clarify things.'

Codovilla went on spitefully: 'We all maintain discipline and obedience. When you're a genuine Communist, without any petty-bourgeois airs or vanity, there are certain things that are not discussed and not brought up. Hernández and Díaz's tone and intentions are offensive. We are *advisers* – *advisers* and nothing more than *advisers*.' And the cynic emphasised the word 'advisers' as if he were hitting us with it. He went on: 'You are the leaders. We have never made a decision without first consulting with one of you. What decisions have we made on our own? What decisions have we imposed on you that were not discussed and decided on by a majority of you? Tell me – which, when?'

His little eyes flashed behind the lenses of his glasses while he continued with his peroration: 'Why this insinuation that you only obey? The Political Bureau can't be in permanent session, and when a problem comes up we decide it by consulting the opinion of the comrades who are most available at hand. And it is decided by common agreement with them. The POUM affair was decided together with Pasionaria and Checa. At other times we made decisions in consultation with Hernández or Díaz or some of the other comrades. So be careful about what you say, and about making reckless statements!' he wound up in a threatening tone.

'In this case the comrades of the "special agency" knew I wasn't in agreement. They promised to go see Comrade Díaz and didn't do it. Why didn't they inform the others of our opinion?'

'Yes, they informed us', Pasionaria declared cynically. 'But since it was urgent and we couldn't convene the full Bureau to take up a simple matter, it seemed to us correct to decide it without waiting any further.'

Codovilla sweated and smoked. He had calmed down and a sardonic smile played over his mouth. Pasionaria was acting very well. When Codovilla had talked a moment ago with such aplomb, he had made sure that the majority of the Political Bureau would support the delegation against any argument we could put up against the conduct of the 'tovarichi'. They had us by the throat.

'I think', said Diaz, 'that we ought to take up the question at the next meeting of the Bureau. This question is far too serious to be decided among us.' Face livid as a corpse, Díaz rose and abruptly left the office. [...]

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Forty-eight hours later, an urgent call informed me that Negrín was expecting me in his office. On entering, I found the president dictating into a machine, and without preamble he asked me: 'What have you people done with Nin?'

'With Nin? I don't know what's happened to Nin', I said, and it was the truth.

With evident anger, Negrín explained to me that the minister of the interior had informed him of a whole series of outrages committed in Barcelona by the Soviet police, who were acting as if they were on their own territory, without taking the trouble even out of courtesy to let the Spanish authorities know about the arrest of Spanish citizens; that they were transferring these prisoners from one place to another without any authorisation or court order and that they were locking them up in special prisons entirely outside the control of the legal authorities; that some of the prisoners had been brought to Valencia but that Andrés Nin had disappeared. The president of the Generalitat^[27] had phoned him, alarmed and indignant, considering that the activity of Orlov and the GPU in Catalan territory was a violation of the people's rights.

I did not know what to answer him. I could have told him that I thought as he did, as Zugazagoitia, as Companys, that I also wondered where Nin was, and that I abhorred Orlov and his police gang. But I decided not to. I saw a storm breaking over our party and I was ready to defend it even in a case where the defence of the party implicitly involved the defence of a possible crime.

For some time now I had been trying to convince myself that it was possible to establish a dividing line which would differentiate our organisation as a party of Spaniards from the actions of the USSR as a state. My differences were with the procedures, not with the doctrines; my doubts rose around the men, not around the principles. The cracks in my faith were limited to the idols, not to the ideas. With all of my reservations about the policies of the Soviet leaders, I remained a convinced Communist, a 'party man', a fervent believer in the historic necessity of the Communist movement and, concretely in Spain, of our party's mission. The ties which bound us to the USSR's 'reasons of state' and which so heavily influenced our political actions – we would have to go about breaking them one after the other till we had completely liberated ourselves from their tutelage and could go ahead on a national basis, with our conduct inspired by the interests of the Spanish people and the political, economic, social and historical realities of Spain. Correct or not, my understanding of these things then went no further than these propositions.

Negrín persisted: 'Nin is an ex-councillor of the Generalitat of Catalonia. If any crime can be proved against him, it must be brought before the Court of Constitutional Guarantees.'

'I suppose', I said, 'that Nin's disappearance is due to an excess of zeal on the part of the "tovarichi" and that they will hold him in one of their jails, but I don't think that his life is in any danger. As for the rest, you are the appropriate person to tell the Soviet ambassador that they should restrain their proceedings.'

'And you people too.'

'We too', I answered.

Negrín remained thoughtful for a moment. Then, as if talking to himself, he said: 'In the Council this afternoon we'll have a row. Prieto, Irujo^[28] and Zugazagoitia will create a scandal. What can I tell them? That I don't know anything about it? And you – what will you say? That you don't know anything either? The whole thing is stupid.' Promising him to find out what I could about the kidnapping of Nin and inform him immediately, I said goodbye and at once went back to our party's headquarters.

In Díaz's office – which remained closed – I found Codovilla and Togliatti. Both of them looked astonished when I told them my conversation with Negrín. I did not know whether this reaction was genuine or whether they were acting out a comedy for my benefit. Codovilla opined that the comrades of the 'special agency' must have held on to Nin in order to question him, or for some other business, before turning him over to the authorities. Togliatti, tight-lipped, now recovered from his feigned or real amazement, said nothing. On my insistence that we ought to know something definite before 4 o'clock

in the afternoon, when the meeting of the Council of Ministers was beginning, he opened his mouth to say that we should not take the matter so hard, since the comrades of the 'special agency' knew what they were doing, were not novices at the job and were political people before everything else. He promised to go to the embassy to find out what was going on, and went out to go there. The Soviet embassy was a few minutes away from the Plaza de la Congregación. I decided to wait. Neither Codovilla nor I said anything. Each of us had our own reason to be worried. I was a prey to presentiments of the worst.

Andrés Nin was a prize coveted by the GPU: an intimate and personal friend of the great leaders of the October Revolution in Russia, he had worked with them since the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions, as one of the secretaries of that organisation. On the death of Lenin he did not hide his sympathies for Trotsky. The course of Stalinist politics did not convince him, and he expressed his disagreement publicly. Shortly after the defeat of the Opposition in the Bolshevik Party, Nin was labelled a renegade and expelled from the Soviet Union. When the Republic was declared in Spain, he returned to the country,^[29] and together with the ex-Communists who had organised the Workers and Peasants Bloc, he formed the Workers Party of Marxist Unification. The organ which spoke for this party, *La Batalla*, was an anti-Stalinist cry in the stirred-up and revolutionary conditions of Spain.

The POUM was not a big movement, but the voice of Nin and the majority of its leaders had undoubtable repercussions in some centres of the Catalan proletariat and, above all, outside our borders.^[30] In any case, they worried Moscow more than they worried us. The moment was propitious. The war permitted the GPU to operate freely in Republican Spain and Orlov's men had set up a police apparatus as if they were ruling conquered territory.

The witchhunt against the POUMists was carried out in order to show that both inside and outside Russia the friends of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, etc. were a gang of counterrevolutionaries, agents of fascism, enemies of the people, and traitors to the fatherland, who had to be shot in whatever country or region. And also in order that the suspicious should put aside their objections. It was not Stalin's personal phobia that caused the extermination of the old guard – the case of Spain proved it. Here, in a democratic country, ruled by a Popular Front, here too they were being unmasked and executed as traitors. I grasped the political 'motive' easily. What I didn't imagine – I was not long in finding out – was the criminal lengths to which the GPU's henchmen were capable of going in the struggle against the men of the ideological opposition.

From the balcony I saw Togliatti's car approaching. A moment later he told us he had been able to find nothing at the embassy, neither Nin's whereabouts nor Orlov's. All my nervousness and worries broke out in anger. I announced that I would not attend the Council of Ministers, that I did not want to be a punchbag for Orlov and Co. over an issue that had seemed improper and shady to me from the beginning.

'Not to show up, to dodge the debate, that would be the greatest stupidity. Let's evade the concrete case of Nin and base ourselves on the existence of the evidence which shows that the POUM leaders were in contact with the enemy. Let's not make our stand on their ground; let's set the debate around the existence or non-existence of a spy organisation. Once it is shown, as it is possible to show, that this exists, the scandal over the whereabouts of Nin will die down. And when Nin appears he will already be accused of treason.' From Togliatti's explanation I deduced that he already knew Orlov's whole scheme and that his visit to the embassy had not been an idle one. Nin was being held, and they would turn him over when the 'affair' took on an official status. Some of my fears were dissipated. And although Togliatti's plan did not please me very much, I was ready to follow it at the ministers' meeting. 'In the end', I told myself, 'the courts will be charged with establishing what is true or not in this whole GPU plot.'

At four o'clock the ministerial cars began to arrive at the grey building of the Presidency. The newspapermen accosted the ministers in the waiting room hung with musty, dull, peeling velvet. 'What do you know about Andrés Nin?', one of them asked me. With an evasive gesture, I avoided a reply and entered the council chamber.

On the oval table where ministerial meetings took place, there were walnut cigarette cases, chocolate boxes, jugs of water, wide pads of paper and bulky leather portfolios. The frowns of several ministers gave warning of a storm to come.

When the president opened the meeting, the minister of the interior, Zugazagoitia, asked for the floor. With unanswerable logic and firm arguments, correct in form, Zugazagoitia told what he knew about the 'case of Nin' and his comrades, 'arrested not by the authorities of the Republic but by an "outside agency" which operates, as we have seen, in our territory in all kinds of ways, without any law other than its will, without any restraint other than its own whim. I would like to know', he concluded, 'if my jurisdiction as minister of the interior is determined by the responsibilities of my post or by the standards of certain Soviet "technicians". Our gratitude to this friendly country should not force us to leave our personal and national dignity in shreds at the crossroads of its policies'.

Prieto spoke. And Irujo. Their speeches were an angry protest against Soviet intervention and oppression in our land. Their dignity as men and Spaniards revolted against the outrages of the 'tovarichi' who, in exchange for providing arms, thought they had a right to humiliate us and even to rule over us. In their speeches they declared that they would resign before becoming 'stooges'. Velao spoke and Giner de los Ríos.^[31] All of them spoke. They demanded Nin, and called for the dismissal of Colonel Ortega, who was a visible and direct accomplice, though an unconscious one, in Orlov's abuses.

Then we, the two Communist ministers, spoke.^[32] Our arguments were poor and colourless. No one believed in our sincerity when we said we did not know Andrés Nin's whereabouts. We defended the presence of the Soviet 'technicians' and 'advisers' as the expression of the 'disinterested' and 'fraternal' aid which the Russians gave us and which had been accepted by previous governments. We once again explained what the USSR's provision of arms meant for our war and about the support on the international scene that the Soviet Union gave to us.

Since, in spite of everything, the atmosphere stayed hostile and brows remained frowning, I gave in on the dismissal of Colonel Ortega – the sacrificial goat – for exceeding his authority and failing to inform the ministry in due time, but I threatened that all the compromising documents of the POUM would be made public and also the names of those inside and outside the government who protected the spies of that party 'over mere questions of procedure'. It was a demagogic and disloyal expedient, but I did not hesitate to use it.

Negrín, conciliatory, proposed to the council that it suspend the debate until all the facts were known and it had the evidence of which the Communist ministers spoke, waiting till the Ministry of the Interior could give us definite information on Andrés Nin's whereabouts. We had weathered the first storm, the most dangerous one. Going out of the council chamber, Uribe told me: 'You were very clever in that combination of concessions and threats.' My Pyrrhic victory gave me such nausea that I wanted to vomit. [...]

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It was another two or three days before we knew anything definite about Andrés Nin. Our Madrid organisation informed us that Nin was in Alcalá de Henares, in a private prison that Orlov and his gang used. When we raised the question with the Soviet delegation, they thereupon told us that indeed – what a coincidence! – they had *just* received news that Nin had passed through Valencia,

without stopping, in the direction of Madrid; that Orlov was thinking of taking him directly to the *Prisión Celular* in Madrid, but that he was afraid of an escape by the accused and chose to put him into jail at his headquarters in Alcalá pending the arrival of the other people arrested, who were to be moved from the Valencia jail to the one in Madrid.

As Díaz and I had foreseen, the political scandal around the arrest of the POUM leaders turned into a bitter political struggle against our party and against Negrín himself. Socialists, Caballerists, Anarchists, trade unionists and also, although more weakly, Republicans joined in denouncing before national and foreign public opinion the attack on the rights of the people and the democratic laws of the country, and the illegal arrest of Nin, Andrade, Gorkin, Arquer, Bonet[33] and the other POUM leaders. All of them demanded the immediate freeing of the prisoners and, as a slogan, raised the question: 'Where is Nin?'

Our press unleashed a furious attack against the POUM and all its political advocates. Nevertheless, it was necessary to give 'evidence' of the prisoners' guilt in order to silence the outcry. Now it was the Political Bureau that demanded the documents showing the guilt of the POUMists, in order to make them public and calm the storm that had broken out over the head of our party.

One day during this time, on visiting Negrín, I could see on the president's table a pile of telegrams from all parts of the world asking the government where Nin was and protesting against the arrest of the POUM leaders. Negrín asked us for a solution which could put an end to this discrediting of his government inside and outside the national frontiers. 'There is no remedy other than for the government to take into its own hands responsibility for the trial against the POUM. By giving it official status, there will be an end to the attacks on the GPU as author of this "affair" behind the back of the Spanish authorities, which is the strong point of all the protests', I advised Negrín.

'Why should I compromise the whole government in this troublesome case?' Negrín protested.

'Because at times, against one's wish, one is obliged to sweat through another man's fever.'

I do not know what arguments Negrín used to convince Irujo, the minister of justice, a Basque Catholic, who had little fondness for the Communists and was frankly opposed to playing along with the GPU. But the day after this conversation an official communiqué of the Ministry of Justice appeared in the press, announcing the indictment of the POUM leaders, together with some Falangists headed by the engineer Golfín, maker of the scale-plan drawn up for Franco, a plan which showed the fixed military emplacements of the capital, all of which constituted a criminal act of espionage and high treason. While the printing presses of the daily papers were running off the official communiqué of the Ministry of Justice, the treacherous hand of Orlov consummated one of the vilest crimes in the annals of political criminality in our history: Nin was assassinated by the henchmen of Stalin's GPU.

The crime against Andrés Nin was not only the responsibility of the material authors of the deed; it was also the responsibility of all of us who, though able to prevent it, by submission to or fear of Moscow facilitated it by our behaviour. Afterwards, consciousness of our complicity silenced our tongues or, as in our case, added infamy to crime. The walls of Spain were covered with questions painted by underground brushes at the risk of life: 'Where is Nin?' And, in order to cover up, our hordes of Agit-Props wrote, underneath, the bloody slander: 'In Salamanca or Berlin.'^[34] Did the president know where Andrés Nin was confined? Did the minister of the interior know? Did the minister of justice know? If we take the testimony of one of the defendants, Julián Gorkin, in his book *Canibales políticos*,^[35] on page 159 we find the following conversation with Garmendia, the inspector general of the Madrid prisons, who belonged to the Basque Catholic party and was a personal friend

of the minister of justice, Manuel Irujo, and had been assigned by the government to move the POUM prisoners from Madrid to Valencia. This is what he says:

I took (Garmendia) aside and we held an interesting conversation. 'Have no fear', he said. 'You will get to Valencia alive. I've promised that to the government. An Assault Guard captain in whom I have the fullest confidence, in command of fifty men, will accompany you. They will be along not to watch you but to protect you.' He showed great interest in getting acquainted with our political positions. Afterwards he told me in a sincere voice: 'I am entirely acquainted with your case. I don't think anything will happen to you people. The minister of justice is ready to resign before permitting a political crime against you.' I asked him about Andrés Nin. He confided in me: 'The government ordered me to discover his whereabouts. Right now I am getting in my car and will stop at the very gate of the building that holds him. But to rescue him I would need a military force such as the government refuses to put at my disposal.' 'Why?' 'It fears the consequences perhaps. I would have to engage in a real battle with other military forces. Perhaps you don't suspect everything that lies behind the POUM affair.'

If this account is true, the government could have rescued Nin and did not want to, or did not dare to. I am inclined to believe that it did not dare to. The more weight Soviet 'aid' had in the wishes of the ministers, the more Stalin's police agents in Spain acted with audacity and impudence.

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Andrés Nin, the old friend of Lenin, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky, was assassinated in Spain by the same hand that, in Russia, had physically exterminated the Bolshevik old guard. Here is how the crime was perpetrated.

Orlov and his gang imprisoned Nin with the aim of wresting from him a 'voluntary' confession, admitting his role as a spy in the service of Franco. As executioners experienced in the art of 'breaking' political prisoners to get 'spontaneous' confessions, they thought that in Andrés Nin, given his ill-health, they had found the right material to provide Stalin with a gratifying success. The interrogation took place for days that went on without any night, without beginning or end, for ten and twenty and forty hours at a time uninterruptedly. The person from whom these facts came had abundant reason to be well informed about it. He was one of Orlov's most trusted aides, the same one who later was able to tell me of the plan to assassinate Indalecio Prieto.[36]

In the case of Nin, Orlov began by using the 'dry' method: a relentless bombardment for hours and hours with 'Confess', 'Make a statement', 'Admit', 'It's in your interests', 'You can save yourself', 'It's better for you', alternating 'advice' with threats and abuse. It is a *scientific* method which tends to exhaust the prisoner's mental energy and demoralise him. Physical fatigue will overcome him, lack of sleep dulls the senses and nervous tension destroys him. Thus his will is undermined and his integrity broken. They keep the prisoner on his feet for whole hours, without letting him sit down, till he collapses in a heap from unbearable pain in the kidneys. When it gets to this point, the body feels frightfully heavy and the cervical vertebrae refuse to support the head. The whole spinal column feels as if split into pieces. The feet swell up and a mortal weariness weighs upon the prisoner, who wants nothing except to get a moment's rest, to close his eyes for an instant, to forget that he exists and that the world exists. When it is physically impossible to continue the 'interrogation', it is suspended. The prisoner is dragged to his cell. He is left alone for a few minutes, enough for him to recover his mental equilibrium a little and begin to become conscious of dreading the continuation of the monotonous 'interrogation', which is always the same in its questions and in its callous disregard of any replies that do not admit full guilt. Twenty or thirty minutes of rest are enough. No more than that is granted.

And once again the session resumes. Again the 'advice', again the hours without measure in which each minute is an eternity of suffering and fatigue, of moral and physical weariness. The prisoner

ends by collapsing, body invertebrate. Finally he neither discusses nor defends himself, he ceases to think, all he wants is to be left alone to sleep, to rest, to sit. And the days and nights follow each other, with time implacably at a standstill. Discouragement overpowers the prisoner; his will fails him. He knows that it is impossible to escape with his life from the clutches of his torturers, and his yearning concentrates on an unrestrainable desire to be left to live his last hours in peace or be finished off immediately. 'They want me to say yes? Maybe if I admit guilt they will kill me right away.' And this idea begins to eat away at the man's integrity.

Andrés Nin put up incredible resistance. In him there appeared no symptoms of the moral and physical collapse which brought some of the most outstanding collaborators of Lenin to an extraordinary abdication of their revolutionary will and firmness, to the absurd thought that 'Stalin is a traitor, but Stalin is not the revolution, nor is he the party, and since my death is inevitable, I will make the ultimate sacrifice for my people and my ideals by declaring myself a counterrevolutionary and a criminal, so that the revolution might live!' With what astonishment the whole world heard these great men of the Russian revolution abjectly defame themselves, without opening their mouth for a single word of condemnation for the strangler of that same revolution that their silence was intended to save! There has been talk of special drugs of which the Russian police possess the secret. I do not believe in such a story. If I did not accept the crazy idea of 'serving the revolution' *in articulo mortis*, I would believe indeed in the workings of certain human considerations which bring a man who knows that he is definitely lost to try to save his children or his wife or his parents from the tyrant's vengeance, in exchange for his 'confession'.

Nin did not capitulate. He resisted, to their dismay. His torturers grew impatient. They decided to abandon the 'dry' method. Now came the living blood, the rended flesh, the twisted muscles, which would put to the test the man's integrity and capacity for physical resistance. Nin bore up under the cruelty of the torment and the pain of refined torture. At the end of a few days his human shape had been turned into a formless mass of swollen flesh.

Orlov, in a frenzy, crazed by the fear of failure – a failure which could mean his own liquidation – slavered over with rage against this sick man who agonised without 'confessing', without implicating himself or seeking to implicate his party comrades who, at a single word from him, would have been stood up against the wall for execution, to the joy and heart-felt satisfaction of all the Russians.

Nin's life was wiped out. In the streets of loyalist Spain and all over the world, the mounting campaign demanded to know where he was and called for his liberation. The situation could not go on much longer. To turn him over alive meant a double load of scandal. Everyone would be able to verify the dreadful physical tortures to which he had been subjected and, what was even more dangerous, Nin could denounce the whole infamous scheme prepared by Stalin's henchmen in Spain. And the torturers decided to finish with him.

Professional criminals would think it through as follows: 'Should we finish him off and throw him in a ditch? Assassinate and bury him? Burn the body and scatter the ashes to the winds?' Any of these methods would have got rid of Nin, but the GPU would not have freed itself from responsibility for the crime, since it was notorious and public that it was the perpetrator of the kidnapping. It was therefore necessary to look for a method which, at one and the same time, would relieve the GPU of the responsibility for Nin's 'disappearance' and also incriminate him, by showing his relation with the enemy.

The solution, it seems, came to the brutalised mentality of one of Orlov's most inhuman collaborators, 'Commandant Carlos' (Vittorio Vidali, as he is called in Italy, or Arturo Sermenti and Carlos Contreras, as he was and is called in Mexico and Spain).[37] His plan was the following: to fake an abduction by

Gestapo agents *disguised* as International Brigaders, an attack on the Alcalá building, and a new 'disappearance' of Nin. It would then be said that the Nazis had 'liberated' him, which would show the contacts that Nin had with national and international fascism.[38] Meanwhile Nin would be made to disappear permanently, and, in order to leave no trace, his body would be thrown into the sea.[39] This infamous trick would be a crude one, but it offered a way out.

One day the two guards who watched the prison of Alcalá de Henares (two Communists who carried Socialist membership cards) were found tied up; they declared that a group of about ten soldiers of the International Brigade, speaking German, had attacked the house, disarmed and bound them, opened the prison cell and carried Nin away in a car. To give a greater appearance of realism to this sinister melodrama, thrown away on the floor where Nin had lived was found his wallet with a number of documents which showed his relations with the German spy service. So that nothing should be wanting, there were found also some German mark notes.

Three questions are enough to lay bare the infamous lie embodied in this tale invented by Orlov's gang.

If the writing on the back of the engineer Golfín's scale-plan matched Nin's handwriting, why not turn it over to the authorities together with the evidence?[40] For what reason was it decided otherwise? If Nin was brutally tortured in order to wrest from him a confession that would implicate him, how can it be explained that the GPU failed to spot a wallet full of espionage evidence, which later shows up on the floor of the cell, and why did it not occur to Nin to destroy this evidence?

If the prison-house at Alcalá des Henares was so well guarded that Garmendia, the inspector general of the Madrid prisons, declared that he dared not rescue Nin from jail because the government refused to give him the necessary forces, since he would have to engage in a battle with the Russians, then how could it be that only eight or ten men attacked it quietly, without firing a shot, made their way with impunity to the guards, overpowered them and carried away the prisoner?

Through the account of the man who had direct contact with Orlov, it was possible much later to reconstruct the facts. But the day after the consummation of the crime I was fully convinced that Andrés Nin had been assassinated. Comrade X let me know that she had transmitted a message to Moscow which said: '*A.N. affair settled by method A.*' The initials coincide with Andrés Nin's. What could 'method A' be? The absurd account of the 'abduction' by Gestapo agents pointed to the GPU's crime. Then 'A', in the Soviet delegation's code, stood for death. If this were not the case, the delegation – that is, Togliatti, Stepanov, Codovilla, Guéré,[41] etc. – would have transmitted something less than 'affair settled'.

The trial which followed against the rest of the POUM leaders was a crude farce based on forged papers and statements wrenched out of the miserable Franco spies, who got promises that their lives would be spared (they were later shot) if they declared that they had been in contact with the POUM people. The magistrates and judges condemned them because they had to condemn them and were ordered to condemn them. The 'evidence' which W. Rocés[42] had a very active part in 'elaborating' documentarily, turned out so hollow and false that none of them could be put up against the wall for execution (in spite of the fact that a hook was published with all the documents of the supposed espionage, a book for which José Bergamín wrote the preface).[43] some of the defendants were set free and others sentenced to no more than 15 years 'because of the defendants' participation in the Anarchist-POUM rising of 5 May 1937 in Barcelona', a movement in which the POUM had never denied its participation.[44] The fall of Catalonia brought about the release of all the prisoners.[45]

Notes

[1] This was in early December 1936. Cimorra was Hernández's secretary.

[2] Marcel Rosenberg was the Soviet ambassador to Spain. In 1937 he was recalled to the USSR and executed.

[3] Abram Slutsky became head of the Foreign Intelligence Directorate of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) in 1934. He died in the Soviet Union in 1938. Although the official cause of death was a heart attack it seems likely that Stalin had him poisoned.

[4] The NKVD in fact had a range of responsibilities in the sphere of state security. The political police was therefore often referred to by its earlier name, GPU (State Political Directorate).

[5] In November 1936, when Madrid was under threat from Franco's forces, the Republican government was removed to Valencia, as was the Soviet embassy.

[6] The 'House' was the Kremlin.

[7] As a young Communist in 1923, Hernández had been involved in an attempt to blow up Socialist Party (PSOE) leader Indalecio Prieto. In September 1936 both Hernández and Prieto became ministers in the Popular Front government.

[8] The Falange was the Spanish fascist party, founded in 1933. In April 1937 Franco issued a decree compulsorily incorporating all political parties supporting the Nationalist cause into the Falange.

[9] Orlov was the head of the NKVD Foreign Intelligence Directorate in Spain, while Bielov was another NKVD operative. It has been argued that this Orlov was not the Alexander Orlov who later defected to the USA and published the book *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* (see Elizabeth Poretzky, *Our Own People*, 1969, p.259). However it now seems clear that they were one and the same person.

[10] Francisco Largo Caballero was the leader of the left wing of the PSOE, Prieto being the leader of the right wing. Largo Caballero became prime minister in the Popular Front government formed in September 1936. He was deposed in May 1937 by a coalition of Communists, right-wing Socialists and bourgeois Republicans after he opposed the illegalisation of the POUM. In 1938 he appeared as a witness for the defence in the trial of the POUM leaders.

[11] After the fall of Largo Caballero, a new government was formed under Juan Negrín, a leading figure in the Prieto wing of the PSOE.

[12] Julián Zugazagoitia was a supporter of the PSOE right wing. Despite this, he also appeared as a witness for the defence in the trial of the POUM. Living in exile in France after the defeat of the Republic, he was handed over to Franco in 1940 and executed.

[13] Antonio Ortega was a relatively recent recruit to the Communist Party who had been appointed director-general of security at the time of the formation of the Negrín government. After the fall of the Republic he was captured by the Nationalists and shot.

[14] Hernández's memory is in error here. The Negrín cabinet was formed in May 1937, while the conversation with Ortega must have taken place on 12 June.

[15] It has been argued that Hernández's description does not fit Alexander Orlov. Burnett Bulloten has written that Orlov was 'more than a foot shorter ... and somewhat corpulent. He is neither elegant nor distinguished looking' (*The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*, 1991, p.363). But this was some decades later. Photographs from the 1930s in John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Dangerous Illusions*, 1993, show an elegantly dressed Orlov who was far from corpulent. Hernández would appear to be mistaken only on the matter of Orlov's height.

[16] Julian Gorkin, Juan Andrade, Gironella (Enrique Adroher) and Jordi Arquer were leading members of the POUM. They were all arrested and imprisoned in June 1937.

[17] Ramón Xifra Riera was said to be the Falangist chief of espionage in Perpignan. Javier Fernando Golfín, Joaquín Roca and Cosme Dalmau were all genuine Falangist spies. For their part in the frame-up of the POUM, see Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1977, p.702.

[18] It seems that Hernández is wrong in stating that the NKVD claimed Nin had signed the message to Franco written in invisible ink on the back of Golfín's map. Judging by the excerpts published in Georges Soria, *Trotskyism in the Service of Franco: A Documentary Record of Treachery by the POUM in Spain*, 1938, the author of the forged letter to Franco was supposed to be a Falangist agent in contact

with the POUM leaders. He relayed the information that 'N. asks that you should arrange that I should be the only person to communicate with them ... '.

[19] Joaquín Maurín was the POUM's single deputy in the Spanish parliament, having been elected in February 1936 as part of the Popular Front bloc. Maurín was caught behind the Nationalist lines during the July 1936 military rebellion and imprisoned. He was released in 1946 and lived in exile until his death in 1972.

[20] 'So far as Catalonia is concerned, the cleaning up of the Trotskyists and Anarchists has begun and it will be carried out with the same energy as in the USSR.' This statement is usually attributed to the 17 December 1936 issue of *Pravda*. The quotation appeared in the Mexican newspaper *Universal Gráfico* and was reprinted by the POUM in the 5 January 1937 issue of *La Batalla*. However, although it anticipates accurately enough Moscow's subsequent actions, no such statement appeared in *Pravda*. See Bulloten, *Spanish Civil War*, pp.414, 864.

[21] A sarcastic reference to an alleged Soviet plot to circulate forged dollar bills.

[22] José Díaz had replaced José Bullejos as PCE general secretary in 1933 after the latter was purged for opposing the Comintern's then ultra-leftist policies. Díaz left Spain in 1938 to go to the Soviet Union for treatment for his stomach ulcers, which turned out to be cancer. He died in 1942 after falling from a window in Tiflis. The official verdict was suicide, though it is possible that he was murdered.

[23] Vittorio Codovilla, Stepanov (a Bulgarian whose real name was S. Mineff) and the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti were all Comintern representatives in Spain. Togliatti would subsequently claim that he did not arrive in Spain until July 1937, but he had obvious reasons for denying that he was present at the time of the POUM's suppression and Nin's murder.

[24] Dolores Ibárruri was known as 'Pasionaria' because of her emotional oratory. She succeeded Díaz as PCE secretary and remained an important figurehead for the party until her death in 1989. Pedro Checa was organisation secretary of the PCE. He died in exile in the Soviet Union in the early 1940s.

[25] Colonel Ricardo Burillo, a Communist sympathiser, was appointed director-general of security in Catalonia following the May Days in Barcelona (see note 44 below). On 16 June the POUM headquarters, the Hotel Falcón, was closed down on Burillo's orders and immediately turned into a prison.

[26] During the October Revolution, Vladimir Antonov-Ovsëenko had organised the seizure of the Winter Palace. Although he supported the Left Opposition in the CPSU he later capitulated to Stalin. Antonov-Ovsëenko arrived in Barcelona as Soviet consul in August 1936. He was recalled to the Soviet Union in June 1937 and executed. The commercial official Arthur Stashevsky suffered the same fate.

[27] The Generalitat was the regional government of Catalonia. Its president was Luis Companys.

[28] Manuel Irujo was a Basque nationalist politician who had been a minister in the Republican government since September 1936.

[29] Nin in fact had to fight for the right to leave the Soviet Union (see Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, 1967, p.276). He returned to Spain in 1930, the year before the declaration of the Republic.

[30] At its foundation in 1935 the POUM had a membership of 7,000, rising to 40,000 during the first months of the Civil War. Its base was in Catalonia, reflecting the fact that the BOC, the main component in the 1935 unification, was an exclusively Catalan organisation. The POUM's international links were with the 'London Bureau', whose affiliates included the Independent Labour Party of Britain.

[31] Antonio Velao and Bernardo Giner de los Ríos were bourgeois Republican ministers in the Popular Front government.

[32] The other Communist in Negrín's cabinet was Vicente Uribe, the minister of agriculture.

[33] Pedro Bonet, who was in charge of the POUM's trade union work, was another of the arrested leaders.

[34] That is, in the capitals of Nationalist Spain or Nazi Germany.

[35] Gorkin's *Cannibales políticos: Hitler y Stalin en España* was published in Mexico in 1941. A revised version was published in 1974 as *El proceso de Moscú en Barcelona*.

[36] Although the PCE had supported Prieto at the time of the struggle against Largo Caballero, he later came into conflict with the Communists. According to Hernández, the NKVD planned to have Prieto assassinated.

[37] Vittorio Vidali was an Italian Communist who had been a Comintern representative in Mexico, where he was implicated in the murder of the dissident Cuban Communist leader Julio Antonio Mella. In Spain he became political commissar of the Communists' Fifth Regiment. In post-war Italy he was for many years a leading figure in the Communist Party in Trieste.

[38] This was the explanation of Nin's disappearance that Negrín relayed to Manuel Azaña, the President of the Republic, who expressed understandable scepticism at this 'novelesque' story. See Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p.706.

[39] For the likely location of Nin's body, see introduction, above.

[40] See note 18 above.

[41] 'Gueré' was the Hungarian Erno Gerö, another Comintern agent in Spain. According to Orlov's letter in the KGB archives, he was present during the torture of Nin.

[42] Wenceslao Roces had been Hernández's undersecretary of education.

[43] This is a reference to the book *Espionaje en España*, which was published in Spain and France just before the trial of the POUM leaders in June 1938. The author was one 'Max Rieger', who according to the PCE was an International Brigader. José Bergamín was a Catholic intellectual and a Communist fellow traveller. In his preface to the book Bergamín stated that the POUM was an espionage organisation linked with international fascism.

[44] In May 1936 the Stalinist police chief in Barcelona, a former BOC member named Rodríguez Salas, tried to take over the city's telephone exchange, which was controlled by a workers' committee. This action was part of a campaign to eradicate the forms of dual power established in July-August 1936 and reassert the authority of the bourgeois state. It provoked a spontaneous working class revolt in Barcelona, in the course of which 500 people were killed and 1,000 injured. Contrary to Communist mythology about an attempted POUM/Anarchist coup d'état (see Nan Green and A.M. Elliott, *Spain Against Fascism, 1936-39 (Our History, No.67)*, 1976, p.20), neither the POUM nor the Anarchists attempted to seize power but concentrated on negotiating a peaceful settlement. As a result the Barcelona workers were defeated and a Stalinist pogrom unleashed against the POUM and the Anarchist left wing.

[45] For an account of the POUM prisoners' escape, see *The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left (Revolutionary History, Vol.4 Nos.1/2)*, 1992, pp.303-13, article (on MIA) [Sherry Mangan: Spanish Militants Describe Their Escape](#).

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