

The Spanish Revolution 1931-1939 – Pierre Broué

Preface

The history of the first years of the Spanish revolution, after the fall of the Monarchy, has been overshadowed by the civil war, and then by the Second World War, for which the civil war was itself the prologue and the World War the general repetition of the civil war.

After having devoted, together with Émile Témime, a book to the topic of *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain 1934-1939*,¹ concerning which we think that, despite the subsequent publication of other works of quality, it has not lost any of its relevance since its first edition, we have gladly accepted the proposal made by Marc Ferro that we should write, for the “Historical Questions” series, an updated work on the revolution itself, beginning in 1931.

We ask the reader not to look for things in this book that will not be found: it is neither a political history of the last Spanish Republic, nor is it a history of the civil war. We have tried to focus our examination as much as possible on our topic, the revolution, that is, the struggle of the Spanish workers and peasants for their rights and liberties, for the factories and the land, and finally, for political power.

The revolution. Such are the now-classic images: demonstrations, strikes, storming the prisons, militiamen clad in overalls, barricades, *dinamiteros*, summary executions and collectivizations. No less classic are contradictory exegeses, theoretical debates, polemics and personal conflicts, and battles between political machines, fractions and tendencies, in short, all the other forms assumed by the struggle of ideas and conflicts between social forces.

And the revolution also faced—sometimes from within its own ranks and under its own flag—an ever-present counterrevolution, even when, as in this case, it is only perceived as a silhouette or a vague shape.

P. B.
Grenoble
July 21, 1971

1. The Monarchy

On April 12, 1931, Spain voted for its Municipal Councillors. It had been more than a year since the general who ruled a dictatorial regime since 1923, Primo de Rivera, had resigned under pressure from King Alfonso XIII, who had not really given him his

¹ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War and Spain 1934-1939*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2007 [Note of the American Translator].

wholehearted support. He was replaced by General Berenguer and then by Admiral Azar, who organized these municipal elections—despite the obvious risks involved—in order to provide the regime, which was fragile and seriously undermined by the crisis and general discontent, a certain legitimacy. On December 12, 1930, two military officers, Captains Fermin Galán and García Hernández, staged an attempted coup d'état in favor of a Republic in Jaca. Their coup failed, and Alfonso XIII personally insisted that they should be shot, and so they were executed by a firing squad. If the King, however, nonetheless decided to take the risk of appealing to the ballot box and promising to restore the constitutional rights that had been suspended under the dictatorship, he only did so because he expected that the traditional structures—the reign of the *caciques*—would guarantee an electoral victory for the monarchist candidates. He was not the only person who expected such a result, since the Socialist leader Largo Caballero and the Republican leader Manuel Azaña also thought that the elections would be “like all the others”: enough reason in the view of the Socialist leaders to call for a boycott of elections that they had every reason to suspect would be fixed....

To almost everyone's surprise, these municipal elections resulted in a veritable electoral landslide: there was a particularly high rate of voter participation and an overwhelming majority voted for the Republican candidates in all the cities, especially in Madrid and Barcelona. The fact that, as expected, monarchists were elected in almost all the rural districts changed nothing about the general outcome: it was clear that the petty bourgeoisie had voted *en masse* against the Monarchy. The King's most trusted advisor, Count Romanones, one of the country's biggest landowners, was the first person to draw the political conclusion of these elections: the King must abdicate. This was also the opinion of General Sanjurjo, another personal friend of the sovereign, and the Commander of the Civil Guards: he told him so, without beating around the bush. The unfortunate sovereign hesitated for a little while, but had to face the facts: his most loyal friends and his most fanatical supporters were unanimous in their opinion that he must abdicate if he did not want to subject the country to the risk of a “red revolution”, in other words, a workers and peasants revolution. So Alfonso XIII packed his bags and, without fanfare, went into exile. The Spanish Monarchy had vanished ingloriously. The history of the Second Republic began with this surprising development that some greeted with amazement, a regime change obtained by way of a simple national election, the proclamation of a Republic that had not cost even one human life....

Already, a few months earlier, commenting on the resignation of the dictator Primo de Rivera, Trotsky, a careful observer of events in Spain, had noted that over the course of this “first stage” the situation had been resolved “by the infirmities of the old society” rather than “by the revolutionary forces of the new society”.² In other words, Spain was one of the “sickest” societies in Europe, the weakest link in the chain of capitalism. The advance that it had undergone at the dawn of modern times had been transformed into its opposite as a result of the loss of its colonies in most of the world by the end of the 19th century. The society of the Old Regime had not yet finished decomposing when the process of formation of bourgeois society itself had begun to grind to a halt. Capitalism

² L. Trotsky, “Les taches des communistes en Espagne”, *Écrits*, Vol. III, p. 405.

had neither the power nor the time to develop its centralist tendencies to their fullest expression, and the decline of commercial life and urban industry, and the dissolution of the links of interdependence among the provinces, reinforced the separatist tendencies whose roots were embedded deep in the most ancient history of the Peninsula.

Basically, at the beginning of the 20th century Spain was still an agricultural country in which the overwhelming majority, 70%, of the active population, worked in the agricultural sector, with primitive technologies, obtaining the lowest yields per hectare in Europe, leaving uncultivated, due to a lack of means and knowledge, due to the social structure of the country, more than 30% of the arable land. All over the country, the land belonged essentially to the big landowners and landlords who lived as parasites on a pauperized rural mass: 50,000 rural *hidalgos* owned half the land, and 10,000 other landowners possessed more than 100 hectares each, so that more than two million agricultural workers depended for their survival on labor on the great *latifundios*, just as one and a half million small landowners had to survive by exploiting tiny plots of land. There are some very well known examples of these enormous tracts of land owned by the big landowners: that of the Duke of Medinaceli, for example, with his 79,000 hectares, or that of the Duke of Peñaranda with his 51,000 hectares.... We must nonetheless add some further qualifications to what we said above: in the North and the Center of the country, the problems faced by the peasants who owned tiny parcels of land—the mini-proprietors, the sharecroppers and tenant farmers working under various contractual terms—were not the same kinds of problems faced by the day laborers on the *latifundios* in the South, the *braceros*, who suffered terrible poverty. Regardless of these nuances, the land in Spain belonged to a tiny handful of oligarchs and the deeply impoverished Spanish peasant suffered terribly from land-hunger.

The Catholic Church reflected a conformist image for this entire medieval rural world. Amidst the peasant masses, of whom 45% were illiterate, there were more than 80,000 priests, monks or other ecclesiastical persons; this was more than two and a half times the number of students enrolled in secondary education. With its 11,000 estates, the Spanish Church was among the leading landowners in the country; furthermore, it almost totally dominated the educational system of the country, with religious schools that had educated more than 5 million adults, and whose administrative staffs reflected the most resolutely reactionary and oligarchic perspectives. Its leader, Cardinal Segura, the Archbishop of Toledo, had an annual income of 600,000 pesetas—as opposed to an average of 161 pesetas for the average owner of a small plot of land in Andalusia. He was, in the words of a Spanish historian, “a Churchman from the 13th century”, for whom “bathing was not an invention of the pagans, but of the devil himself”.³

The army was no less characteristic. Born in the era of the Napoleonic Wars, a rallying point for the young generation of the declining ruling classes who put all their hopes in the State, believing that it was the guarantor of a national mission, the army was a social force that sought the support of a mortally wounded ruling class, and its backbone, the

³ A. Ramos Oliveira, *Politics, Economics and Men of Modern Spain, 1808-1946*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1946, p. 438.

officer caste, justified, in addition to all its remaining privileges, the right to the “*pronunciamiento*”, that is, to take control of the State, for the benefit of the ruling class, by way of a military coup d’état.

At the beginning of the 20th century, especially in the period of the First World War, there was a partial resurgence of industrialization. It was reduced, however, to a handful of geographically limited zones. The metal industry of the Basque Country was the only industrial sector that really displayed the features of modern, concentrated industry. The textile industry of Catalonia, the most important industrial sector from the point of view of total production, was scattered in a multitude of small and medium-sized enterprises. In the framework of the world market, Spain was nothing but a semi-colony, which only offered the products—a small part—of its agriculture and its mines in exchange for foreign industrial products, and all the profitable sectors of its economy—mining, textiles, shipbuilding, hydroelectricity, railroads, urban transport, telecommunications—were completely open to foreign investment, which had colonized these industries for several decades. . . . There was no real Spanish capitalist bourgeoisie: industrial and banking shares were divided up among foreign companies and the biggest Spanish landowners—the ones whose existence really justified the use of the term, “oligarchy”. Between the one million or so of the latter category understood in the broadest sense, whom Henri Rabasseire calls “the privileged”—government officials, priests, military officers, intellectuals, business owners and bourgeoisie—and the two or three million workers in the industries and the mines, one finds the “middle classes” who reflected the features of both the Old Regime as well as modern society: a million urban craftsmen and artisans; and a million of those intermediate families born of capitalist development in the urban centers of the most highly developed regions.⁴

Thus, Spain’s national unification was never really concluded, and two of these regions—strongholds of industry—Catalonia and the Basque Country, displayed strong separatist tendencies. While the Basque Nationalist Party and the *Lliga Catalana*, born from the leading strata of these two regions, were conservative, i.e., reactionary, pro-autonomy formations, the “national question” had become one of the essential motivations that mobilized the petty bourgeoisie, and a part of the proletariat, against Castilian centralism, through the *Esquerra Catalana*, for example. Utilized by the conservative forces in the framework of the crisis that was crushing them, the national oppression of the Basques and the Catalonians constituted an explosive force in the context of a more general crisis, a crisis of Spanish society as a whole.

Such was the situation at the beginning of this century: which made Spain, in effect, one of the weakest links of capitalism. All the elements were already in place for the emergence of the different movements that, in 1917, had given the Russian Revolution its irresistible power: the insurrection of the poor peasants, the uprising of the industrial workers, and national liberation movements, all three of which were directed against an oligarchy that had no other choice but to fight, with every means at its disposal, to preserve the precarious survival of the declining system that ensured its rule. This was the

⁴ Henri Rabassaire, *Espagne, creuset politique*, p. 40.

situation that led King Alfonso XIII to resort to the services of General Primo de Rivera in 1923 to carry out a *pronunciamento*, for which he was simultaneously the inspiration and the accomplice. Primo de Rivera's dictatorship was an attempt to impose, upon a ruling class divided by the outbreak of economic difficulties which became more acute with the end of World War One, "health" measures dictated by a concept of the general interest, which would allow for the gradual attenuation of particular privileged positions. It was above all, however, an attempt to bring an end to workers and peasants agitation, to take advantage of the internal crisis and division of the workers movement in order to roll back the main conquests of the working class, and especially to destroy the relative advance made by democratic liberties that permitted a certain degree of organization for the workers and the peasants.

It was therefore under the mailed fist of the Minister of the Interior of the dictatorship—General Martínez Anido, famous for having launched his assassins, the "*pistoleros*", against the militants of the Catalanian CNT during the 1920s—that the "directory" of Primo de Rivera abolished the Municipal Councils, fired government officials, censored newspapers, dictated working conditions, and blithely violated legislation concerning the eight hour working day, while a galloping inflation ate up the wages and the living standards of the workers, and while Spain's open door to American investment allowed some businessmen to get rich and certain speculators to make a killing. All of this, however, only assured the oligarchy of a brief breathing space. The world crisis of 1929 profoundly undermined the dictatorship, which had been seriously discredited by highly publicized financial scandals, even among the social layers which had supported it, the army and the petty bourgeoisie. It was in order to protect the Monarchy that the King finally decided to get rid of Primo de Rivera. As it turned out, however, less than a year later the oligarchy decided to dispose of the Monarchy, without even having to pretend to carry out a *pronunciamento*. Indeed, it was not necessary, in Spain at the beginning of the 20th century, for the workers and the peasants to engage in threatening movements to inspire fear in the oligarchy: although they were seemingly absent from the political stage, it was due to the danger represented by the fact that they might potentially become political and seize possession of society, and the events of 1931 would be inexplicable without reference to this factor, temporarily passive, but potentially terrible, which represented a threat to the property and political rule of the oligarchy.

Already, on the very day after the fall of Primo de Rivera, student demonstrations against the government of General Berenguer constituted an opening act for infinitely more decisive social movements. As a lucid observer, based on his experience of the revolutionary struggles at the beginning of the century, Trotsky was capable of writing as follows:

"The student demonstrations are nothing but an attempt on the part of the young generation of the bourgeoisie, especially the petty bourgeoisie, to find a solution for the unstable equilibrium in which the country found itself after the supposed liberalization of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. When the bourgeoisie consciously and stubbornly refuses to take upon itself the solution of the tasks flowing from the crisis in bourgeois society; when the proletariat appears to be still unprepared to undertake the solution of

these tasks itself, then the proscenium is often occupied by the students. For us this phenomenon has always had an enormous and symptomatic meaning. The revolutionary or semi-revolutionary activities of the students mean that bourgeois society is passing through a deep crisis. The petty bourgeois youth, sensing that an explosive force is accumulating in the masses, tends to find its own way to escape from this dead end and drive political development forward.”⁵

Precisely because the accumulation of “explosive force ... in the masses” was not yet the explosion itself, the oligarchy benefited from a reprieve in 1931 and was able to find, with the Republican regime, a new form of its rule that at first enjoyed the favorable attitude of not only the workers but also the urban petty bourgeoisie, who had over the years become alienated from the dictatorship. The constitutional change of form was merely the window dressing for the real change. In August 1930, a conference of all the political groups was held in San Sebastián which formalized the new orientation: Catholics, conservatives like Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura, “right wing” republicans like Alejandro Lerroux, “left wing” republicans like Azaña and Casares Quiroga, the socialist Indalecio Prieto, and the Catalan nationalist Nicolau d’Olwer, signed the “Pact of San Sebastián”, in which they proclaimed their support for the Republic, for which they sought a shield and a general.... It was with Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura that the representatives of the King negotiated the handing over of power in April. It was upon this “republican” model that the new provisional government of the Spanish Republic was established, with Alcalá Zamora as Prime Minister, Maura as Minister of the Interior, three socialists in key positions, Prieto in the Ministry of Finance, Largo Caballero in the Ministry of Labor, and the jurist De los Ríos in the Ministry of Justice....

Far from having come to an end, the Spanish Revolution had only just begun. Between the moderately reformist and profoundly conservative program of the team in power and its possibilities of being inscribed on reality, a terrible obstacle arose that the fall of the Monarchy itself helped to preserve and develop: the existence of an organized workers movement, parties and trade unions swept the rural masses in their wake, millions of impoverished workers from the cities, mines and countryside, whose basic demands posed the problem of revolution.

2. The workers movement

The Spanish workers movement was still young, the proletariat was still connected to the rural world by multiple links and shared its traditions and customs. The rural temperament sometimes provoked feelings of resignation, and at other times brutal revolutionary explosions. It had never really taken shape on a national scale until the era of the First International and, like the International, was quickly divided into socialist and libertarian wings. In Spain, however, the anarchists—the “libertarians”—possessed and still possess a much greater influence than in the industrialized countries of Western Europe. In 1930, the division of the Spanish workers movement reproduced the split that

⁵ Trotsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 406-407.

developed at the turn of the century between a combative revolutionary syndicalism that advocated direct action, and a reformist and doctrinaire socialist movement.

It was in 1910, in part under the influence of the revolutionary syndicalists of the French CGT, when the foundations of the anarchosyndicalist confederation, the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* [National Confederation of Labor] (CNT), were created. Its rapid growth and its devotion to action, earned it harsh repression in its first few years, and this repression conferred a great deal of prestige upon it. It played a leading role in the insurrectionary general strike of 1917. The very flexible forms of its organization, its fidelity to the principles of direct action, its adherence to the class struggle; these traits responded quite well to the characteristics of the proletariat of the peninsula, which was young, poor and hardly differentiated, largely marked by the distinctive character of the poor peasant, very much influenced by “exemplary” actions carried out by “active minorities” which sought to simultaneously shake off the yoke of oppression as well as to awaken the workers from their apathy. It is in this sense that it can be said that the CNT—with respect to its perennial nature, its great popularity despite the large number of forms that it assumed—was typically Spanish, insofar as Spain had changed little; in Spain, the historical conditions that marked its historical birth persisted, barely modified by the beginnings of industrialization and capitalist concentration. For both Spain as well as the CNT, however, world history, after the war of 1914, would supply a new context.

For 1917 was not only the year of the victorious Russian Revolution, but also the year when an unprecedented general strike took place in Spain. The impact of the Russian Revolution and the exacerbation of social contradictions would generate a particularly vigorous workers movement that would assume, during the great Canadiense strike in Catalonia in 1919, the features of a powerful revolutionary upsurge. Like all organizations of the same type, the CNT was profoundly affected by the attraction of the Russian Revolution, which testifies to the prestige enjoyed by the Bolshevik victory in the eyes of revolutionaries of all tendencies. In Spain, like everywhere else, the ranks of the revolutionary anarchists and anarchosyndicalists had grown as a result of opposition to the practice of reformist Marxism, which had sought to adapt its activities to a particularly underdeveloped democratic and parliamentary framework. The victory of the Russian October gave Marxism its revolutionary impulse. It was after the general strike which followed in the wake of the strike at Canadiense, at the peak of the wave of strikes and demonstrations, that the congress of the CNT, by popular acclaim, and amidst a great wave of enthusiasm that was undoubtedly not exempt from being guided by ulterior motives, voted to provisionally join the Third International. One of its principal leaders, Ángel Pestaña, was sent by the CNT as its delegate to Moscow, where he participated in the deliberations of the Second Congress of the Communist International (CI), and conversed with Lenin and other Bolsheviks. In 1921, a delegation from the CNT, led by the Catalonians Andreu Nin and Joaquín Maurín, attended the Third Congress of the International and participated in the founding of the Red Trade Union International (RTUI).

The situation would change, however. In Spain, the workers movement went into decline. In Catalonia, the assassins of the “free trade unions” of Governor Martínez Anido and of

the Police Commissioner, Arlegui, had at least temporarily brought a halt to the developing workers uprising by systematically assassinating revolutionaries. Also, the actions of the workers and peasants after the Russian Revolution fell short of victory in every country: the ebbing of the workers movement that commenced at that time would allow for a provisional stabilization of capitalism in Europe. The difficulties encountered by an isolated Soviet Russia, and the repression directed by the Bolsheviks against anarchist organizations and militants, especially their repression of the Kronstadt Rebellion, which was strongly influenced by libertarian currents, provided the defenders of traditional anarchism with arguments to use against Bolshevism, and allowed them to recover the ground they had lost in 1919 to the enthusiastic wave of support for Bolshevism expressed by the masses. In February 1922, at a meeting of the National Committee of the CNT—held without the participation of Nin, who was still in Moscow, and Maurín, who was in prison—a resolution was passed repudiating the CNT’s “provisional” membership in the Communist International: in June of that same year, the Zaragoza Congress confirmed the National Committee’s decision to break with the Communist International and also with the Red Trade Union International.

In the meantime, however, a large number of militants and cadres of the CNT had been won over to communism, and among them, the names of Nin and Maurín stand out. There were also numerous militants who, without being communists, refused to break with the RTUI, for which Nin was at that time serving as Assistant General Secretary. Inspired by Maurín and his comrades, the Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees (RSC) were formed, which joined the RTUI. The RSC held a national congress in December 1922 in Bilbao, and founded the weekly newspaper, *La Batalla*. These communists and syndicalists constituted a new current, born from anarcho-syndicalism, but inspired by the Russian experience, which definitively broke with traditional anarchism and henceforth followed its own road: the militants of the RSC joined either the CNT or the UGT—which was a reformist trade union—and they fought to win a majority in both of these organizations, which they sought to unite. They were systematically expelled from both organizations.

A current that was very closely related to that of the communist syndicalists persisted, however, within the CNT, and was associated with one of the CNT’s most popular leaders in Catalonia, Salvador Seguí. Seguí, from an anarchist background, became a working class leader of the first rank over the course of the strikes of 1919, and could very well be defined as a real “revolutionary syndicalist”. In 1922, at the Zaragoza Congress, he took a position alongside the supporters of breaking with the RTUI, but he had his own, different arguments. He refused to endorse the condemnation of “politics”, which is traditional among anarchists, and in 1919 he had not hesitated to proclaim his advocacy of “the seizure of power”. In Zaragoza he was largely responsible for the adoption of a “political revolution” directed against traditional anarchist taboos. Particularly concerned with the problem of working class unity, he systematically pursued the goal of united action with the UGT, and a communist like Nin, his personal friend, thought that he was heading in the direction of communism. However, this peerless organizer, this extremely popular working class fighter, was also the *bête noir* of the employers: he was assassinated by the *pistoleros* of Martínez Anido at the very

moment when he was about to conclude an agreement between the CNT and the UGT for a joint struggle against the wave of repression. With Seguí's death, at least for many years to come, the possibility of seeing a thriving revolutionary syndicalist current arise within the CNT that would make a decisive break with "pure" anarchism also vanished.

Practically outlawed since 1923 and the beginning of the dictatorship, the CNT experienced a chronic crisis for many years. Taking a position between the traditional anarchists and a national leadership of a syndicalist tendency that had been arduously reconstructed in 1927, during the years of underground existence the small activist group of the "*Solidarios*" was formed, led by Juan García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso and Buenaventura Durruti, who were accused by their enemies of being "anarchobolsheviks" because they had come to support the idea of the "seizure of power", and due to their advocacy of the idea of a "dictatorship" and a "revolutionary army", which they believed were necessary. Above all, beginning in 1927, the CNT experienced the totally clandestine formation within its own ranks of the extremely influential and ultra-secret *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* [Iberian Anarchist Federation] (FAI), which undertook the systematic conquest of the CNT, which it sought to convert into an instrument of its policy of revolutionary coups.

In fact, however, the dominant current in the reconstructed CNT in 1931 was the reformist fraction led by Ángel Pestaña. Moderate enough to accept participation in the game of the "parity committees" [*comités paritarios*] that were established by the dictatorship to impose compulsory arbitration in labor conflicts, it did not hesitate, during the last few months of the Monarchy, to involve the CNT in a supporting role in the general coalition that led to the founding of the Republic. Two representatives of the CNT were present as observers at the conference held in San Sebastián in August 1930, and pledged their support to the republicans and the socialists in exchange for a guarantee that freedom of organization would be reestablished and that a general amnesty would be proclaimed. In November, the leadership of the CNT engaged in negotiations with the conservative leader Miguel Maura; in December, it supported the insurrection of the republican officers at Jaca. In the municipal elections of April 12, 1931, finally, abandoning the old principled hostility of anarchism towards the "farce of elections", the CNT encouraged its members and supporters to vote for the republican candidates. With the proclamation of the Republic, the CNT could once again operate openly, but within its ranks the most diverse currents had emerged, from the unabashed reformism of Pestaña and his comrades to those who advocated revolutionary terrorism and minority coups, as was the case among some extremist elements in the FAI, and with intermediate syndicalist tendencies that oscillated between these two extremes.

The "Marxist" current was also profoundly affected by trends in world events that followed in the wake of 1917. In the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* [Spanish Socialist Workers Party] (PSOE), founded by Pablo Iglesias after the Guesdist model, a left wing emerged in the wake of the Russian Revolution that wanted the Party to join the Communist International. The first socialists to take this decisive step were the members of the *Juventudes Socialistas* [Socialist Youth] led by Juan Andrade and Luis Portela, who founded the *Partido Comunista Español* [Spanish Communist Party] (PCE) in April

1920. The Socialist Party itself underwent a split shortly afterwards, in April 1921, when the majority of the party voted to reject the twenty-one conditions for membership in the Communist International. The minority then founded the *Partido Comunista Obrero Español* [Spanish Communist Workers Party] (PCOE) that soon merged with the PCE under pressure from the International. This merger took place in 1921, but it was too late for the young party to perform the role that its founders had intended it to fulfill.

One year later, Primo de Rivera's *pronunciamiento* drove the party underground, and at the same time the crisis of the Bolshevik Party led, under the pretext of "Bolshevization", to the submission of the Communist Parties of the world to the victorious fraction in the Soviet Union. The party lost one of its founders—Oscar Pérez Solís, who would become a Falangist—and many militants. Although it succeeded in winning over a significant group of CNT militants in Seville in 1927, including Manuel Adame and José Díaz, the Communist Party nonetheless continued to decline, under both the blows of a systematic repression as well as from the effects of its own policies, and especially the expulsions mandated by the leadership of the International, whose decision-making role was favored by the precarious conditions of the Spanish party's clandestine activity. When the Republic was proclaimed, the official Communist Party had barely 800 members in the entire country, led by militants who had only recently joined the party and who were preferred, due to their docility in following the orders that came from Moscow, to the surviving members of the "old guard". Entire party sections were expelled without being given any reasons for their expulsion, nor would the real motives ever be explained: this is what happened to the Catalanian-Balearic Federation led by Maurín and Arlandis, Luis Portela's Madrid Group, the Valencia Group, and the Asturian Federation—all of them led by men who were much more well known as workers leaders than the leaders of the official communist party. Andreu Nin returned to Spain in 1930. The former Secretary of the CNT, and then of the RTUI, Nin was associated with the Left Opposition in Russia, for which he served on its "International Commission", and he was a personal friend of Trotsky. With other militants—especially Juan Andrade and Henri Lacroix, who had followed the same trajectory—he devoted his efforts to constructing the left communist opposition in Spain, seeking grounds for an agreement with Maurín to unify the opposition communist groups.

In the communist milieu, reactions to the proclamation of the Republic were quite diverse. The official Communist Party received the order to disseminate the slogan, "Down with the bourgeois republic! All power to the Soviets!", despite the fact that, according to *Pravda*, there was not even the shadow of a soviet or any similar institution present in Spain. Maurín—who clearly discerned the pressure that was being brought to bear on him during that period by Bukharin and the "right wing communists"⁶—and Nin, who, as we have seen, was associated with Trotsky, to the contrary called for a struggle to realize the slogans of the democratic revolution, concerning which they believed that

⁶ J. Maurín, 1965 Introduction to *Revolución y contrarrevolución en España*, p. 3. (In fact, Maurín's party, the BOC [Workers and Peasants Bloc], was hardly at all influenced by Bukharin; see A. C. Durgan, *B. O. C. 1930-1936 El Bloque Obrero y Campesino*, Barcelona, 1996, pp. 97-101 [Note added by the Spanish editor].)

only the workers were capable of doing this, and that the conquest of these democratic rights would constitute an essential element in the struggle for the socialist revolution. Maurín and Nin, however, did not see eye to eye on the national question: although he was just as Catalanian and as much in favor of self-determination, Andreu Nin nonetheless disapproved of the position taken by Maurín and his organization in favor of Catalanian independence, and he also disapproved of Maurín's close collaboration with the *Catalanista* [Catalonian nationalist] petty bourgeoisie.⁷

As in other countries, the split that followed the founding of the Communist International caused the Socialist Party, which had rejected the twenty-one conditions for membership in the Communist International in 1921, to move further to the right. In 1923, the PSOE and the trade union that it controlled, the *Unión General de Trabajadores* [General Workers Union] (UGT), announced their willingness to collaborate with the dictatorship and accepted the promises made to them by Primo de Rivera. The General Secretary of the UGT, Francisco Largo Caballero, accepted appointment to an advisory position in the government's State Council. The UGT systematically took advantage of the institutional apparatus of collaboration, such as the parity committees, to expand its influence at the expense of a persecuted and divided CNT. The socialists, advocates of class collaboration under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, became resolutely reformist when the Republic was proclaimed: one of them, Indalecio Prieto, was one of the leading advocates of the tactical alliance of the opposition against the dictatorship, and then, under the Monarchy, he was one of the main organizers of the conference of San Sebastián. The presence in the provisional government of socialist Ministers constituted a guarantee of support from the left for the new regime, and a buffer against the impatient aspirations of the masses of workers and peasants, while simultaneously enabling it to promise profound "reforms" and social legislation that would satisfy some of the most immediate demands of the masses.

It would be wrong, however, to perceive these developments as merely a successful maneuver to uphold the prevailing order. For this reformist policy was no stronger than the illusions that the workers nourished with respect to the new regime, not to mention the fear that it might have temporarily instilled in an anxious oligarchy. The fact is that the proclamation of the Republic cleared the way for the expression of workers' and peasants' demands that the classes in power were incapable of satisfying. The revolution definitely loomed on the horizon. The problem was to find out if it was possible to organize the forces that would be necessary for its victory in Spain: the elements were present everywhere, in the UGT and the CNT, in the ranks of the "*faístas*" and those of the syndicalists, among the official and opposition communists, among the young people who were just becoming aware of politics and who were joining the various trade union or political organizations. How could a framework be elaborated that would make it possible to unite them? This was the question that was discussed among communists, between Maurín and Nin in Barcelona, between Nin and Trotsky by way of letters, within

⁷ Maurín had ceased to support Catalanian independence in 1932; as for his very short-lived, or rather non-existent, "collaboration with the *Catalanista* petty bourgeoisie", see *ibid.*, pp. 102-136 [editor's note].

a still-narrow circle of militants who at that time disposed of no other arsenal than the experience of the revolutions of the 20th century, victorious and defeated, and the conviction that the moment of the proletarian revolution was inevitably approaching in Spain.

3. The impossible democracy

The composition of the provisional government was itself quite revealing, both with regard to the intentions, as well as the limitations, of the founders of the Republic. The Prime Minister, Niceto Alcalá Zamora, and the Minister of the Interior, Miguel Maura, were not only fervent Catholics and self-declared conservatives, but also convinced centralists. Nicolau D'Oliver, the Minister of the Economy, was a liberal associated with the Bank of Catalonia. The Finance Minister, Indalecio Prieto, besides being a leader of the socialist party, was a businessman in Bilbao. Largo Caballero, the Secretary of the UGT, former State Councilor under the Primo de Rivera regime, was the Minister of Labor. All of them were men who sought to impose order, they wanted to prevent and fight against the revolution, and their alliance—on this negative foundation—was impossible to maintain when faced with the tasks of the “bourgeois revolution” that had to be carried out in Spain in order to resolve its centuries-old contradictions: the problem of the land and agrarian reform, the question of nationalities, the relations between Church and State, and the fate of the bureaucratic and military apparatus of the Monarchy, which was entrusted to the only new man on this team, the left wing republican, Manuel Azaña.

Their first initiatives were intended to be pacification measures. One of the Republic's first declarations guaranteed property rights, but left open the question of the possibility of “expropriation” “for reasons of public usefulness, with indemnification”; it was somewhat vaguely stated that “agrarian rights must correspond to the social function of the land”. The government proclaimed its intention to maintain good relations with the Vatican, and it proclaimed freedom of religion without referring to an eventual separation of Church and State. The government opposed the proclamation of the Catalan Republic in Barcelona, where it sent three Ministers to negotiate a compromise, the reestablishment of the Generalitat, the old Catalan governing institution, and to promise that a statute of autonomy would be passed. No reference was made to purging the apparatus of the State or the army, and all the former police commissioners retained their positions, as did the Commander of the hated Civil Guards, General Sanjurjo, and Alcalá Zamora welcomed the Monarchist officers who composed the general staff of the army, with admiral Aznar, the last Minister of War under the King, at their head.

The new regime's first few weeks of existence revealed the key to understanding this prudent conduct. It was quite illuminating that there were no bloody confrontations on April 14. While neither the Monarchists nor the anarchists seemed to be interested in seriously challenging the Republic, the first decisions of the provisional government provoked reactions that nonetheless make it possible to gauge the extent of its contradictions. The first decrees were issued by the Ministry of Labor: the leader of the UGT had a serious problem within his own organization, insofar as he was under intense

pressure from the agricultural workers organized in the *Federación de los Trabajadores de la Tierra* [Federation of Land Workers], and he was compelled to satisfy their demands at least in part. One of the first decrees prohibited the foreclosure of mortgages affecting small rural parcels, another prohibited big landowners from employing workers from outside their municipalities if the latter contained unemployed workers, and the municipal councils were authorized to compel the big landowners to cultivate their fallow lands. Finally, on June 12, the government extended to the agricultural workers coverage under the disability insurance legislation from which they had formerly been excluded.

As unwelcome as these measures were to the oligarchy, they did not trigger an open outburst of opposition. Despite their moderate tone, however, the government's declarations seemed to be intolerable threats to the leading circles of the Catholic hierarchy and its satellite institutions. The big newspapers that they controlled, *ABC* and *El Debate*, waged a bitter editorial campaign, highlighting the provisional nature of the government, to which they opposed the eternity of the Catholic religion. They violently attacked the decree of May 6 that exempted schoolchildren from religious education at the request of their parents. On May 7 they published a pastoral letter from Cardinal Segura that was a veritable declaration of war on the Republic and its government, in "defense" of the "rights" of the Church as opposed to the "anarchy" that threatened the country, even comparing the provisional government with the Bavarian Council Republic of 1919. This inflammatory text only fed fuel to the flames of the propaganda campaign that was underway against the religious orders. Many of the latter openly supported reactionary machinations, the most obvious manifestation of which was the meeting held in Madrid by the "Monarchist Circle". This meeting, on May 10, gave rise to violent incidents and alarming rumors: there was talk of a cab driver having been murdered by the Monarchists. That night, six monasteries were burned down by young people; monasteries and churches were also looted and burned in the following few days in Seville, Málaga, Alicante and Cádiz. The opinion that these incidents were carried out by agents provocateurs, which is maintained even today by a historian as eminent as Gabriel Jackson, has often been suggested to explain these outbursts of anti-religious violence. There is no proof for this view. What is certain, however, is that the Spanish Church embodied in the eyes of the masses, who were in the process of becoming conscious of their class condition, the entire reactionary tradition of the country and its age-old submissiveness towards the powerful. The government acted with the greatest caution: the police did not take any further action than to assist in the evacuation of the monks, and in vain did the Minister of the Interior—right up until May 15—appeal for authorization to mobilize the Civil Guards and to proclaim a state of emergency. The indignant outcries of the mainstream press and the bishops did not divert attention from the total absence of any reaction on the part of the country's Catholic majority: the awakening of the masses overturned traditional ways of thought.

The result of the May incidents was in any event a hardening of positions: Segura, accused of having provoked the popular explosion, was declared *persona non grata*, and the government resolved to proclaim freedom of religion, adding, under the pretext of public health concerns, the prohibition of the placing of religious images in niches in walls. The bishops protested furiously.

The religious question was also at the heart of the first crisis, after the debate in the Cortes on the Constitution and particularly Article 26. The proposed Constitution, closely modeled after that of the Weimer Republic, proclaimed a “democratic republic of workers of every class”, concentrating power in a single legislative chamber, elected by universal, direct and secret suffrage, with a President disposing of extensive powers, elected every seven years by an electoral college. The separation of Church and State, mandated by Article 3, and the stipulations of Article 26 against the activities of the religious orders provoked the first ministerial crisis, the resignation of Maura and Alcalá Zamora and the formation of a government under the anticlerical Azaña. It was this same government, consisting of a republican-socialist coalition, that adopted the “law of defense of the republic”, on the pretext of defending the principles of the constitution with regard to democratic liberties, and gave the Minister of the Interior draconian powers for the preservation of order, and which would be used more often against workers and peasants than against the reactionaries.

Having taken such radical measures in the struggle against the Catholic Church, the republicans were, however, much more cautious on the terrain of social reform and above all in their approach to the agrarian question. The “agrarian reform law”, approved after endless debate, authorized the expropriation of the large estates in the main regions of the *latifundios*, but its impact was considerably limited by the indemnification clauses and, consequently, by the credit made available for this purpose to the Institute for Agrarian Reform. In fact, during the first few years of its existence, this Institute was only granted enough money to resettle 50,000 peasants each year, which heralded the perspective of a span of half a century for the definitive resolution of the land question. And the resistance marshaled against this measure by the landowners at the level of the State apparatus was so stubborn that the Institute only spent a third of the money that it had been granted in two years. And since capital was either fleeing the country or being concealed, the economic and social problems in every economic sector increased: working class unemployment reached unprecedented levels, and this was combined with a continuous rise in prices that was not compensated for by the wage increases obtained by means of the increasingly more numerous strikes despite the multiplication of arbitration boards. The workers unrest encouraged unrest among the peasants and vice-versa. The repression exercised by the traditional police forces—especially the Civil Guards—exasperated, enraged and embittered these conflicts. While Catholics and “seculars” confronted each other in the Cortes with flowery speeches and hurled thinly veiled threats of retaliation in each others’ faces, Spanish workers and peasants were shaping the fate of the new regime in their everyday struggles.

In the middle of the debates on the Constitution, the strike of the employees of the American firm that owned the Telephone company in Barcelona broke out, led by militants of the CNT. This company, which had come to Spain during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, was a symbol of foreign imperialism, which had been denounced previously by socialists and republicans, who, now that they were in power, sought to reassure the foreign capitalists. Socialists and anarchists, militants of the UGT and of the CNT, clashed, the former accusing the latter of starting and spreading the strike at

gunpoint. In response to government repression, the CNT issued a call for the general strike in Seville, to which the government responded by declaring a state of emergency. Within a week, order was restored in the big Andalusian city: the final tally of casualties was thirty dead and more than two hundred wounded. The press and the militants of the CNT waged a propaganda campaign against the government: socialists and anarchists began to settle their differences with firearms.

Six months later, the tragic events at Castilblanco took place. There, the Civil Guards brutally dispersed a demonstration of peasants organized by the Federation of Land Workers, an affiliate of the UGT. Four Guardsmen who entered the *Casa del Pueblo* to prevent a protest demonstration were surrounded by women. One of them fired his gun: the four Guardsmen were lynched and dismembered by an infuriated crowd. The repression was harsh: six death sentences, commuted to life imprisonment. A few days later, the same unit of Civil Guards opened fire on a delegation of strikers in the county of Arnedo: there were six deaths, among them four women and a child, and sixteen wounded by gunfire.

At the same time, militants of the FAI led an armed insurrection in the mining district of Alto Llobregat, proclaiming “libertarian communism” in the impoverished villages of the region. They were suppressed in a few days and about one hundred anarchist militants, among them Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, were deported to the Canaries and to the Spanish Sahara. Their comrades protested against their deportation with a new insurrection in Terrassa, on February 14, 1932, seizing the Municipal Offices and besieging the barracks of the Civil Guards, and finally surrendering to army units that had been dispatched against them.

A few months later it would be the right wing that would seize the initiative of resorting to firearms. Having been replaced as commander of the Civil Guards by General Cabanellas, General Sanjurjo attempted to carry out a coup d’etat that the CNT and the workers of Seville nipped in the bud by responding en masse to a call for a general strike, while government troops repulsed the poorly-prepared attack by the Monarchist elements in Madrid. The rebel General was condemned to death and was immediately pardoned. The property of the conspirators—some of whom were deported—was confiscated. Having been encouraged by the failure of this movement, the government took advantage of the occasion to accelerate somewhat the pace of the agrarian reform and to obtain approval of the Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia, which had until then remained a dead letter. It did not, however, dismiss from the army any but a few of the most notorious conspirators.

In the month of January 1933, the anarchist activists of the group, *Nosotros*—García Oliver, Durruti, former members of the “*Solidarios*”—supported by the FAI and the “defense committees”, unleashed another insurrection that swept over the CNT sections in numerous localities in Catalonia, Levant, Rioja and Andalusia. In the latter region, at Casas Viejas, a unit of Civil Guards set fire to a house in which about thirty anarchist militants had taken refuge, who were burned alive, while an officer ordered the cold-blooded execution of fourteen insurgents who had been taken prisoner. The author of this

crime claimed to have been obeying orders from Azaña. “No wounded, no prisoners. Shoot them in the belly.”⁸ This policy of brutal repression, the juridical arsenal that the government had provided itself with in the form of the law of April 8, 1932 concerning the control of the trade unions, the law of public order of July 1933, the vagrancy law, which allowed the police and security forces to shoot unemployed workers and professional militants, the obligation to give eight days notice in advance before calling a strike, the multiplication of preventive arrests, and the protection given by the police to the anti-anarchist commandos; all of these factors henceforth gave the new regime its anti-worker reputation, exacerbated contradictions, stirred up old grudges and encouraged new organizational orientations within the workers movement.

As for the CNT, after the proclamation of the Republic, it was convulsed by a profound crisis. Since October, the elements of the FAI had won a resounding victory over their syndicalist adversaries by eliminating Joan Peiró from the editorial committee of the CNT’s newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, because they considered him to be an opportunist. A few months later, Pestaña was expelled from the metal workers trade union. A manifesto signed by thirty leaders of the CNT—the “*treintistas*”—including Joan Peiró, Juan López and Pestaña, took a stance against the adventurism of the FAI and drafted a reformist program⁹ that earned its signatories expulsion from the Confederation, along with numerous organizations—in Valencia, Huelva and Sabadell, especially—that took the name of “opposition trade unions”.

The FAI, however, was itself divided, and the pure anarchists, faithful to the traditional model, engaged in a bitter factional struggle with those whom they referred to as anarcho-bolsheviks, who were trying to find, under the really existing conditions, an answer to the question that the “*trentistas*” refused to pose: How to bring about the revolution?¹⁰ The internal conflict also had a dramatic impact on disagreements between the responsible committees: in January 1933, in Catalonia, the local federation of the CNT called a general strike, twenty-four hours after the regional confederation had taken a position against a general strike. This actually reflected an extremely profound political crisis, however. As Andreu Nin noted at the time, in observations repeated today by the historian César Lorenzo, if the anarchists were really to be faithful to their old philosophy of “revolutionary gymnastics”, whose purpose was to train the workers, they were actually doing nothing less than acting in contradiction with traditional anarchist principles, by in fact seizing political power and establishing, in their own way, a dictatorship that was certainly not a dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather a dictatorship of their own revolutionary power.¹¹ Commenting on the strike of January 1933 and the “proclamations” of the “seizure of power” by the anarchist committees,

⁸ Upon encountering resistance, the Civil Guards were reinforced by units of Assault Guards. The officer in command of the government forces was Captain Rolas of the Assault Guards (Editor’s Note).

⁹ The complete text of this manifesto is included in Peirats, *La CNT en la Revolución Española*, Vol. I, pp. 44-48.

¹⁰ A. Nin, *Los problemas de la revolución española*, p. 115.

¹¹ C. Lorenzo, *Les anarchistes espagnols et le pouvoir*, p. 74.

Andreu Nin hailed this new position as a “step forward”: “The leaders of the movement have practically renounced the basic principles of anarchism in order to come closer to our positions.”¹² And this was evidently not by chance, since at the other extreme of the anarchosyndicalist spectrum, Angel Pestaña broke with anarchism in order to found a “Syndicalist Party” that was basically devoted to the goal of bringing about a peaceful and reformist kind of socialism based on self-management and federalism.

The collaboration of the socialists in a republican government that was so obviously opposed to the demands of the workers and peasants, and the disappointment caused by the concrete results of the change of political regime, could not, at least at first, contribute to the growth of the CNT, which despite all the obstacles nonetheless subsequently did undergo rapid growth with regard to its organization and its influence during the first few years of the Republic, in which it seemed to represent the rallying point for revolutionaries as well as for the class actions of the workers and peasants. The CNT indisputably united the most combative and most resolute elements of the Spanish proletariat, yet it was at the same time incapable of offering them either a revolutionary method or a revolutionary program and, under these circumstances, the crisis that it was experiencing—the rebellion of the militants against anarchist prejudices—theoretically opened up a considerable range of intervention for the communists, who had a real opportunity to build their party in dual opposition to the reformist currents of class collaboration and to the adventurist tactics of revolutionary coup d'états which facilitated the task of government repression and aggravated the divisions within the workers movement.

The official Communist Party, however, was far from understanding the political reality or taking such a position. Integrated with and strictly obedient to the Stalinist leadership of the Communist International—which was represented in Spain by a “delegation” composed of Humbert-Droz, Rabaté and the Argentinian Codovilla—mechanically applied in Spain the analyses and directives elaborated for it in the framework of the policy known as the “third period”, characterized by sectarianism and the rejection of working class unity. The definition of social democracy as “social fascism”, which in Germany reaped such catastrophic results by preventing unity in the struggle against the Nazis, assuring that Hitler’s gangs would be victorious without a fight, was also applied to the Spanish situation: the analysis of the Socialist Party as a “social fascist” party could only isolate the communists and cause those socialist militants who were asking questions about the basic principles of their party’s policies to rally around their reformist leaders. Furthermore, this analysis was applied mechanically to the anarchists, who were defined as “anarcho-fascists” and consequently treated as such. The repeated proclamations of the PCE for “power to the Soviets” in a country where nothing even resembling a Soviet existed, could only help discredit them and at the same time discredit the image of communism. Wherever communist militants constituted an important force, as in Seville, they were used to try to bring about a split in the CNT: the “committee for the reconstruction of the CNT”, founded by the communists who were politically active in the port of Seville, was the instrument of this enterprise, which would lead to bloody

¹² A. Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

confrontations between militants of the PCE and the CNT, and caused numerous anarchosindicalist militants associated with the united force of the Confederation, which the PCE was trying to destroy, to turn against “communism”. This sectarian and divisive course of action culminated during the “*sanjurjada*”; on the very day of General Sanjurjo’s *pronunciamiento*, *Mundo Obrero* denounced the government as the control center of fascist activities, and the counter-demonstration organized by the PCE offered no other slogan besides “Down with Sanjurjo!” The mistake was so obvious, the confusion was so great even in the ranks of the party itself, that the International resolved upon a “change”: the leaders Adame and Bullejos, blamed for the sectarian policy that they merely implemented, were eliminated, and the committee of “reconstruction” was transformed into a “committee for trade union unity”. Stalin’s delegates were still the real leaders of the party behind the façade of the “new”, recently promoted leaders such as José Díaz, Jesús Hernández and Dolores Ibárruri, and the committee for trade union unity served as an organizing platform for a new national trade union federation, the unitary CGT, whose creation led to the expulsion of communist militants from the UGT and the CNT and only further contributed to the isolation of the Communist Party.

Those communists who were opposed to these policies during this period promoted other positions and attempted to convince the militants who were dissatisfied with this catastrophic situation. Maurín’s Catalanian-Balearic Federation merged with Jordi Arquer’s *Partit Comunista Catalá* [Catalonian Communist Party], another small organization, but with a significant presence in many locations, such as among the longshoremen of Barcelona and Lérida, forming the *Bloc Obrer i Camperol* [Workers and Peasants Bloc] (BOC), which defined itself as a mass organization and called upon the communists of Spain to join it. Nin, who began to collaborate with Maurín’s *La Batalla* and considered joining the Catalanian Federation, ultimately refused to do so, not so much because of Trotsky’s exhortations as because of the continuous refusals on the part of the leaders of the Workers and Peasants Bloc to follow Trotsky’s advice. The return to Spain of the elements won over to the left opposition in Belgium and Luxemburg allowed for the growth of the group that would become the *Izquierda Comunista* [Communist Left] in 1932, which published an important theoretical journal, *Comunismo*, and also a short-lived weekly, *El Soviet*. From then on, Nin distanced himself from the followers of Maurín and published polemics against the Workers and Peasants Bloc. The disagreements between the two groups were profound. The main disagreement was that Nin and his supporters possessed an analysis of Stalinism, and that their assessment of the Spanish situation was based on an interpretation of the events that took place in Russia after the revolution, and consequently, of the “Russian Question”, which, according to them, dominated the entire policy of the International, not only in Spain but everywhere else, too. Maurín and his supporters, for their part, rejected the attacks against the Trotskyists, refused to take sides between “Stalinists” and “Trotskyists”, claiming that they wanted to look after their own schisms as Spanish communists solely within the framework of the Spanish Question, and refusing to accept any policy that would be limited to the theoretical implementation in Spain of the same

tactics that had been successfully used in Russia in 1917.¹³ Nin characterized this position as a “distorted transplantation of the anti-Marxist Stalinist theory of socialism in one country”.¹⁴ And this fundamental divergence gave rise, suddenly, to many other divergences.

While both Trotskyists and Maurinists recognized the importance of the “national question”, they did not draw the same practical conclusions. Nin fought for the recognition of the right of nationalities to secession, but also for the national and international unification of the proletariat, while Maurín declared that he was a “separatist” in Catalonia and reproached the International for not supporting all the separatist movements in Spain. Similarly, the Communist Left and the Workers and Peasants Bloc were in agreement in their condemnation of the Stalinist sectarian policy that consisted in mechanically opposing “the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the Soviets” to the “bourgeois republic”, and characterizing the initial phase of the Spanish Revolution as “bourgeois democratic”. Nin, however, advocated a policy of “breaking with bourgeois organizations” as a step towards the constitution of the soviets, while Maurín called for a “national convention” directed by the advanced elements of the petty bourgeoisie, that is, an alliance of the kind that was formed in Catalonia with the Catalan nationalist movement, in a region where, unlike the rest of Spain, the UGT and the Socialist Party only comprised an insignificant force. After the “*sanjurjada*”, the Workers and Peasants Bloc issued the watchword, “All power to the workers organizations”: Nin condemned this slogan as an opportunist concession, for in Spain this meant “All power to the trade unions” and therefore excluded the peasant masses. As opposed to what the Trotskyists defined as “centrist” deviations, which in the decisive question of power sometimes led Maurín and his supporters to make concessions to the Catalan petty bourgeoisie and at other times to the anarchosyndicalists, the Trotskyists called for the line of struggle for the construction of the Spanish form of the soviets, the “revolutionary committees” elected by the workers and peasants.

The fierce political conflicts between these three groups, and between them and the PCE, provoked reevaluations and shifting positions among these groups whose borders were furthermore never very impermeable. In Madrid, Valencia and Extremadura, militants of the PCE and the *Juventudes Comunistas* [Communist Youth] (JC) were expelled from the party and joined the left opposition. Gorkín, a former leader of the party in exile who had been associated with the Trotskyists in France, left the Spanish left opposition to become a member of the Workers and Peasants Bloc. The Catalan Molins i Fàbrega, on the other hand, left the Workers and Peasants Bloc to join the left opposition. The Madrid group dissolved in 1932, and some of its members joined the PCE, while two of its most important leaders, the former leader of the Communist Youth and of the Socialist Party, Luis Portela, and the former leader of the Communist Youth, Luis García Palacios, joined Maurín’s Workers and Peasants Bloc and the left opposition, respectively. A minority

¹³ Already in December 1932, the BOC began to advocate a clearly anti-Stalinist position, in addition to praising Trotsky, and it published his articles while continuing to criticize his followers; see Durgan, *B. O. C.*, pp. 101-102 [Editor’s Note].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

known as the “Workers Opposition” within the Catalan Federation rallied around the comrades of Maurín, Antonio Sesé and the pioneers of communism, Hilario Arlandis and Evaristo Gil, who in 1932 also joined the PCE. The PCE, which was able to publish a daily newspaper thanks to the financial support of the International, a task that was far beyond its own capacities, only grew slowly, despite the success achieved in Madrid against the Maurinist opposition. The journal, *Comunismo*, enjoyed enormous prestige among intellectuals, but the left opposition, which became the Communist Left, that published this journal did not make very much progress among the manual workers. The Workers and Peasants Bloc, which had emerged from the Catalan Federation, which later became the Iberian Communist Federation, was still, despite its failures in the rest of Spain, the largest workers party in Catalonia, where the trade union organizations of the CNT and the Catalan nationalist parties were politically dominant.

From the activities of these two minority organizations, however, even though they were separated by serious disagreements, arose, with the worsening of the political situation and the looming threat of counterrevolution in 1933, the first initiative that could have possibly radically transformed the relation of forces between trade unions and parties, on the one hand, and the workers movement and the ruling classes, on the other.

For in December 1933, under the sponsorship of the Workers and Peasants Bloc and the Communist Left, the first united front of organizations was formed, the Workers Alliance: the Catalan UGT, the *Unió Socialista*, the opposition trade unions—the *trentistas*—the *Unió de Rabassaires* (small-scale peasant landowners) and the minuscule Spanish Socialist Party of Barcelona, and the two communist organizations resolved to conclude this alliance for the purpose of “opposing the victory of reaction” and for preserving the threatened conquests of the working class. This initiative, as modest as it was, was first of all the result of the tireless propaganda campaign waged by the international and Spanish left opposition in favor of united workers fronts against rising fascism, and also of the shock felt throughout the world due to the defeat of the German working class, the consequence of the stubborn rejection of the policy of the united front on the part of the two big German workers parties. It also constituted a defensive initiative against the appearance of the first openly fascist groups in Spain, the JONS (*Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista* [Committees of the National-Syndicalist Offensive]), under the leadership of Ledesma Ramos and Onésimo Redondo, and then the Falange (*Falange Española*) led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the dictator, and the aviator Ruiz de Alda. And, finally, it reflected the growing unrest and impatience that was being expressed more and more openly in the Socialist Party, because of the disappointment with the results of years of government collaboration.

The balance sheet for these years proved to be an extremely contradictory one for the militants. If the results obtained were poor compared to the high hopes that had been sustained at first with regard to reforms and a gradual advance towards socialism, it was no less true that the Socialist Party and the UGT had grown enormously and became, during those years, powerful mass organizations that attracted to their ranks numerous young people who perceived them as the main hope for political and social change. Their new militants also proved to be sensitive to both the disappointment of the masses with

respect to the poverty of the results obtained and the pressure exercised by the anarchists on their left. The government coalition became increasingly more a source of embarrassment. On the one hand, the republicans reproached the socialists for being nothing but troublemakers, or at least accomplices of the peasant unrest and its increasingly more violent expressions, and accused them of playing a double game. On the other hand, the anarchists and communists of various types denounced the socialists as accomplices of a policy of fierce repression, of a regime concerning which a republican as moderate as Martínez Barrio could declare that it was a regime of “mud, blood and tears”.¹⁵ It was now just a matter of how long it would take for the break to take place between socialists and republicans: the President of the Republic, Alcalá Zamora, was busy, actively provoking, first, the cabinet crisis, and then, proclaiming the dissolution of the Cortes after the short-lived Lerroux cabinet. Suddenly, the crisis of the Socialist Party became inevitable: the prospect of elections posed the question of electoral alliances, and forced its leaders to reconsider the results of their policy, and this compelled the militants to assume responsibility for reassessing the trajectory of the party. In the ranks of the Socialist Youth, especially in Madrid, a current took shape that would radically challenge the perspectives of the party since the split, the defense of parliamentary bourgeois democracy and reformist class collaboration. A new force arose, a new concrete possibility for the construction of a workers front that was simultaneously a revolutionary force. It was only taking its first steps, however, and the elections of November 1933, which were won by the right wing parties, would create a new context.

4. The impossible reactionary government

The elections of November 1933 were won by the right wing parties: the electoral law favored broad coalitions, and the socialists, who campaigned alone, lost half of their seats even though they won about the same number of votes, while the republican parties were almost totally defeated. This result, in and of itself, posed the basic problem: in the economic and social context of traditional Spain, the socialists, facing an alliance that had access to considerable funds and which enjoyed the support of the local *caciques*, had no other choice than to accept defeat or forge an alliance with the republicans, an alliance which, as the experience of the last few years had demonstrated, did not allow them to implement their policies. Having resolved to contest the elections alone, the Socialist Party was suddenly forced to come to terms with this contradiction and to engage in a stunning reversal of its previous policies. The left wing that had first emerged over the course of the summer of 1933 due to unrest among the Socialist Youth began to take shape, and its main spokesman was none other than Largo Caballero. The man who, for fifty years, had been the leader of the ranks of reformism and class collaboration, now began to speak a new, surprising kind of language, to say the least. For him, the experience of the first few years of the Republic was clear: nothing could be expected from the petty bourgeoisie and the republican parties that were congenitally incapable of carrying out their bourgeois democratic revolution. According to him, during those years of coalition government, Azaña and his friends had sabotaged every attempt to implement serious reforms—even attempts on the part of high officials in his own

¹⁵ Quoted by G. Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War*, p. 94.

Ministry. During the electoral campaign, he used, according to the testimony of Andreu Nin, “a purely communist language, even advocating the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat”.¹⁶

The anarchists, for their part, addressed the same problem in their own way and attempted to oppose the “parliamentary road” with the “revolutionary road”. Their historian, César Lorenzo, has written: “Their militants, their best speakers, their agitators engaged in a formidable campaign in favor of abstention, tirelessly and straightforwardly denouncing the ineptitude and betrayals of the bourgeois and liberal parties and the socialists, their cowardice in the face of the rightists, their refusal to seek a definitive remedy for Spain’s traditional afflictions and their ignorance of the needs of the working class. Libertarian propaganda found a growing echo among the proletariat and the peasantry, who were tired of the ineffectiveness of the republican-socialist coalition in power.”¹⁷

In the country as a whole, the rate of abstention was 32.5%, and surpassed 40% in the provinces of Barcelona, Zaragoza, Huesca and Tarragona, and reached 45% in Seville, Cádiz and Málaga. Having thus in its own way assured, thanks to the impact of its anti-voting campaign, the electoral success of the right, the anarchists then proceeded to the second part of their “demonstration”, unleashing against the victorious right the traditional armed uprising. On December 8, 1933, at the initiative of a “revolutionary committee” led by Cipriano Mera and Buenaventura Durruti, among others, the CNT unleashed the insurrection in Zaragoza and, from there it spread to Aragón and Rioja. Once again, “libertarian communism” was proclaimed for a few days in the villages. Military and police repression easily suppressed these uprisings: the shattered and divided CNT was, for the moment, defeated.

The victory of the right wing, however, was not the final goal but rather, for its authors, only a first stage. For, as far as they were concerned, their victory was not a simple swing of the pendulum of alternating parties in power, but the beginning of an attack for which other means besides electoral ones would be employed, if necessary. The Monarchists, “Carlists” or “*Alfonsinos*”, organized in the *Comunión Tradicionalista* and the *Renovación Española* party, had not renounced their mission to “save” Spain and regenerate it by force of arms in a civil war. Their leader, Calvo Sotelo, an enthusiastic devotee of the political philosophy of corporatism, an admirer of fascism, and a personal friend of Cardinal Segura, enjoyed the support of the highest echelons of the military command. These two parties and a representative of the army signed a secret agreement with Mussolini in Rome in 1934, the terms of which bound Mussolini to provide money and weapons to overthrow the Republic. This extreme conservative right, more authoritarian and corporatist than Monarchist, had the greatest influence on the political organizations of the right. Formed at the initiative of the Catholic hierarchy, the organization known as *Acción Popular*, led by José María Gil-Robles, an admirer of the corporatist State of Dollfuss, who would later become the parliamentary leader of the

¹⁶ A. Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁷ C. Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

CEDA (*Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* [Spanish Confederation of the Independent Right]), the strongest party in the Cortes, and who also enjoyed the support of the most important military commanders.

The new government, with Lerrox as Prime Minister, in which the left was not represented, immediately set about demolishing the work of the first few years of the Republic. The investigation concerning the crimes of the Monarchy was terminated by court order. The clergy received exorbitant subsidies, while the budgetary allotments for the public schools were reduced. The laws mandating a public bidding process for public works were repealed. The police forces were reinforced with a large number of new recruits. Calvo Sotelo, condemned to exile after the fall of the dictatorship, was granted amnesty. The groups of the extreme right marched in the streets with the explicit protection of the authorities: the Falangists attacked socialist and even liberal newspapers and offices, opened fire on the university, and the troops of the CEDA's Youth organization, meeting at *El Escorial*, saluted their leaders in the Roman style. Sanjurjo and the other leaders of the 1932 *pronunciamiento* were granted amnesty and released from prison. Lerrox resigned because President Alcalá Zamora demanded the publication of a note in which he declared that it would be dangerous to allow these men to reassume their previous positions as military commanders. His successor, Samper, continued to pursue the same policies, which rapidly led to serious conflicts, this time with the Catalonians and the Basques: the government rescinded a Catalonian law that significantly curtailed the rights of the big landowners, and unilaterally disregarded an old agreement concerning tax revenues that allowed the provincial authorities to collect taxes in the Basque provinces. Finally, the President sought a way to undermine the separation of Church and State.

The Spanish working class and poor peasants, however, felt frustrated rather than defeated, and the reactionary offensive began to generate a convergence of perspectives among their ranks.

In this context, the idea of establishing a united front assumed a new, comprehensive dimension and the Workers Alliance began to attract more support.

A delegation of the Workers Alliance of Barcelona, which included Pestaña, the socialist Vila Cuenca and Joaquín Maurín, went to Madrid and met with Largo Caballero, who would himself go to Barcelona shortly thereafter for further discussion. Aware of the threat posed by the counterrevolution, rendered despondent by the failure of his life as a militant, but spurred on by the willingness to fight displayed by the militant workers of his party and of the UGT, and influenced by the intellectuals—Carlos de Baraibar and Luis Araquistain—who expressed the desires of the current that was both unitary and revolutionary that had begun to inspire the young generation, the old reformist leader took one more step and announced his support for the Workers Alliance, as well as for the revolutionary path. The Workers Alliance, already existing in Barcelona, spread throughout all of Catalonia, and also through Madrid—where the participation of the *Caballerista* wing of the Socialist Party gave it major influence—through Valencia, and

through Asturias, where it obtained the energetic support of the regional organization of the CNT.

It was in February 1934 when, in the columns of *La Tierra*, the first announcement in favor of the Workers Alliance was published by a well known leader of the CNT. Valeriano Orobón Fernández, attacking the old anarchist sectarianism, posed the problem in these terms:

“The reality of the fascist danger in Spain has seriously posed the problem of unifying the revolutionary proletariat for action that is more far-reaching and radical than merely defensive. The only political solution that is currently possible has been reduced to solely the opposed formulas of fascism or social revolution ... it is indispensable for the workers forces to form a rock-solid bloc.”¹⁸

The unity that he was proposing would have to be brought about on the basis of the refusal to collaborate with the bourgeoisie and to fight for the overthrow of the latter. The basis of the new regime must be “the acceptance of revolutionary workers democracy, that is, of the will of the majority of the proletariat, both as a common denominator and as the decisive factor of the new order of things”.¹⁹

On this basis, the Asturian Regional Confederation of the CNT signed a pact of alliance with the UGT that the National Plenum of the CNT indignantly repudiated. The Asturians, however, under their leader José María Martínez, refused to renege on their commitment to join the Alliance. As César Lorenzo pointed out: “Challenging traditional anarchism, these Asturian militants would accept the constitution of an executive power that was to organize the revolution and afterwards would exercise authority and assure order.”²⁰

Bitterly opposed, both by the right wing socialists of the Besteiro tendency as well as by the anarchists, denounced as “social fascist” by the Communist Party, the formation of the Workers Alliance drew a new line of division within the Spanish workers movement and at the same time created the conditions for its gradual reunification and, in the short term, the preconditions for its united front. The initiative of the Workers Alliance of Catalonia, which called for a general strike in solidarity with the strikers of the publishing industry in Madrid in March 1934, demonstrated that from then on there was a new element in Spain, a factor of renewal for working class strategy, an opportunity to overcome the old divisions and to pursue a revolutionary strategy.

The Workers Alliance would soon be put to the test. The CEDA announced, through the mouth of Gil-Robles, that it demanded to be given its share of government responsibility. The socialist leaders were divided: should they resist by force, despite an obvious lack of preparation, as Largo Caballero thought? Or should they find a way to avoid a fight that

¹⁸ The text of this speech is included in Peirats, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁰ C. Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

they were sure to lose and to husband their forces for better times, as Prieto asserted? The recent defeat of the Austrian socialists at the hands of Chancellor Dollfuss—Gil-Robles's role model—undoubtedly tipped the scales, and Largo Caballero won the debate: they would resist with arms in hand. On October 1, the Cortes met, the government resigned and Gil-Robles claimed a majority in the government. The socialists informed the President that they considered this announcement as a declaration of war against them; with the support of the left wing republicans, they called for the dissolution of the Cortes and new elections. After hesitating, President Alcalá Zamora appointed Lerroux to form a government that would include three members of the CEDA. The UGT issued the order for a general strike. The CNT did not take any action on a national level. The rural areas, exhausted by the hardships of a long strike of agricultural workers in June, did not respond, either. Only three focal points of insurrection arose: Barcelona, Madrid and Asturias.

In Barcelona, the Workers Alliance, led by Maurín and Nin, took a position in favor of insurrection against the new government, which was a direct threat to the workers and peasants as well as to Catalanian autonomy. It tried to convince the government of the Generalitat that it had the key to the situation in its hands. The Catalanian CNT, because of its internal crisis, and because of the months of struggle in support of the big strike in Zaragoza the previous spring, did not even consider entering an alliance, even a limited one, with the separatists of the Generalitat, and were even less disposed to consider an alliance with the communists of the Workers and Peasants Bloc who were attempting to capitalize on the crisis in the CNT in order to build a new, independent trade union that would be allied with the UGT and the opposition trade unions. The CNT took a position against the strike—one of its leaders even opposed it in a radio address that was broadcast in Barcelona—and the anarchist militants would find themselves in a de facto alliance with the central government, against the strike that was spreading throughout Catalonia, and against the proclamation by the President of the Generalitat, Companys, of the “independence of the Catalanian State within the framework of the federal republic”. The leaders of the Catalanian nationalists were outflanked on their right by the Catalanian fascists under the police chief, Dencàs and his “green shirts”, who tried to provoke the workers by attacking the anarchists and disarming the members of the Workers Alliance, with their proclamation that they had “saved the honor” of Spain, and were pressured to negotiate an honorable surrender. Despite the initial success of the general strike—the first general strike in Catalonia which had not been called by the anarchists—the working class, especially in Barcelona, remained passive, with the apparent connivance of the Alliance and of the Catalanian nationalists and the de facto complicity of the anarchists with Madrid: for the CNT remained outside of the Workers Alliance, viewing it as a competitor, and because the CNT had shattered the united front the Madrid government was able to reestablish its authority without firing a shot.

The CNT also refused to join the Workers Alliance in Madrid, where the Socialist Party was by far the dominant force. On October 2, its representatives informed the delegates of the Alliance that they had resolved to join the insurrection if the CEDA were to join the government. On October 4, with the announcement of the CEDA's Cabinet appointments, they took a stand in favor of the launching of a peaceful general strike for

the purpose of putting pressure on the President of the Republic. As it turned out, the strike broke out spontaneously: the streets were full of workers who were ready to take up arms and to fight. The socialist leaders, however, did not issue any directives: they did not have enough arms. Finally, the insurrection in Madrid took the form of enthusiastic marches of crowds of people, a few isolated cases of firing on the forces of order, and commando raids on public buildings and barracks that were carried out for the most part by militants of the Socialist Youth. After forty-eight hours the government was able to recover the initiative and began to arrest militants involved in the insurrection and their leaders. The strike lasted until October 12, testifying to a will to fight that could not be translated into actions. The Madrid Workers Alliance, a simple organization for unity, a branch of the Madrid Socialist Party, was not the hoped-for organization of the united front and revolutionary struggle.

In Asturias, however, the situation was quite different. There, as we have seen, the CNT, under José María Martínez, joined the Workers Alliance, and the Communist Party also joined the Alliance at the last minute, coining the famous slogan, “*Unión, hermanos proletarios*” [Unity, proletarian brothers]. In all the mining towns local committees were formed which, beginning on the night of October 4, launched the general strike, occupying most of the cities and towns on October 5, ambushing and disarming the police, and occupying the provincial capital, Oviedo, on October 6. Reports concerning the failure of the insurrection in Barcelona and Madrid did not diminish the combative spirit of the miners, whose committees seized power, armed and organized the militias, enforcing a very strict revolutionary order, occupying buildings, confiscating businesses, and rationing food and raw materials. They seized the La Trubia, La Vega and Marigoya arsenals, taking 30,000 rifles and even artillery and a few armored vehicles, but, due to a lack of ammunition, used dynamite for the most part, the traditional weapon in the battles waged by the miners. Once it was certain that order had been restored in the rest of Spain, the government used all the means at its disposal, and, following the advice of Generals Goded and Franco, it appointed General López Ochoa as commander of the reconquest of Asturias, with a select corps of veteran troops, the Moroccans and the Foreign Legionaries. Oviedo fell on October 12, and the socialist Ramón González Peña resigned from the revolutionary committee. Resistance continued, and the army took one mining town after another until October 18, when the socialist Belarmino Tomás negotiated the surrender of the insurgents. Guerrillas carried on resistance here and there for weeks. The repression was terrible: more than 3,000 dead, 7,000 wounded, and more than 40,000 imprisoned, some of whom were tortured by the agents of Lieutenant Colonel Doval, which shocked broad sectors of the population. The state of emergency was enforced for three months and numerous municipal councils were temporarily dismissed, including those of Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. The military tribunals pronounced a certain number of death sentences: Sergeant Vázquez, who had joined the insurrection, was shot; the death sentence pronounced against the socialist deputies, Teodomiro Menéndez and Ramón González Peña, was commuted, as was the death sentence pronounced against Lieutenant Colonel Pérez Farras, the leader of the “insurgent” Catalan forces.²¹ Azaña,

²¹ The death sentence pronounced against Captain Frederic Escofet was also commuted. Other officers, loyal to the Government of the Generalitat, who participated in the

Largo Caballero and others were sentenced to various prison terms....²² Prieto fled to France.

After the insurrection of October 1934, Andreu Nin wrote that what the Asturian Commune needed to be victorious, but lacked, was the same thing that the Paris Commune lacked: a revolutionary party. This was also Trotsky's opinion, as well as the political line of the supporters of the founding of a new International, the Fourth International. It was also the opinion defended by the Socialist Youth, particularly by its leadership, as well as by the most advanced intellectual circles of the "*Caballerista*" wing of the Socialist Party and of the UGT. Yet it was at just at this moment, when unity on these foundations could have been achieved, and when the perspectives of these three currents seemed to be converging, that these currents would actually split apart in the most decisive manner with, on the one hand, the break between Nin and Trotsky, and on the other hand the displacement of the Socialist Youth into the orbit of the Communist Party.

During the years of the "third period", the international left opposition fought tooth and nail for the realization of a united workers front. In 1934 this perspective was on the verge of becoming a reality in France and Spain, as a result of both the groundswell in favor of unity that had swept the masses after the victory of Nazism, as well as due to the new policies of the communist parties all over the world and their abandonment of the tactic of denouncing their enemies as "social fascists". This beginning of the realization of the united front was for those who were its most devoted advocates a step forward, but it also constituted at the same time an enormous threat by creating the conditions for their isolation within small groups that were external to this united front. Based on the need of the revolutionaries to exist within this united front in order to make it "fruitful", Trotsky proposed to his French comrades what he called the policy of "entrism" in the Socialist Party. For him, what needed to be done first was to bring about unity between the small group of his supporters, the "Bolshevik-Leninists"—almost all of whom were former militants of the Communist Party who had been expelled for being "Trotskyists"—and the left wing of social democracy. It would then be possible, after inducing a split in social democracy, to seek the organizational foundations for an independent party that would then constitute enough of a pole of attraction to precipitate a crisis in the ranks of the official Communist Parties. The shift towards the left of the Socialist Party—which was even more evident in Spain than it was in the SFIO [the largest socialist party in France]—led Trotsky to insist that his supporters in Spain should engage in what came to be called the "French Turn", and negotiate their entry into the party of Largo Caballero.

October insurrection, who were condemned to death for their involvement, were Joan Ricart, Salas Ginestar and López Gatell [Editor's Note].

²² The members of the Cabinet of the Government of the Generalitat were also imprisoned and remained in jail until the elections of February 1936. They had been tried in May 1935 and sentenced, in accordance with the prosecutor's wishes, to thirty years in prison [Editor's Note].

The failure of the uprisings of 1934 had by no means brought a halt to the leftward swing of important sectors in the Socialist Party and the UGT. Largo Caballero, swept up by the natural movement of radicalization that was affecting the masses, acted as its spokesman and became in turn, by virtue of his activities, one of the most powerful factors of its acceleration. While in prison, the old reformist militant discovered the classics of Marxism, and after reading *The State and Revolution*, became an enthusiastic devotee of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. A whole galaxy of brilliant intellectuals rallied around him, such as Araquistain, Carlos de Baraibar, and Alvarez del Vayo, who would form the editorial staff of the weekly paper, *Claridad*, whose mission was to propagate the new revolutionary orientation. Luis Araquistain summed it up in the following way:

“I think that the Second and Third Internationals are virtually dead: the reformist, democratic and parliamentary socialism embodied by the Second International is dead; and the revolutionary socialism of the Third International that takes its orders and directives for the whole world from Moscow is dead, too. I am convinced that a Fourth International must be born that would be based on the previous two Internationals, taking from one its revolutionary tactics, and from the other the principle of national independence.”²³

These revolutionaries were followed and supported, and sometimes preceded, by the Socialist Youth. Together they waged campaigns for what they called the “Bolshevization” of the Socialist Party, which they wanted to transform into a revolutionary party. The newspaper of the Madrid Socialist Youth, *Renovación* [Renewal], issued an appeal to the Trotskyists of the Communist Left, whom the editors considered “the best theoreticians and the best revolutionaries in Spain”, to join the Party²⁴ and the Socialist Youth for the purpose of hastening this necessary transformation. This was a threshold that was crossed, starting in 1934, by some important Trotskyist militants, most notably by José Loredó Aparicio.

Most Spanish Trotskyists, however, were not convinced by Trotsky’s arguments; and they were even less moved by the appeals of those whom Trotsky characterized as “the magnificent socialist youth which has spontaneously arrived at the idea of the Fourth International”. Despite the opposition of L. Fersen and Esteban Bilbao, in the autumn of 1934 a large majority of the members of the Communist Left refused, in exchange for what would in its view be nothing but a “circumstantial advantage”, to “merge in an amorphous conglomeration that will shatter on its first contact with reality”;²⁵ in other words, it refused to join the Party and the Socialist Youth, whose new orientations it considered to be complete demagoguery and whose revolutionism it deemed to be purely verbal. In fact, the experience of the Workers Alliance allowed the militants of the Communist Left to move towards the positions of the Workers and Peasants Bloc due to

²³ L. Araquistain, Introduction to F. Largo Caballero, *Discursos a los trabajadores* [Speeches to the Workers], pp. xi-xvi.

²⁴ G. Munis, *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria* [Milestones of Defeat, Promise of Victory], p. 178.

²⁵ *Comunismo*, September 1934, p. 6.

their everyday collaboration, especially in Catalonia. The Spanish Trotskyists also sought to break out of the isolation to which they were condemned by activities restricted to the small confines of their organization, and to find a wider field for immediate action, while simultaneously responding to the passionate yearning for unity that was sweeping through the masses and which was further reinforced by the Asturian insurrection. Despite their differences with the Maurinists on a certain number of important points, they considered them, as Andrade writes today,²⁶ to be the current that was “closest” to them and therefore “more subject to influence”, and they were also aware of the fact that merger with them would give them a wider field of operations in Catalonia and also the basic elements of a party on a national scale.

Extensive work in common brought the two organizations closer on every level. The Communist Left broke with Trotsky, and the Workers and Peasants Bloc refused to join the forces of the “right wing” organization on the international terrain. Both organizations were in agreement concerning their support for the formula of a “socialist democratic revolution” in Spain and for the need to form a new party. They merged on September 29, 1935, in Barcelona, to form the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* [Workers Party of Marxist Unification] (POUM), which its founders viewed as a stage on the road to the unification of the “revolutionary Marxists” in Spain. The resolution passed at the founding congress of the POUM proclaimed:

“The great Revolutionary Socialist (Communist) Party will be formed by gathering into a single whole the existing revolutionary Marxist nuclei, in addition to the new revolutionary wave that will go into action as it is swept along by Marxist unity, and the elements that, demoralized due to the fragmentation of the workers movement, had remained temporarily inactive.”²⁷

The mission of the new party was “to win over to this point of view the really Marxist sectors of the socialist and communist parties so that both, rallying to the idea of a single revolutionary socialist party, will proclaim their support for a Congress of Revolutionary Marxist Unification”.²⁸

The new party situated itself in the communist tradition, that of the October Revolution and of the first four congresses of the Communist International, under the banner of “Lenin and Trotsky”, but it was careful to remain independent of “Trotskyism” and its associated organizations that were in favor of forming the Fourth International. It had around 8,000 militants, a real working class base of support, especially in Catalonia, in cities like Lérida and Gerona, and more isolated groups in Andalusia, Estremadura, the Basque Country and Asturias. Its leaders were all men who were well known in the workers movement, not only Maurín and Nin, but also Luis Portela and Juan Andrade,

²⁶ Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 6. It should also be pointed out that in 1933, for example, the Workers and Peasants Bloc’s daily newspaper in Barcelona, *Adelante*, published articles by Trotsky.

²⁷ *La Batalla*, October 18, 1935.

²⁸ *What Does the POUM Want?*, p. 9.

former leaders of the Socialist Youth and of the first Communist Party, Luis García Palacios, a former leader of the Communist Youth, David Rey and Pere Bonet, pioneers of Communism and of the Catalanian Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees, and Julián Gorkin, a founding member the communist party and former agent of the Communist International. In Catalonia, on the basis of the CNT local trade unions whose leaders were militants of the Workers and Peasants Bloc and which were therefore expelled from the CNT, the new party even formed a trade union organization, the *Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical* [Workers Federation of Trade Union Unity] (FOUS), whose general secretary was Andreu Nin, which included most of the organized workers in Tarragona, Lérida and Gerona, and which claimed to have a larger membership than the Catalanian UGT.

The founding of the POUM by the merger of the two organizations which had inspired and given direction to the Workers Alliance took place precisely during the period of the decline of the Alliance, and may have indirectly contributed to the fact that the socialist left would distance itself from the POUM. But in the meantime the new turn in world Stalinist policy was implemented, which took the form of the new line adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. It was supposed to be a step beyond the “united front”—and it was presented as its intensification or its extension—and was known as the “popular front”, but it was actually quite the opposite, since it called for the alliance of the workers organizations with the republican parties.

Numerically weak, the official communist organizations, once they broke out of their isolation, an isolation whose essential factor was their own sectarian politics, benefited from favorable conditions for the rapid growth of their influence. In that pre-revolutionary atmosphere, the prestige of the Russian Revolution, whose traditions and continuity they sought to embody, was immense. They also enjoyed the advantages of their international connections, their organizational capabilities, their experience, considerable material means and the major impact of the antifascist campaign waged by the Communist Parties all over the world on an anxious Spanish population.

However, while the left wing trend sweeping the Socialist Party offered a favorable terrain for its influence, it also aroused certain reservations that were expressed in private by the POUM’s leaders with respect to the kind of “leftism” that this trend represented. The revolutionary phraseology of Caballero and his lieutenants was not based on any serious analysis; it was instead based on a profound ignorance of the nature of the Stalinist phenomenon, on an almost total absence of concrete directives, and on an excessive faith in their own forces. Sure of their hundreds of thousands of adherents, the socialist and UGT leaders did not seriously consider the eventual risks posed by the “establishment of cells” by the Communist Party. Furthermore, for many left wing socialists the merger of the socialist and communist parties seemed like the miraculous solution to the division that was the source of weakness, and the necessary perspective for victory. It also seemed to be inscribed in the very nature of things, as the result of a convergent evolution, “towards the left” on the part of their own party, and “towards the right” on the part of the Communist Party. Some Socialist leaders—most notably Alvarez del Vayo, the Vice President of the Madrid Socialist organization—went even farther and

saw the PCE and, more generally, the USSR and the Communist International, as the only “effective” forces, the keystone that would make it possible to overcome divisions, hollow rhetoric, and, finally, the impotence of their own party.

The alliance of those who became, consciously or not, agents of Stalinism in the ranks of the Spanish workers movement and of those, much more numerous, for whom from now on only slight nuances separated the two parties that had been opposed for so long, led to rapid realignments. One group of leaders, including Alvarez del Vayo and two leaders of the national office of the UGT, Amaro del Rosal and Edmundo Rodríguez, were openly allied with the PCE, and some people would later refer to them as “agents” of the PCE. Above all, however, the leaders of the Socialist Youth also sided with the PCE and made rapid progress along the same road. The young secretary of the Socialist Youth, Santiago Carrillo, and his main lieutenant, Federico Melchor, self-declared anti-Stalinists and anti-reformists, who in 1934 passed themselves off as Trotskyist sympathizers, returned from a trip to Moscow in 1935 convinced of the need to work for “unity” and henceforth devoted all their efforts to bringing it about: on April 1, 1936, the minuscule Communist Youth under Fernando Claudín merged with the powerful organization of the Socialist Youth to form the *Juventud Socialista Unificada* [Unified Socialist Youth] (JSU), which subsequently constituted the principal vehicle for Stalinist influence in Spain. At about the same time, the socialists of Catalonia, behind one of Largo Caballero’s lieutenants, Rafael Vidiella, also participated in a process that would lead to merger with the Communist Party of Catalonia to form the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* [Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia] (PSUC), which joined the Third International immediately after its founding Congress.

This phenomenon was obviously important. The fact that the open crisis in the Socialist Party, as a reaction against its reformist policy under the pressure of the workers and peasants, in the context of a government crisis, would begin to find its resolution in a reinforcement of the neo-reformist current represented by the communists who held Stalinist positions, was definitely much more important than the convergence of revolutionaries, “the union of the Marxists”, that gave birth to the POUM. The decline of the overall influence of the Workers Alliance, the rapprochement between socialists and communists, the increasing strength of the latter and their impact within the workers movement in favor of the supporters of yet another alliance with the republican parties, also posed the risk that the POUM would find itself cut off from the front that was in the process of being formed, and would also face the threat of being not only geographically, but also politically isolated, right after the Asturian insurrection proved that not one of the problems that lie at the heart of the Spanish crisis was even close to being solved by peaceful and parliamentary means and that civil war was, more than ever, in the offing.

The center-right government of Lerroux seemed to be incapable of dealing with the situation. Its Minister of Agriculture, the Christian Democrat, Giménez Fernández, sought to square the circle with the aid of social Catholicism by proposing an agrarian reform program that did not really harm the interests of the big landowners. The CEDA withdrew from the Government because the President of the Republic, Alcalá Zamora, refused to comply with the demand made by Gil-Robles that the Asturian socialist

deputies who had been condemned to death should be executed. The CEDA rejoined the Government, however, this time with Gil-Robles as Minister of War, which allowed him to assign the highest posts to the generals who were members of the *Unión Militar Española* [Spanish Military Association] (UME), which had been founded by Sanjurjo for the purpose of preparing the *pronunciamiento* which seemed, more and more obviously, to be the solution, regardless of the risks that it entailed: General Francisco Franco was Chief of Staff, General Fanjul was Undersecretary of State, General Rodríguez del Barrio was Inspector of the Army, and all of them were among the leading members of the conspiracy. The CEDA was itself in danger at any moment of being outflanked on its right, whether by its own youth organization, the *Juventud de Acción Popular* [Youth for People's Action] (JAP), led by Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco's brother-in-law, an admirer of Hitler and Mussolini, and a persecutor of "Jews, Freemasons and Marxists", or by the Falange, with its typically fascist programs and methods, whose undisputed leader was the young José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who was also an agent of the Italian fascist government.

The President of the Republic finally resolved to bring these two years of reaction—the "*bienio negro*" ["two black years"], as it would be called—to a conclusion by dissolving the ungovernable Cortes after the financial scandals that ultimately discredited Lerroux, and after the leader of the main parliamentary party, Gil Robles, issued a series of declarations of war and threats against the parliamentary republic. "On top", nothing else could be done. "At the bottom", nothing more could be borne. New elections, on the basis of political alliances, would permit the ruling classes to gain time before the confrontation that was increasingly more inevitable, at least in their view.

5. The Popular Front

In 1933, the electoral law, which necessarily favored the largest organizations in the allocation of representative positions covering huge electoral districts, worked to the advantage of the right wing thanks to the fragmentation of the coalition between the republicans and the socialists which resulted from the first two years of the left wing government. After the reactionary years of the "*bienio negro*", however, it worked in the opposite sense, ensuring the victory of the bloc—the future Popular Front—within which one could find workers parties and bourgeois republicans. It would be incorrect, however, to attribute to this electoral law the sole responsibility for the reconstitution of a left wing coalition.

First of all, the attempts by the right to extend the wave of repression after the insurrection of 1934 favored a rapprochement between the left and the republicans: the persecutions, the arrest of Azaña, the way Azaña and those who were closely associated with him were viciously hounded by certain political and government elements, and the same treatment meted out to the workers organizations, favored their moving closer to one another on the political terrain, which was objectively impossible after the events of Casas Viejas, responsibility for which was attributed to the republicans in 1933. Later, the fierce attacks of the extreme right separated the center from its liberal elements, some of whom joined more leftist organizations. A political realignment took place around the

*Izquierda Republicana*²⁹ [Republican Left] led by Azaña and Casares Quiroga, involving the *Unión Republicana* [Republican Union] led by Martínez Barrio, who broke with the radicals, and Sánchez Román's *Partido Nacional Republicano*.

The following factors were favorable in the eyes of numerous militant workers: enduring repression or fighting the wave of repression that battered the militants of the workers organizations after 1934, making a clean break with the center-right coalition, the republican elements were, if not totally, at least to a large extent, rehabilitated. On the other hand, over the course of the last few months of 1935, the fascist danger had continued to grow not only in Spain but everywhere else in the world, where it was furthered by Hitler's victory. The propaganda of the official communist parties, but also that of the dissidents of the POUM, the socialists and, to a certain degree, the liberals, placed the fascist danger at the center of the concerns of the working class. The communists therefore became the champions of anti-fascism conceived as the broadest possible alliance of all the enemies of fascism, even those who were outside the workers movement. The new combination of forces led to a new alliance, a new edition of left unity, of the alliance of all the workers parties and bourgeois republicans. On the one hand, the right wing of the Socialist Party, led by Besteiro, and its center, with Prieto, had the best arguments in favor of such an alliance with Azaña; on the other hand, the left wing, impressed by the USSR, its economic achievements, the five year plans, and the collectivization of agriculture, once again moved closer to the communists who had been involved in a campaign advocating the Popular Front for several months.

It was under these conditions, beginning in December, that the leadership of the Socialist Party resolved to form an alliance with the left wing republicans. Having clandestinely returned from France where he had taken refuge after the events of October 1934, Indalecio Prieto convinced the executive committee to support such an alliance; Largo Caballero, who led the dissenting minority, resigned from his position on the executive committee. The game was underway. Within one week negotiations concerning the electoral alliance commenced, and then, on January 15, these negotiations were concluded with the signing of a pact of alliance. The program of the new coalition was a moderate program that the socialists openly described as "bourgeois democratic": to restore the policies of the first years of the Republic with regard to religion, education and regional autonomy; to resume the process of agrarian reform; to implement measures of State intervention to stimulate the economy; and amnesty for all political prisoners. In every electoral district, jointly agreed-upon lists were drawn up in advance to allocate the elected positions among the various component organizations of the alliance. The Socialist Party and the Communist Party both worked energetically to have this program adopted, which they considered to be a minimum program, without participating in the

²⁹ The Republican Left party was formed by the merger of various republican organizations after the electoral fiasco of November 1933. The organizations that merged to form the Republican Left in April 1934 were: *Acción Republicana*, led by Azaña; the *Organización Republicana Gallega Autónoma* [Independent Galician Republican Organization], under Casares Quiroga; and the *Partido Radical-Socialista* led by Marcelino Domingo [Editor's Note].

government—any participation in the Cabinet was vigorously rejected by the tendency led by Largo Caballero, which threatened to break with the Socialist Party should the latter accept any cabinet positions. The pact of electoral alliance was signed by the Republican Left, the *Unión Republicana*, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the UGT, the Socialist Youth, the POUM, the Syndicalist Party and the *Esquerra Catalana*.

Juan Andrade's signing of this pact aroused bitter polemics among the extreme left throughout the world. Trotsky denounced what he called the "treachery of the POUM", writing: "Electoral *technique* cannot justify the treacherous *policy* constituted by the launching of a *common program* with the bourgeoisie."³⁰ Nin would justify the conduct of his party by claiming that the mass movement and its democratic illusions were so powerful that the POUM had no choice but to join the movement during the elections, or else be completely isolated and forfeit any effective influence among the workers. In fact, the more persuasive argument, which undoubtedly swept away any reticence and principles, was the one that, at that very same time, led the CNT to temporarily suspend its traditional abstentionist campaign and to work discreetly but effectively for the electoral victory of the Popular Front: the prospect of the 30,000 Asturian prisoners being released from their prisons overnight. This determination to engage in effective solidarity with the insurrectionists of 1934 consolidated the will of the working class militants to build a "legal" wall against another period of right wing government, even though—and this was the case at least for the left wing of the Socialist Party, the POUM and the CNT—these militants did not have the slightest illusion about the reality of the fascist threat, regardless of the outcome of the elections.

On February 16 the electoral slate of the Popular Front was victorious by a slim margin of a few hundred thousand votes, but its candidates won a comfortable majority in the Cortes. The prearranged division of the seats in the Cortes delivered 84 deputies to Azaña's party, 37 to Martínez Barrio's party, 38 to the *Esquerra* led by Companys, 90 to the Socialist Party, 16 to the Communist Party, 1 to the POUM—who was represented in the Cortes by Joaquín Maurín—and 1 to the Syndicalist Party—represented by Pestaña. The CEDA still had 86 deputies, and *Renovación Española* only 11.

There was a persistent rumor that spread among government military circles to the effect that General Franco had proposed to the head of the government that the army should intervene to annul the elections. The head of the government, however, preferred that one of the leaders of the winning side should have the responsibility of making that decision. Azaña was then made responsible for forming a government: he maintained the state of emergency proclaimed by his predecessor on the eve of the elections.

From the moment that Azaña took office, the tide of history once again seems to have rolled back: on February 22, all the political prisoners were amnestied; on February 23, rent payments in Andalusia and Estremadura were abolished, as a guarantee that the pace of agrarian reform would be accelerated. The Basque municipal councils that had been

³⁰ L. Trotsky, "La trahison du Parti ouvrier d'unification marxiste", *La Révolution espagnole, 1936-1939*, p. 98.

suspended in 1934 were reinstated; Companys was released from prison and once again assumed the leadership of the Generalitat of Catalonia. Two generals suspected of participating in a conspiracy were dispatched to commands far from the capital: Franco was sent to the Canary Islands and Godea to the Balearic Islands. On April 4, Azaña presented his legislative program to the Cortes: it called for the precise enactment of the electoral program of the Popular Front, a renewed and serious agrarian reform, massive investments in the construction of schools, more independence for municipal governments, a statute of autonomy for the Basque provinces, and the rehiring of all the workers who had been fired for political and trade union-related reasons since 1933. He solemnly reaffirmed that he would not nationalize the land, banking or industry; he promised the right wing parties that he would postpone the municipal elections; and he asked the right wing and left wing parties to play the parliamentary game and to allow his reform program to be implemented legally.

From then on, the government found itself in a difficult situation. Since the announcement of the electoral victory, enormous “victory marches” took place in all the big cities in Spain; in Valencia and Oviedo the prison doors were thrown open and the prisoners freed without waiting for the amnesty to be proclaimed. All over Spain, there were incidents involving clashes between the masses of demonstrators and the police units that were guarding the churches and the offices of the reactionary newspapers. Throughout the country, strikes broke out demanding the immediate rehiring of the workers who had been fired for political reasons, the payment of back wages to the workers who had just been released from prison, across-the-board wage increases and better working conditions. The unrest was if possible even more generalized in the countryside where “*asantamientos*”—land occupations by poor peasants—were also the source of disputes, and sometimes led to armed confrontations between demonstrators and civil guards. The extreme right engaged in terrorist actions. On March 13, a group of Falangist students tried to assassinate a socialist deputy, killing his police bodyguard. On March 14, a mob attacked the offices of Calvo Sotelo’s newspaper, *La Nación*, and tried to burn the building in which they were located. On that same day there were four fatalities in Logroño as a result of a clash between army units and peasant demonstrators. On March 19, unknown persons opened fire on the home of Largo Caballero; on April 13, Falangists assassinated a judge after he sentenced a Falangist to thirty years in prison for murdering a newspaper vendor who sold working class papers.

The left socialists, especially the Socialist Youth, were in the front ranks of these “victory marches”, where they called for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Their press drew numerous parallels between the Russia of 1917 and the Spain of 1936, comparing Azaña to Kerensky, and depicting Largo Caballero as the “Spanish Lenin”. Azaña tried in vain, during the course of several personal discussions in early March, to persuade Largo Caballero to restrain these demonstrations. The socialist leader assured Azaña of his loyalty to the Popular Front, but he also reproached him for the slow pace with which he was implementing his program. *Claridad*, which had become a daily beginning on April 6, fanning the flames of the enthusiasm of the socialists, announced imminent victory. On May Day, “the great army of the workers in their march forward to the summit of power” celebrated the holiday, and 10,000 members of the Socialist Youth, in uniform and with

their fists in the air, marched in military formation, singing revolutionary songs and proclaiming the slogans of “Workers Government” and “Red Army”. The socialists of Madrid not only proclaimed their support for the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, but also for socialist-communist unity, trade union unification, the transformation of Spain into a “confederation of Iberian peoples”, and the recognition of the right of national self-determination—including for Morocco. The congress held by the CNT in Zaragoza received a trenchant note from Largo Caballero, who would later say that “The revolution that we want can only be carried out by violent means.... To establish socialism in Spain it is necessary to defeat the capitalist class and establish our power”,³¹ and he called upon the republicans to step aside.

In the CNT, the FAI emerged victorious from the Zaragoza Congress, which concluded on May 15 in the old Aragonese city, draped in red and black flags, and which was characterized by César Lorenzo as “an impressive display of revolutionary mysticism, optimism and collective enthusiasm”.³² The defeated *trentistas* surrendered unconditionally, and in that atmosphere the “anarcho-Bolsheviks” chose not to defend their plans for military organization for the struggle against a fascist coup d’état. With regard to the program that was adopted at the Congress of Zaragoza, César Lorenzo writes that “childish dreams and utopias were given free rein without any consideration for the particular conditions of Spain, the international situation, the historical moment or how the new promised land was to be reached”.³³

In fact, the revolutionary enthusiasm that swept over the ranks of the left socialists and the anarchosyndicalists was far from providing the means or clearing the way for the victorious revolution. Neither left socialists nor anarchosyndicalists formulated any short-term perspectives, unifying goals or concrete objectives. The revolutionary phrase ruled supreme in this movement, a double reflection of the search, on the part of an inexperienced generation of young people, for a revolutionary way forward, and on the part of the left socialist leaders for an instrument with which they could exert pressure on their own party and their republican allies.

The first counterattack, however, came from within the Socialist Party itself. In Cuenca, on May 1, during a local election campaign, Prieto delivered a speech that constituted a veritable government program. He denounced the calamities of violence and anarchy which were in his view responsible for the emergence of fascism, and he claimed that revolutionary agitation, in the absence of the necessary means, could only lead to a “socialization of poverty” and that this would increase the risk of provoking a military coup d’état, a coup whose ideal leader, because of his qualities, would be General Franco. He therefore appealed to the workers to be reasonable, to avoid “playing the game” of fascism by sowing fear over their “exaggerated” demands, and he advocated a coalition government with the republicans that would implement a program of progressive and cautious reforms, agrarian reform and industrialization within the framework of a modern

³¹ *Claridad*, June 15, 1936.

³² C. Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, p. 935.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

capitalism. But Prieto's time had not yet arrived: when the Cortes, after a process in which Prieto played a leading role, deposed Alcalá Zamora, who was replaced by Azaña as President, Prieto, due to the resistance of the socialist left and because of his fear of triggering a split, had to refuse to accept the position of Prime Minister, which was then given to Casares Quiroga, a republican from Galicia.

The tumultuous rise of the workers and peasants movement revived the contradictions within and between the parties. While Largo Caballero and his supporters competed with the militants of the CNT to organize strikes and demonstrations, the Communist Party adopted an extremely cautious policy that brought it closer to Prieto. In a speech in Zaragoza, its secretary, José Díaz, emphasized that "the employers are provoking and fanning the flames of these strikes by the expedient policy of sabotage", and denounced the intervention of "agents provocateurs".³⁴ Nin, the political secretary of the POUM, argued that "every setback suffered by the reactionaries, every step forward by the revolution, have been the direct results of the initiative and of the extra-legal action of the proletariat".³⁵ These disagreements were not restricted to polemical exchanges in the press: on April 13, in Écija, Prieto, González Peña and Belarmino Tomás were greeted with gunfire that probably originated from among the ranks of the Socialist Youth; in Málaga, in June, a leader of the UGT, the son of a leader of the CNT, and a socialist leader were murdered in succession.

This tension, the outbreak within the workers parties and trade unions of conflicts on this scale and of such violence, can be explained: in fact, it was the question of power itself that was being posed by the demands of the workers, who were engaged in increasingly more resolute general strikes. The Catalan metal workers had won the 44 hour work week in 1934, but in 1935 they had to work 48 hours for the same weekly wage they earned in 1934. They demanded the back pay for this extra four hours a day for the previous 15 months and rejected a compromise offered by the Generalitat of a 40 hour week for 44 hours' wages. The railroad workers demanded the restoration of their 1931-1933 wage levels, and the railroad companies vainly offered to open up their books to prove that they could not possibly satisfy this demand. The Madrid tram workers told their employers that two could play that game: they decided to operate the tram system on their own account and collected donations that amounted to considerable sums.

But it was the construction workers strike in Madrid that pushed social and political contradictions to their breaking point. The strike was proclaimed on June 1 at a general assembly convoked by the CNT and the UGT: the workers demanded a significant wage hike, a 36 hour week, one month of paid vacation, and the recognition of work-related illnesses, such as rheumatism. But the employers resisted. The CNT then called upon the striking workers to apply the principles of libertarian communism, to help themselves to the food in the markets and warehouses, and to eat without paying in restaurants. *Claridad* and *Mundo Obrero* denounced these directives as "anarchist provocations". An arbitrated settlement drafted by a mixed panel of adjudicators partially satisfied the

³⁴ José Díaz, *Tres años de lucha*, p. 164.

³⁵ A. Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

workers' wage demands, increasing the lowest scale of wages by 5% and the other categories by 10%. On June 20, the members of the UGT construction workers unions voted in favor of accepting the settlement, following their leaders' advice. The CNT, however, called for the strike to continue and called the UGT leaders "yellow". The secretary of the UGT construction workers union, Edmundo Domínguez, a PCE sympathizer, declared that the strike could "degenerate into a serious threat to the regime", while the CNT leaders David Antona and Cipriano Mera issued an appeal for "revolutionary unity" against the employers and the government that supported them. There were riots in the vicinity of construction sites: there were fatalities on both sides. The right wing press asserted that the workers had been coerced into going on strike by "anarchist terrorism"; the Falangists, under the leadership of Fernández Cuesta, carried out attacks on the strike pickets, and the CNT militants replied decisively with a machine gun attack at a café, killing three of José Antonio Primo de Rivera's bodyguards. The government intervened by shutting down the offices of the CNT and arresting Antona and Cipriano Mera. The situation became very difficult for Largo Caballero, accused by the CNT of being responsible for causing the UGT to play the role of strikebreaker, while the right wing of his party accused him of having performed the role of sorcerer's apprentice and for having unleashed the anarchists. The socialist congress was postponed from June to September after the incident at Écija, but on June 30, the election for positions on the Executive Committee—for which supporters of Largo Caballero were among the candidates—delivered a majority to the supporters of Prieto, so that González Peña became the President and Ramón Lamonedá Secretary of the Executive Committee. A split appeared to be imminent, but Largo Caballero lost control of the party apparatus at precisely the moment when it appeared that he had also lost control of the mass movement.

Preparations by the oligarchy were proceeding at an accelerated pace. This important fact was not, however, the most spectacular one, since the progress made by the Falange, its daily attacks and shootings, its attempts to mobilize its followers in military formations and to break the workers and peasants movement by means of terrorism and assassinations, attracted a lot of attention. The really decisive factor, however, was the progress of the preparations being undertaken by the military commanders organized in the *Unión Militar Española*.

The mounting disagreements between Generals Franco and Goded after the elections inhibited the progress of the conspiracy. Its leader, Sanjurjo, who was living in Portugal, met with Nazi leaders in April in Germany, making the necessary contacts and receiving promises of aid. The fascist government in Rome supplied money and weapons. The financier Juan March was sent to London to drum up support. General Mola, the former Director General of Security under the Monarchy, who had been appointed military commander of the garrison at Navarra, assumed responsibility for overall direction of the revolt, supported by Colonels Varela and Yagüe who ensured communications with the other military commanders. A new plan was devised, and it had to be modified in April, two days before the date set for the *pronunciamiento*. This new plan, however, allowed for the recruitment of two important commanders who were assumed to be republicans, Generals Queipo de Llano and Cabanellas, and thanks to Franco, Admiral Salas, who was

supposed to bring the Navy onto the side of the conspiracy. The final plans called for the military uprising to take place on July 10: the conspirators obtained the agreement of José Antonio Primo de Rivera and Calvo Sotelo, and everyone, for the time being, accepted the authority of General Sanjurjo.

These preparations could not take place without being noticed. First, because the police were aware of the conspiracy, and the police informed the government. And also because a secret society of republican military officers—the Air Force general, Núñez del Prado, Colonel Asensio Torrado, and Captain Pérez Farras—kept close tabs on the conspirators and reported on their activities to the government. The government, however, did not really intend to intervene against the plot of the Generals, which was both a threat to Spain’s political regime as well as the last line of defense for its economic and social regime. It was therefore with full knowledge of the facts that, in a press release issued on March 18, the government denounced the “unjust accusations” directed against the officers who were “loyal servants of the constituted power and the guarantee of obedience to the popular will”, claiming that the authors of these accusations displayed a “criminal and obstinate desire to undermine the army”.³⁶ In June, the Prime Minister of the Republic, Casares Quiroga, stubbornly denied the veracity of all rumors concerning a military conspiracy and characterized the warnings issued by Prieto as “fantasies of male menopause”.³⁷ For this bourgeois republican, the main question at that time was, as Gabriel Jackson noted,³⁸ the construction workers strike in Madrid, and he was anxious to stay in the good books of the leaders of the army against the greatest danger facing society. To try to forestall the threat of a civil war that would marginalize it, the Popular Front government of the petty bourgeoisie could only proceed along a zig-zag path, lashing out weakly in alternation at each of its adversaries on the right and the left, in order not to surrender defenselessly to one or the other. In fact, it was already condemned to death, and the tragic events of July, the double assassinations of Lieutenant Castillo and of the right wing leader Calvo Sotelo, only provided the *pronunciamento* with the context that conferred more credibility on its motives.

On July 12, Lieutenant José del Castillo of the Assault Guards, an instructor of the Socialist Youth and a person who was hated by the Falangist *pistoleros*, was gunned down. His comrades, convinced that the government would never prosecute the assassins, took vengeance into their own hands by ambushing one of the masterminds of the assassination: on the following day, at dawn, in uniform, they took Calvo Sotelo from his home and killed him. The right wing press and politicians denounced the government, availing themselves of the pretext that the murder allowed them to justify their long-prepared coup. The workers sought arms. The socialist leaders called upon the government to arm the workers. The President of the Republic expressed his confidence in Mola’s “loyalty”; later, when he was notified of the uprising, he spoke these “historic” words: “They have arisen? Good. I am going to bed.”³⁹

³⁶ Note dated March 18, 1936.

³⁷ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Quoted by Peirats, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 138.

The military uprising began on the night of July 17-18. The civil war was begun, at the initiative of the oligarchy, in order to crush the revolution that the revolutionaries did not know how to organize for victory.

6. Revolt and revolution

The rebels' plans called for a rapid victory, and in order to achieve this goal they had resolved to employ even the most radical measures. Determined to do whatever was necessary to crush the revolutionary workers movement, to "regenerate" Spain and finally exorcise the specter of the revolution, the counterrevolutionary generals never suspected that their initiative would actually liberate the Spanish workers and peasants from their hesitations and their divisions, and unleash the very revolution that they were trying to prevent.

The movement led by General Franco after July 19 started with the army in Morocco where, on the night of the 17th, the rebel officers shattered all resistance. Contrary to all evidence, the republican government denied that the situation was serious, and, at 3:00 p.m. on July 18, announced that a "vast uprising against the Republic has been thwarted" and that "it had no support on the peninsula". That same night, a Cabinet meeting, at which Prieto was present, once again refused to comply with Largo Caballero's demand, in the name of the UGT, to distribute arms to the workers. Playing the parliamentary game, the Socialist and Communist Parties, in a joint communiqué, declared that the "government is sure that it has adequate means to crush this criminal move", and proclaimed that "the government commands and the Popular Front obeys".⁴⁰

That same night, the CNT and the UGT called for a general strike and on the 19th, at four in the morning, when battles were underway throughout the country, the Casares Quiroga government resigned.

Azaña immediately summoned Martínez Barrio to form a republican government that included, on its right wing, a representative of Sánchez Román's group, which was hostile to the Popular Front, with General Miaja as Minister of War. This last attempt to reach some kind of agreement with the leaders of the revolt failed due to the determination of hundreds of thousands of workers who surged into the streets of Madrid and demanded arms. Martínez Barrio refused to comply with the UGT's ultimatum to distribute weapons, and resigned. A few hours later, a left republican government was formed: Doctor Giral, a personal friend of Azaña, officially endorsed what had already taken place: the arming of the workers, organized and carried out by the workers themselves in order to confront the uprising of the generals.

In the resulting battles, numerous factors explain the successes and failures of both sides and especially the attitude of the various units of the two police corps, the Civil Guards

⁴⁰ Pierre Broué and Émile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, tr. Tony White, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1970, p. 100.

and Assault Guards, some of which joined the military uprising while others fought against it. Overall, however, insofar as we may disregard the element of surprise, and in consideration of the fact that the rebels' *modus operandi* was everywhere the same, it can be said that the uprising of the army was successful wherever a lack of political understanding on the part of the workers leaders did not allow for adequate preparations and the implementation of a plan of resistance, or wherever the workers allowed themselves to be taken in by false declarations of loyalty: "To this extent, it may reasonably be claimed that the key to the outcome of the early fighting lay less in the actions of the rebels than in the reactions of the workers, parties, and unions and their capacity to organize themselves militarily; in short, in their political outlook. In effect, each time that the workers' organizations allowed themselves to be paralyzed by their anxiety to respect Republican legality and each time that their leaders were satisfied with what was said by the officers, the latter prevailed. On the other hand, the *Movimiento* was repulsed whenever the workers had time to arm and whenever they set about the destruction of the Army as such, independently of their leaders' positions or the attitude of 'legitimate' public authorities."⁴¹

In almost all of Andalusia, the *pronunciamento* was victorious, and proceeded in accordance with an almost uniform pattern: the government and the authorities vouched for the loyalty of the army, and the workers were persuaded not to demand that arms should be distributed to them: taken by surprise, they were then defeated after bitter but improvised resistance. This is what took place in Cádiz, Algeciras, Córdoba, and Granada, where the fighting in the working class neighborhoods lasted until July 24. In Seville, General Queipo de Llano won a dramatic victory by seizing the radio station with a detachment of Civil Guards and broadcasting radio announcements claiming that he had a large body of troops. The workers leaders—socialists, communists and anarchists—allowed themselves to be deceived while the first Moroccan troops arrived by airlift, and the armed resistance of the workers commenced too late. The working class district of Triana held out for an entire week before being "cleansed" in a veritable slaughterhouse of hand-to-hand fighting that claimed 20,000 victims. Only one major city in Andalusia, Málaga, remained in the hands of the workers because, since the military had launched the coup on July 17, the workers had a breathing space before the assault. They used this opportunity to take action in response: a CNT-UGT Defense Committee assumed command over operations. The houses surrounding the barracks were set on fire and the soldiers, faced with the threat of being burned to death in their quarters, preferred to surrender.

In Zaragoza, the great stronghold of the CNT, the military won an unexpected victory. The local leader of the CNT, Miguel Abos, trusted the governor and the commander of the local garrison, General Cabanellas, both of whom were republicans and also, like Abos, Freemasons. He successfully convinced the local CNT militants that it was not necessary to take up arms. Only on the 19th, when the first arrests of CNT militants began to take place, did the members of the CNT in Zaragoza understand that they had been deceived and they issued the call for the general strike. It was too late and, despite the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

resolve of the workers—the strike would last more than a week—the 30,000 workers of Zaragoza organized in their trade unions were defeated without even having been able to offer any resistance at all.

The events that took place in Oviedo were similar to the above accounts. In Oviedo, some working class leaders grasped the nature of the situation and the left socialist newspaper edited by Javier Bueno, *Avance*, defying the censorship, announced the military uprising on the afternoon of the 18th, and called upon the workers to take up arms. The commander of the local garrison, a republican, Colonel Aranda, however, managed to bring about an extraordinary stand-down with the complicity of the right wing socialists and the republicans, who continued, despite the warnings of Bueno and the CNT, to trust Aranda. Following Aranda's advice, three columns of miners equipped with improvised weapons departed for Madrid to help defend the capital, while the Civil Guards concentrated in Oviedo, which they successfully conquered. In Gijón the garrison also proclaimed its loyalty to the republic, but the port workers, reinforced by the metal workers from La Felguera, surrounded their barracks and forced the rebels to surrender at the very moment when they were going to mobilize against the republic. In Santander, the general strike was proclaimed once news of the insurrection had arrived: there, too, the barracks were surrounded and the officers surrendered without any significant fighting. In the Basque Country, the commanders of the revolt hesitated, and the soldiers in the garrisons were divided. In San Sebastián, on the 21st, when the Civil Guards attempted to rebel, the workers were prepared and the city was full of barricades. The rebels capitulated between the 23rd and the 28th.

The rebel "Movement", however, suffered other, even more resounding failures that entailed the most serious consequences. First of all, in the Navy, in which almost all the officers joined the revolt, the sailors, under the influence of working class militants, clandestinely organized "sailors councils" whose delegates had been meeting since July 13 and who maintained contact with each other by radio. The signal was given by a Madrid noncommissioned officer who was posted at the communications center of the Navy: he arrested the commander of the communications center, the main agent of the conspiracy there, and alerted all the crews. The crews mutinied, and some of them, onboard ship in the open sea, executed the officers who tried to stop them, took control of all the naval vessels, and thus struck a very serious blow against the uprising of the generals.

In Barcelona the government of the Generalitat refused yield to CNT demands to distribute arms to the workers. The workers, however, began to look for weapons on the 18th, seizing hunting rifles, firearms from ships in the port, and dynamite from quarries, and also obtained some rifles that were distributed by the Assault Guards. When the first troops emerged from their barracks, on the night of the 18th, they were met by huge crowds that defeated them despite suffering heavy casualties. A significant part of the Civil Guards, and also the Air Force, sided with the workers. After two days of fighting, the leader of the insurrection in Barcelona, General Goded, surrendered. The last barracks was taken by assault. The leader of the Youth organization of the POUM, Germinal Vidal, and the anarchist leader, Francisco Ascaso, died in the fighting. A POUM column

under the command of Grossi and Arquer, and the famous CNT-FAI Durruti Column, set out for Zaragoza, and liberated Aragon along the way.

In Madrid, the CNT leader Antona was released from prison on the morning of the 19th. He immediately undertook the organization of the armed struggle. The left socialist leader Carlos de Baráibar organized a surveillance and reconnaissance network composed of UGT railroad workers and postal workers. None of the barracks had yet showed any signs of activity when the workers militias, armed with a motley assortment of weapons, were already patrolling the streets. On the 19th, there was fighting inside many of the barracks between the supporters and the opponents of the *pronunciamiento*. General Fanjul, barricaded in the Montaña barracks, which was surrounded, ordered his troops to open fire on the crowds. An officer distributed 5,000 rifles to the workers. On the 20th, the workers, supported by Air Force planes flown by “loyal” officers, stormed the barracks, suffering heavy casualties. General Fanjul was taken prisoner. Workers columns were dispatched towards Toledo, Alcalá, Sigüenza and Cuenca, which the CNT bricklayer Cipriano Mera, who had recently been released from prison, conquered with 800 militiamen and a single machine gun.

In Valencia, the situation was quite different. The garrison did not join the uprising, but the trade unions issued the call for the general strike on the 19th, the barracks were surrounded and General Martínez Monje proclaimed his loyalty to the republic: he was soon supported by a delegation from the Madrid government led by Martínez Barrio. This took place during the first few days of August, when, undermined by mutinies, lacking any political perspective, the garrison surrendered.

By the night of July 20, with a few exceptions, the situation was clear. Either the military was victorious and the workers and peasants organizations were outlawed, their militants imprisoned or dead, and the working class population was subjected to the most implacable white terror; or else the military uprising failed, and the authorities of the republican State were swept away by the workers, who went into combat under the leadership of their organizations, which formed “committees” that, with the consent and the support of the armed workers, exercised all power and devoted their efforts to the transformation of society. The initiative of the counterrevolution had unleashed the revolution.

The armed struggle against the military uprising needed a central leadership and an organizational principle. This was all the more true during the days immediately following the victory at the barracks: it was necessary to follow through on this victory, to eliminate the last supporters of fascism, safeguard the new revolutionary order, resume production and communications, plan new military operations, and, in a word, to govern. This was the mission of the committees that G. Munis called, in a novel expression, “committee-governments”.⁴² The parts of Spain which had repulsed the first attacks of the generals were covered with them: popular defense or war committees, revolutionary committees, anti-fascist executive committees, workers committees, and committees of

⁴² G. Munis, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

public safety exercised power everywhere at the local level. They assumed a thousand and one forms: sometimes they were elected at workplaces or general assemblies; sometimes their members were appointed by working class organizations, parties and trade unions, with or without negotiations with other organizations. At the local level, they were strictly controlled by a “base” that usually influenced rather than minutely directed them. In any event, trade unions and parties were everywhere represented as such in proportions that often varied with their influence or the policies of the numerically dominant organizations. All of these committees, after the initial defeat of the military uprising, laid claim, with the consent, or responding to the pressure, of the working class and peasant masses, to all legislative and executive functions. “All of them, in the days after the uprising, had seized all local power . . . not only with regard to immediate problems, such as the maintenance of law and order and the control of prices, but also about the revolutionary tasks of the moment, the socialization or unionization of industry, the expropriation of the property of the clergy, the ‘factionists’, or simply the big landowners, the distribution of land to the sharecroppers and tenant farmers or collective exploitation of the land, the confiscation of bank accounts, the municipalization of lodgings, the organization of information, written or spoken, education, and welfare.”⁴³ Regional governing powers were organized on the basis of the local committees during the days following the defeat of the armed uprising. In Catalonia, where the militants of the CNT played the leading role and where the vast majority of the armed workers followed its directives, the Regional Plenum of the CNT rejected García Oliver’s proposal that the CNT seize power and establish libertarian communism. The delegates at this Plenum also voted in favor of preserving the existence of the government of the Generalitat, in which they refused to collaborate. They did, however, along with the other working class and republican parties and the trade unions, support the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias of Catalonia. This Committee was a veritable parallel revolutionary power, which was responsible for the operations of the specialized war committees, the organization of militias, transport, supplies, war industries, the “unified school”, and internal security; a veritable Interior Ministry was also formed, which in fact exercised its authority in parallel with the CNT- and UGT-based “control patrols”, i.e., rearguard militias.

In Valencia, the particular situation created by the attitude of the garrison in that city resulted in the development of a conflict for several weeks between the Junta under Martínez Barrio, the representative of the Madrid government, and the Popular Executive Committee, led by the CNT-UGT strike committee. In August, this Popular Executive Committee exercised its exclusive rule as the sole revolutionary authority in the region.

In Asturias, there were actually two separate revolutionary bodies that claimed to be the governing authority: the War Committee in Gijón, with an anarchosyndicalist majority, under Segundo Blanco, and the Popular Committee in Sama de Langreo, under González Peña. In Santander, the War Committee was dominated by the socialists. In the Basque Country, the authority of the Defense Juntas was vested in the representatives of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which was just as concerned to maintain order as it was

⁴³ P. Broué and É. Témime, *op. cit.*, p. 129 [translation revised].

to win autonomy for the Basque Country. In Málaga, the Vigilance Committee led by the militants of the CNT dictated its orders to the governor, who was “a rubber stamp ... a pallid Girondin”, as the French journalist Delaprée wrote at the time.⁴⁴

Finally, in Aragon, retaken by the Catalanian militias within a few weeks, the most original type of revolutionary power arose, the Council of Aragon, which César Lorenzo characterized as a “libertarian crypto-government”.⁴⁵ It was vested with its authority by a congress of the committees of the cities and villages that had been formed after the region was liberated by the workers militias, and was in fact an instrument of the most resolute anarchist currents.

Within a few weeks, the novel institutions of a new State apparatus had taken shape, whose power, under the auspices of the committee-governments, was actually based on the armed workers and their organizations: commissions of public order or security, with control patrols, rearguard militias, workers brigades or people’s guards, constituting the new revolutionary police force, enforcing a reign of “class terror”. Select “revolutionary tribunals”, whose members were named by the parties and trade unions, were formed in Barcelona, Lérida, Castellón and Valencia. Finally, the dominant institutions, within the framework of the armed struggle, were the various militia committees which had been formed at the initiative of both the parties and the trade unions, an improvised revolutionary army composed of “loyal” career officers—referred to as “technicians”—and the political militants who comprised the commanders and the troops. In this domain, the committees, especially the Central Committee of Militias of Barcelona, also sought to standardize organizational measures, regulations, pay, and military training. In Madrid, the Fifth Regiment, created by the Communist Party, devoted all its efforts to the training of cadres, and the Central Committee of Militias of Barcelona appointed García Oliver to organize and administer a people’s military academy.

Within a few days, and without any directives from any organizations, these revolutionary bodies plunged into the task of directly addressing the great problems of Spain. The committee-governments were the working class answer to the bourgeois State, the militias replaced the caste-ridden army, the problem of the Church was resolved in the most radical way with the closure of the churches, the outlawing of religious services and processions, the confiscation of Church property, the shutting down of parochial schools and a particularly vigorous purge that affected the great majority of priests and ecclesiastical officials. The same was true with regard to the economic foundations of the oligarchy, landed property and industry. Throughout the entire zone controlled by the committee-governments, industrial enterprises were confiscated from their owners, seized by the workers—with expropriation the norm in Catalonia and, more generally, wherever the anarchists were the dominant force—or subjected to workers control, which prevailed in the regions where the socialist party or the UGT was dominant. In practice, authority in the enterprises passed into the hands of elected workers committees that undertook to resume production on the basis of a

⁴⁴ L. Delaprée, *Mort en Espagne*, p. 70.

⁴⁵ C. Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

profound reorganization that was consonant with their conception of the new society, generating a multitude of solutions that we shall not examine in detail here, but which all bore the hallmark of the will of the workers to take control of their lives. The same variety was to be found in the countryside, which was characterized by a vast and profound movement of collectivization that remains to this day one of the most controversial aspects of the history of the civil war: forced collectivization, encompassing all the inhabitants; voluntary collectivization which sometimes embraced the majority of the population; collectivization that was limited to the lands of the big landowners; or the reallocation of the land in the form of small parcels distributed to individual peasant owners; the creation of production or distribution cooperatives; and experiments in total collectivism with the abolition of money, as in the liberated parts of Aragon. The committees that exercised political power undertook joint efforts to coordinate and plan the economy: there were Councils of the Economy in Catalonia and Levant, which obviously had to address problems of foreign currency and credits, that is, problems having to do with political power, which was only seemingly dissolved at the level of local and regional affairs, but which nonetheless remained intact, since there was still a central government concerning which no working class organization assumed the responsibility for calling upon the workers to at least simply ignore it, if not overthrow it.

For the government still existed, although it was no more than, in the expression of Franz Borkenau, a “monument of inactivity”. Aware of its powerlessness, the Giral government and its representatives and the Companys government in Catalonia did not take the risk of confronting the committee-governments in an open test of force, and the only attempt to bring such a conflict of powers to a head, which took place in Valencia, rapidly turned to the disadvantage of the representatives of the legal government. The mere existence of these authorities, however, constituted a crucial factor. For a certain time they were content with issuing paper “decrees” validating what the workers had already carried out in reality: the militias that stood guard outside their doors and that were fighting at the front; the patrols that maintained order in the streets; the committees that administered and legislated. But this power to issue “decrees”, which was allowed to these government bodies by the workers organizations and committees, opened up the door to new possibilities for the government: ultimately, it was in the name of the State and the republican government that the new revolutionary authorities acted, and the fact that the government recognized the presidents of the committees that ruled in the big cities and provinces as “governors” was no empty formality. As ghostly as the power of the traditional State was, it existed at least nominally, and the situation created in “republican” Spain by the response of the workers and peasants to the revolt of the generals was one of “dual power”, in other words, a transitory situation that could only be resolved with the hegemony of one or the other power.

The committee-governments enjoyed the support of the armed workers, but they were also based on the parties and the trade unions. Two possibilities emerged with regard to the resolution of a situation that could not last forever: either the committees would have to merge with republican legality, in the form of a popular front extended to the trade unions and the anarchosindicalist current, in the framework of a “renovated” State of the traditional type, which was none other than the bourgeois and parliamentary republic

adapted to the conditions of civil war—this was the conception advocated by the republicans, the right wing socialists and the leaders of the Communist Party; or else, the committees must break with bourgeois legality, investing themselves with a new legality, that of the masses, and transform themselves into institutions of a new kind of State that would be based on the direct representation of the workers in their workplaces, in other words, a “soviet” State, or a Council State in the classic Marxist sense of the term.

During the summer of 1936, however, no working class party seriously considered this latter solution. Right wing socialists and communists rejected the perspective of a “socialist republic”, which they judged to be not only unrealistic, but also dangerous. Anarchists and anarchosyndicalists rejected waging a struggle for a “power” that they would not know what to do with, since the exercise of such power was contrary to their principles. In the POUM—whose members assumed that Maurín, who had fallen into the hands of Franco’s forces, had been executed—Andreu Nin, who had become the POUM’s political secretary and most important leader, claimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat had in fact been established in Spain, and that, moreover, the existence of trade unions, parties and specific proletarian institutions had rendered the appearance of soviets superfluous.⁴⁶ As for Largo Caballero, he said that because “the workers parties had made a clean sweep of the bureaucrats, the government officials, the ministerial system of governance”, they “were proceeding towards new revolutionary forms of leadership” which he did not precisely define.⁴⁷ The revolution had stopped halfway, at the very threshold of the *sancta sanctorum*: political power, State power.

7. The democratic reaction

The Spanish Revolution, which was on the verge of breaking out for five years, finally exploded with the totally spontaneous response to the military coup d’état. Within a few hours, in battles against mercenaries, police and regular army troops, what proved to be decisive was the initiative, imagination, and spirit of sacrifice, in a word, the action of the masses, rather than the strategy of the superior committees of the parties and trade unions: more than one libertarian or socialist, anarchist or communist militant was swept up during those days by the fever of initiatives that contradicted the principles defended by his organization and by his own leaders. The armed counterrevolution was not totally defeated, however. It was successful in about one-third of Spain and was subsequently able to benefit from the foreign assistance that it had secured during the period of preparation. Furthermore, once the street fighting, the mass assaults on the barracks and the battles of the barricades had come to an end, military strategy and technique assumed a preponderant role, and organizations became more important than mass movements: it was a war of movement that would now be unleashed between the two Spains, and the professional army would prove its superiority against improvised revolutionary militias.

First of all, the German and Italian governments, due to their prompt intervention, made it possible for the nationalists to recover from two crucial setbacks: the defeat of the

⁴⁶ A. Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁴⁷ Koltsov, *Diario de la Guerra de España*, p. 58.

military conspirators in the Air Force and the Navy. Beginning on July 21, Hitler sent the rebels transport planes that made it possible, despite the blockade of the republican fleet, to transport troops from Morocco to the peninsula. Italian and German airplanes intervened by seriously damaging the cruiser *Jaime I* in a surprise attack and by escorting naval convoys that were transporting reinforcements to the nationalist zone. At the same time, the big international oil companies made their positions clear: the British company, Vacuum Oil Company of Tangiers, prohibited all sales of fuel to the warships whose crews had mutinied against their officers and, on July 18, the American president of Texas Oil Company ordered the five oil tankers that were on their way to Spain to dock at ports occupied by the nationalist generals, who were accorded very generous credit terms. An international alliance was taking shape against the Spanish Revolution because the Revolution was a direct threat to capitalist interests in Spain, and constituted a disturbing resurgence of the revolutionary menace in Europe.

The Giral government turned to France for help, where a Popular Front government under Leon Blum had just taken office. The international agreements between the two governments, and the principle of sympathy that one might assume would prevail between two such governments, made the prospect of French assistance plausible. This assistance turned out to be non-existent, however. First, because the Cabinet of the Popular Front government included “radical” ministers, representatives of the bourgeoisie and spokesmen for the army general staff, who vehemently expressed their opposition to any intervention that might imply indirect support for a revolution that the mainstream press was denouncing with extraordinary vehemence. Also, because the French government, held hostage by its alliance with England, was a junior partner of the conservative government in London that was concerned above all with securing capitalist interests in Spain, which were more threatened by the armed workers than by the rebel generals, and was in any event ready to deal with the Spanish generals as well as with Hitler and Mussolini. The Blum government therefore took the initiative of signing a “non-intervention” pact that it presented as the means to bring an end to Italo-German intervention in Spain while avoiding the domestic and foreign risks that would be entailed by French intervention. On August 8, the Blum government closed the border on the Pyrenees to all shipments of military equipment; almost simultaneously, the American government prohibited all sales of war materiel to Spain, while authorizing the sales of oil by Texaco to the generals, on the pretext that it was not a strategic product. Salazar’s Portugal, shaken by workers and peasants uprisings, an ally of the Spanish oligarchy and supporter of British interests, became the base of operations for the nationalists.

Spain stood alone. In official declarations, the government of the Soviet Union expressed its sympathy for the “democratic and peace-loving” government that had just been attacked by the fascist powers. The Soviet Union, however, was itself undergoing a difficult period: a few days after the beginning of the Spanish civil war, the first of the Moscow Trials commenced, with Zinoviev and Kamenev as defendants, and Trotsky, the *bête noir* of the Stalinist regime, being tried in absentia. How could the Soviet Union consider giving unconditional aid to a nominally “republican” regime in which left socialists, anarchists and anti-Stalinist communists played the leading role? The Soviet

Union was also a signatory to the non-intervention pact, and, moreover, did not establish normal diplomatic relations with republican Spain until the end of August, when the Soviet ambassador Marcel Rosenberg arrived in Madrid. Finally, only the president of Mexico, Cárdenas, would agree, much to his credit, to help the government of the Spanish Republic.

Under these conditions, the initial successes of the workers and peasants militias remained without any future. Undoubtedly invincible in street fighting, in their neighborhoods and cities, they were ineffective in the operations required for battle in the open field. Composed of enthusiastic and individualistic volunteers, they lacked basic technical training, competent field officers, and minimal discipline. Above all, they fought in a dispersed manner, without any plan, without the coordination of one sector with another, and it soon became obvious that the militias could not be expected to have any success without a unitary command structure, which they refused to accept and which the government was incapable of providing. Starting in the first week of August, the nationalist offensive against Badajoz, supported by Portuguese complicity, was crowned with success: the two nationalist zones were united. Almost simultaneously, the offensive against the cities in the North began: Irún, and then San Sebastián, fell, after desperate but uncoordinated resistance. Everywhere, the nationalist advance was accompanied by huge massacres and fierce repression, for which the killings in Badajoz would become the symbol. In early September, Franco became the commander in chief of the nationalist army, after the accidental death of Sanjurjo on the first day of the uprising, and he made plans for the offensive, which all observers judged to be decisive, against Madrid, whose fall seemed to be presaged both by the sudden disasters that overcame and scattered the militias fighting against motorized forces and aerial attacks that they were not capable of confronting, as well as by the miserable exodus of huge crowds of peasants as they fled from the advancing nationalist troops.

Once the intoxication of the lyrical illusion of the revolutionary battles in the streets of the big cities had dissipated, the reality of class relations once again arose under the dual form of the isolation of Spain and the military deployment against the militias of a modern war machine whose training and equipment were superior to those of the militias. Winning the war became the primary necessity, the precondition for the development of the revolution, and unexpectedly, but logically, slogans like “discipline” and “unitary command” were once again taken up by all the revolutionaries, regardless of their previous positions, who grasped the practical implications of a victory by Franco’s troops.

It was in this context that the problem of the State and of political power was posed. The right wing socialists who supported Prieto insisted that a revolutionary Spain could not expect any foreign help. In their view, it was imperative to avoid what Prieto called “revolutionary excesses”, which they thought would only serve to justify the non-intervention of the “democratic” governments of London and Paris. This same theme was seized upon by the communist leaders, who claimed that it was not a question of fighting for a socialist Spain, but only “for a democratic republic with an extensive social content”, and “the defense of the republican order with respect for property”. According

to them, the struggle was not between revolution and counterrevolution, socialism and oligarchy, but between democracy and fascism, which made it necessary to preserve the Popular Front and the alliance with the bourgeois republicans, and respect for the legally constituted institutions, parliamentary democracy and the government. For the men who defended these positions and thus the continued support throughout the civil war for the policies that had failed between February and July, the disasters of the summer and the weaknesses of the revolutionary army provided an inexhaustible source of arguments: it was necessary, they said, “to win the war first of all”, and the revolution would come later.

That was not, however, the position of the Spanish workers and peasants, who did not separate the armed struggle from their demands, and who were waging the war in order to carry out the revolution, and who were carrying out the revolution in order to win the war. It was their pressure that undoubtedly led Largo Caballero to write: “War and revolution are the same thing, aspects of the same phenomenon. Not merely are they not exclusive and contradictory, but rather they are complementary and reinforce each other. The people are not fighting for the Spain of July 16, a Spain under the social rule of hereditary castes, but for a Spain from which those castes have been utterly extirpated and uprooted. The most powerful support for the war is the economic extinction of fascism. It is the revolution in the rearguard that provides the guarantee and the inspiration for victory on the battlefield.”⁴⁸ This was also the view of the POUM, which, through its spokesman Nin, asserted that, “against fascism there is only one effective means of struggle: the proletarian revolution”.⁴⁹

As for the anarchists, after refusing to attempt to impose libertarian communism, that is, their own dictatorship, they had no other problem than to discover how to best help the government in which the other organizations participated, regardless of its form—since, in any event, this participation would constitute a break with their traditional opposition to all forms of power—by making the sacrifices that, after the July events, they were willing to make as the price that must be paid for military victory.

Today it is not known under what conditions Largo Caballero, whom many considered to be a candidate for the leadership of a workers government and who had insisted on the need to dispose of the Giral government, finally agreed to become the Prime Minister in a Popular Front government which included bourgeois republicans, socialists, communists and the UGT, and which was joined two months later by four ministers from the CNT: a “legal” government, constituted formally according to the proposals of president Azaña, whose program of “defense of Spain against fascism” called for the “unity of the forces that are fighting for republican legality” and “for the preservation of the democratic republic”.⁵⁰ A few days later, the Catalonian revolutionaries yielded, simultaneously accepting the dissolution of the Committee of Militias and a government of the Generalitat that would have Tarradellas as President, in which representatives from the

⁴⁸ *Claridad*, August 22, 1936.

⁴⁹ Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁵⁰ *Política*, September 5, 1936.

CNT accepted positions as Ministers of the Economy, Provisions and Public Health, and the leader of the POUM, Andreu Nin, accepted the position of Minister of Justice.... A moderate was capable of expressing the following sentiments a few years later: "The normal situation was restored."⁵¹

In fact, the formation of these coalition governments, the participation of revolutionary leaders or persons who were considered to be such, at least responded both to the need to present to the Western democracies a "respectable" face of a legitimate republican government that was soliciting normal assistance against fascist aggression, as well as to the need to obtain the commitment of the revolutionary organizations to a "return to normal" justified by the needs of the war, but which implied an active struggle against most of the conquests of the revolution.

As soon as they were inaugurated, the governments of Largo Caballero in Madrid and Tarradellas in Barcelona devoted their efforts to "unifying" the institutions of power. The *Consell* of the Generalitat dissolved all the committee-governments as of October 9 and replaced them with municipal councils modeled in its own image. *Claridad*, for its part, proclaimed that "all these institutions have fulfilled the mission for which they were created" and would henceforth only "be hindrances to a task that is the exclusive responsibility of the government of the Popular Front". It would take several months to suppress the resistance of the supporters of the committees: in a first, transitional stage, their leaders were for the most part granted official titles, as "governors", or presidents of "municipal councils", such as, for example, the anarchist Joaquín Ascaso, who was styled the "government delegate" in Aragon.

The Ministry of Justice was also reformed in much the same way in Madrid by García Oliver, and in Barcelona by Andreu Nin: the judges who had formerly served in the government judiciary, which had been subjected to a thorough purge during the period of revolutionary terror, were reinstated under the title of "justice technicians", operating with the help of tribunals formed of representatives of the parties and trade unions. The "revolutionary militias of the rearguard" were unified by decree, put under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, and monitored by inspectors organized in what were called "security councils", composed of delegates of the political parties and trade unions. Alongside the "Republican National Guard" composed of the remnants of the loyal units of the Civil Guard and Assault Guard, a new police force known as the *carabineros* was created under the authority of the Ministry of Finance, at first to serve as border and customs guards, but it was really an elite police force. The militarization of the militias proceeded step by step, first with the creation of a general staff, and then with a special military draft calling up two age groups of reservists with the rank of officer and non-commissioned officer, and finally by using the pressure exerted by the government on the militia units with respect to the distribution of weapons and ammunition. The soldiers councils were abolished, the military terminology for naming the units was reestablished and names were replaced by numbers, ranks, brass and insignia reappeared, and the old Military Code of Justice was also reinstated. The corps of "political commissars",

⁵¹ Angel Ossorio, *Vida y sacrificio de Lluís Companys*, p. 172.

“representing the war policy of the government in the army”, which replaced the original militant delegates, was the crucial instrument of this militarization.

The new government was also dedicated, according to its own decrees, to “legalizing” the revolutionary conquests, a legalization that was at the same time a means of preventing their extension. The government granted itself the right to “intervene” in the war industries, compelled the acceptance of the principle of indemnification for expropriated capital, rejected the monopolization of foreign trade, and imposed its authority on all enterprises by way of the control that the UGT trade unions exercised over the banking system. Finally, a decree signed by the communist Uribe, the Minister of Agriculture, which had nothing to say about the crucial problem of land and rent, legalized the expropriation without indemnification, to the benefit of the State, of the lands of known rebels, and thus all at once raised the looming specter over thousands of peasants of the eventual return of their lands to “non-rebel” landowners.

The suppression of the revolution carried out by the new government bodies of the Popular Front variety coincided with the first major turning point of the war, the recovery and stabilization of the military situation as a result of the battle for Madrid. Three factors were crucial in this case: first of all, Russian material aid, the arrival in the capital of Russian tanks and armored cars, and the mobilization of an air squadron supplied, and totally controlled, by the Moscow government; then, at the initiative and under the control of the various communist parties of the world, the deployment of the International Brigades in the battle for the capital, units composed of volunteers from every country who had come to fight fascism; and, finally, the provisional but decisive expedient of the Madrid Defense Junta, dominated by the Communists and the Socialist Youth, with the most revolutionary methods of organization of the defense of the city: the use of class rhetoric, appealing to the idea of the “proletarian revolution” and “internationalism”, forming neighborhood, block, and district committees, and massive repression directed against the “Fifth Column”. Madrid stood fast. In March 1937, the major victory won in Guadalajara over the Italian expeditionary corps, whose effectiveness was undermined by revolutionary propaganda organized in a masterly fashion by the communists, marked the high-water mark of this period, during which “organization and discipline had not killed off enthusiasm and faith, and enthusiasm and faith were relying on discipline and organization—and also on arms...”⁵² From then on, the struggle against the revolution in the republican zone would progressively lose its democratic luster.

8. The influence of the Stalinists

The historian of the battle for Madrid, the American Colodny, described in the following terms what he called the “turning point of the siege”, after December 1936: “Under the guidance of Red Army generals, Madrid’s war was changed from one of revolutionary committees to one conducted by technicians of the General Staff. From the exaltation of the first weeks of November, the city passed to the grim monotony of the siege, complicated by cold and hunger and the familiar spectacle of air-borne death and

⁵² P. Broué and É. Témime, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

desolation. The heroic hour had passed into legend and history, and with the enemy pinned against the fortifications, the mortal danger which had temporarily fused all energies into a single will to resist seemed to have passed.”⁵³

What actually took place was a political turning point: the revolution was succeeded by the slow progress of the democratic reaction which now had to give way to the Stalinist counterrevolution in all its crudity. The poetic illusion that had inspired the militants of the CNT-FAI during the summer, who believed that they could build a new society with their own hands, a society that had been turned into the opposite of their goal, gave way to cynicism and despair. García Oliver became “his Excellency the Minister of Justice”, and numerous comrades became military officers, police chiefs, and governors, in the name of the necessary sacrifices and due to their determination to “renounce everything except victory”, as Durruti said, who was felled in Madrid by a bullet that was undoubtedly fired by one of his militiamen who would not allow his leader to prevent him from deserting the front whenever he pleased. Unrest among the anarchists led them to engage in absurd acts of violence, such as the retaliatory expedition launched by the sadly famous Iron Column, which left the front at Teruel to try to kidnap a judge and raid the nightclubs, and like the violent attack carried out by several hundred CNT militants in Tarancón against the members of an officer’s wedding party on the road to Valencia. Blind violence, with no other goal than to express protest against a hopeless situation, the reaction of the anarchists who had been defeated by their own contradictions and crushed by the weight of their own prejudices, only reinforced the authority and the prestige of those who ceaselessly denounced the “*incontrolados*” and their “excesses”, the new champions of order, the Stalinist communists, powerful as a result of the fear inspired by these anarchists, verbal revolutionaries, incapable of pursuing their project to the end and providing the revolution with the means and the will to be victorious.

Ever since July, the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party received significant reinforcements from Moscow: the Argentinian Codovilla, known by the code name of Medina, and the Bulgarian veteran Minev, who was known as Stepanov, who were joined by other insiders from the international apparatus of Stalinism; the Hungarian Geroe, known as Pedro in Barcelona; the Italian Vidali, one of the leaders of the Fifth Regiment who went by the name of Carlos Contreras; and later, the Italian Palmiro Togliatti, who was known as Ercoli in Moscow and Alfredo in Spain. Although the majority of the party’s militants had been swept away by the tidal wave of the revolutionary enthusiasm during the period of street battles, its leaders held to a steady course and continued to stand by the party line. It was necessary, first of all, to win the war, “first defeat Franco”, and to do this, it was also necessary to reinforce the “national and popular alliance”, and the authority of the “government of the Popular Front” against those whom they referred to as “enemies of the people” and whom they defined as follows: “fascists, Trotskyists and *incontrolados*.” Strong because of the revolutionary prestige of the Soviet Union, basking in the aura of the victory of October 1917, with access to a lot of money, and soon to enjoy the support of the only government that was willing to send material aid to

⁵³ K. Colodny, *The Struggle for Madrid: The Central Epic of the Spanish Conflict, 1936-1937*, Paine-Whitman, New York, 1958, p. 93.

beleaguered Spain, they were the only elements that were capable of waging the struggle against the revolutionaries they referred to as “Trotskyists or *incontrolados*” when not actually implying that they were fascists. The communists were the only ones to oppose the committees, the collectivizations, the expropriations, and revolutionary class justice, the only ones, in short, who said out loud what the republican petty bourgeoisie were thinking, who were terrified by the initiatives of the masses and who had only just begun to recover their composure after the terrible fear the anarchists inspired in them. Spain became an important card in the game of Stalin’s foreign policy, who was aware of the danger posed by the expansionism and the open display of anti-Bolshevism of Hitler’s government. For Stalin, Spain was simultaneously a necessary testing ground, a laboratory for the next war, and the terrain upon which he proposed to prove to the “Western democracies” that he was a reliable ally, a defender of the status quo, the shield against the political subversion that they feared even more than they feared the Nazis or the fascists. Stalin did not conceal his political goals in Spain, the most important of which was the destruction of the revolutionary organizations, first and foremost the POUM, which had harshly denounced the “Moscow Trials” and proclaimed that it fought under the banner of Lenin. On November 28, the consul general of the USSR in Barcelona, the former revolutionary Antonov-Ovseenko, did not hesitate to issue a press release in which he denounced *La Batalla* as “a newspaper that is in the pay of international fascism”. As a result of his pressure, combined with that of the Catalonian Stalinists of the PSUC and the UGT, the POUM was removed from the government of the Generalitat with the consent of the CNT; a few days later, *Pravda*, in particularly threatening language, after describing in detail the circumstances of the execution of the old Bolsheviks who were condemned in the first series of Moscow Trials, published the following comment: “In Catalonia, the elimination of the Trotskyists and the anarchosyndicalists has now begun: it will be carried out with the same energy as in the USSR.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, in December, in a letter conveyed by his ambassador Marcel Rosenberg, Stalin gave Largo Caballero some “friendly advice”: keep the peasants in mind, and interest them “by way of a few decrees that address the agrarian question and taxes”, to win at least the neutrality of the petty bourgeoisie by protecting it against the expropriations and guaranteeing its freedom of trade, to attract to the government bourgeois republicans “to prevent the enemies of Spain from viewing it as a communist republic, which would constitute the greatest danger to Spain”, and finally to solemnly declare that “there will be no toleration for any attacks against the property and the legitimate interests of the foreigners in Spain, and of the citizens from countries that do not support the rebels”.

This policy, distinctly moderate and counterrevolutionary under the circumstances, assured that the Stalinist organizations would find an audience in Spain: under its auspices, for example, it organized the GEPCI in Catalonia, a defense organization of the shopkeepers, artisans and small manufacturers, and in Levant it created the peasant federation, which organized the small landowners who were against collectivization. Judges, high level government officials, military officers, and policemen found it to be both an effective means of protection, and the instrument of the policies that they

⁵⁴ *Pravda*, December 17, 1936.

supported. For those who were only concerned with the immediate military struggle against fascism—and they were numerous—Moscow’s support and shipments, the role played by the Russian military advisors, the contributions of the International Brigades, and the organizational capacities of the communist cadres, seemed to guarantee the efficacy that was necessary for victory. It was not by chance that the Fifth Regiment was one of the most important propaganda tools and a springboard for the activities of the Communist Party: in two months, it grew from 8,000 to 30,000 men, it had instructors and modern weapons, it systematically recruited career officers and non-commissioned officers, it became a model of discipline, a real military instrument, at the same time that it was the object of systematic advertisement. Similarly, the communists were the first and practically the only elements to avail themselves of the opportunities offered by the army corps of commissars whose doors were opened wide to them by the Commissar General Alvarez del Vayo. Untouchable because of Russian aid, the Spanish Stalinists, “defenders, consequently, of the anti-fascist program for the restoration of the state as well as organizers of the Army, thus became the most dynamic element in the government coalition”,⁵⁵ and they were entrusted with key posts in the police and other forces of public order.

Yet it was precisely this success that provoked a backlash of resentment and hostility against them. The first signs of an evident cooling off of their relations with Largo Caballero appeared in the latter’s curt response on January 12 to Stalin’s letter. Dismayed by the changing orientation of his former disciples who led the Unified Socialist Youth and by the fact that almost all of them had joined the PCE during the last six months of 1936, Largo Caballero responded with a resounding negative to Stalin’s pressure in favor of a merger of the socialist and communist parties, to which his old enemy Prieto was, motivated by revenge, all too willing to consider. The prestige enjoyed by the Madrid Junta of Defense, which in his view was openly opposing him, the alliance with the PCE, and Alvarez del Vayo, concerning whom he began to entertain serious doubts, also contributed to his annoyance. In February, he sharply demanded the recall of ambassador Rosenberg.

The Communist Party, from then on, declared war on Caballero, taking aim first at his chief advisor on military affairs, General Asensio. The occasion was the fall of Málaga, which was probably inevitable considering the military situation, but whose particularly tragic circumstances were traumatic for all Spaniards. Concluding an alliance in this matter with the CNT, which did not respect Asensio as a career officer, the PCE initiated a campaign of demonstrations and rallies demanding general mobilization, a purge of the officer corps and an authentic unified command structure. The republicans and right wing socialists under Prieto joined the CNT-UGT campaign against Asensio. Largo Caballero reluctantly decided to ask Asensio to resign. But the decision had been made to get rid of Caballero, and “well-informed sources” spoke of a new cabinet that whose Prime Minister would be the current Minister of Finance, Juan Negrín, with Prieto as Minister of War.

⁵⁵ P. Broué and É. Témime, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

Perhaps these circumstances caused the CNT to try to shake off the oppression of the PCE. An occasion arose in connection with the Cazorla affair, involving the young Minister of Public Order of the Madrid Junta, who was accused of using his authority to conceal the existence and operations in Madrid of secret prisons run by the PCE. The investigation, which was finally conducted openly, discovered that he was associated with the existence of an extortion scam involving payoffs in gold to release people who had been arrested who were generally innocent. This gave Largo Caballero the excuse to dissolve the Madrid Junta, after another scandal involving secret prisons, this time in Murcia, and to restrict the powers of the political commissars and to reserve to himself the right to appoint them. Now the gloves were off: the plan for an offensive devised by Caballero's military advisors in Extremadura had to be abandoned because the Russians offered no more than ten planes for air support and because Caballero's protégé, General Miaja, the commander in chief of the Madrid garrison, purely and simply refused to deplete the forces devoted to the defense of Madrid.

Disputes within the anti-fascist coalition presaged the onset of a new crisis. A revolutionary opposition was on the verge of being reconstituted, emerging from within the parties which during the previous Autumn had accepted the policy of collaboration, and were only now beginning to grasp its consequences. The newspaper of the Iberian Communist Youth, *Juventud Comunista*, criticized Nin's participation in the government, while *La Batalla* had been waging a campaign for several months in favor of the return of the POUM to the Cabinet. The same position was expressed shortly later in *La Batalla*, too, this time in an article written by Andrade, who said that the POUM's participation in the government had been "negative and harmful". Perceiving that it had been expelled from the anti-fascist alliance and fully aware of the fate that lay in store for it, the POUM harshly attacked the counterrevolutionaries of the PCE and the PSUC, and once again spoke of "committees" and "councils" analogous to soviets, which were supposed to constitute the basis of a really revolutionary power. A similar movement arose in the CNT, in which a group of militants hostile to militarization formed the "Friends of Durruti", which published a daily newspaper and also expressed its views through articles written by its founder, Jaime Balius, in the columns of the evening newspaper of the CNT of Barcelona, *La Noche*. The Italian libertarian Camillo Berneri, in the weekly newspaper, *Guerra de Classe*, defined the PCE as the "foreign legion of democracy and liberalism", and compared it to Noske, the counterrevolutionary in the name of democracy who came from the workers movement. He called attention to the relation that existed between the counterrevolutionary policy of Stalin in the USSR, the Moscow Trials, and Stalin's international policy, in which Spain figured as only one element. The same themes were expressed among the Libertarian Youth, and in its daily newspaper, *Ruta*, it was claimed that the alliance of the republicans and the PCE was merely the reflection in Spain of the alliance of the Stalinist USSR with France and Great Britain for the purpose of "strangling the revolution".

At the initiative of the Iberian Communist Youth, the "Revolutionary Youth Front", whose secretary was the libertarian militant Alfredo Martínez, was founded in Catalonia, and rapidly spread to Levant. After the Valencia congress of the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), which witnessed the complete regimentation of this organization behind Stalinist

policy and the denunciation, henceforth classical, of the “Trotskyists” and the “*incontrolados*” by Santiago Carrillo, two of the JSU’s most important federations, those of Asturias and Levant, formed an opposition. Rafael Fernández, the secretary of the Asturian JSU, denied the assertion that the JSU was fighting for “a parliamentary republic”, resigned from the national committee, and joined, together with the members of the Asturian federation, the Asturian Libertarian Youth in the Revolutionary Youth Front. In the spring of 1937, it was clear that a new level of tension had been reached. The forces that were jointly engaged in the democratic counterattack were in the process of splitting. The continuing development of the revolutionary opposition made it necessary to search for more reliable methods, for a more secure government that would opt to rely on the POUM and the CNT-FAI to reestablish the republican regime on a firm footing.

The crucial test would take place in Catalonia, the stronghold of the opposition where the main features of the revolutionary conquests still subsisted. The *Caballerista* current was practically nonexistent here. On the other hand, Juan Comorera’s PSUC, which had been forced to behave cautiously vis-à-vis the anarchists for months, was now ready to fight, and it was not by chance that the famous formula was attributed to Comorera: “Before taking Zaragoza, it is necessary to take Barcelona.” The first clashes were provoked by the dispatch of a large force of *carabineros* by order of Negrín to take control of the border posts from the militiamen of the CNT, who put up a violent resistance. On April 25, Roldán Cortada, a former *trentista* who became a leader of the UGT and a member of the PSUC, was assassinated by unknown persons in Molins de Llobregat.⁵⁶ The CNT formally condemned the murder, calling for an investigation that it claimed would clear its militants of any suspicion of involvement in the crime. The PSUC, however, took advantage of the occasion to fully exploit the emotions aroused by this assassination. The funeral of Roldán Cortada provided an opportunity for a demonstration, concerning which *La Batalla* wrote that its purpose was to create a pogrom atmosphere against the vanguard of the Catalan proletariat, the CNT, the FAI and the POUM. The anarchist leaders of Molins de Llobregat were arrested and eight militants of the CNT were killed in Puigcerdá by the *carabineros*. The tension reached its peak in Barcelona, where the rumor spread that all workers who were not members of the State police forces would soon be disarmed. The government of the Generalitat prohibited all demonstrations on May Day, and on that day *Solidaridad Obrera* denounced the “crusade against the CNT”, while *La Batalla* called upon the workers to remain vigilant “with arms in hand”.

The incident that lit the fuse broke out on May 3, involving control over the Telephone Company building. Ever since July 1936, telephone communications in Barcelona had been “syndicalized” under the direction of a CNT-UGT committee: an intolerable situation, because the CNT officials in the trade union of the telephone workers could therefore exercise constant surveillance and control over telephone communications and could also cut off telephone service between the government and its foreign contacts. The PSUC chose this favorable terrain for its provocation: without either orders or

⁵⁶ This is a town in Catalonia that was formerly known as Molins de Rei, whose name was changed during the Republic due to its monarchist implications [Editor’s Note].

authorization from the government of the Generalitat, the police chief, Rodríguez Salas, a former member of the Workers and Peasants Bloc, now a member of the PSUC, arrived at the Telephone company building with three trucks full of armed police and stormed the building's lobby, disarming the militiamen who were on guard on the first floor. The militiamen on the other floors set up a machine gun in the stairwell and opened fire. The anarchist leaders of the Barcelona police units arrived to persuade their comrades not to continue to resist. But the noise of the battle alerted the workers of Barcelona who perceived it as a counterrevolutionary attack aimed at their organizations. Without any directives being issued by any organization, a general strike broke out and Barcelona was filled with barricades.

That night there was joint meeting between the leaders of the CNT, the FAI, the Libertarian Youth and the POUM. The POUM thought that the workers had spontaneously responded to a counterrevolutionary provocation and that it was necessary to stand by their side. The anarchist leaders preferred to attempt to negotiate a settlement. On May 4, many organizations, including the POUM, the Libertarian Youth, and the Friends of Durruti, supported the movement. Companys and the CNT agreed to impose a negotiated compromise. The president of the Generalitat disavowed the raid led by Rodríguez Salas and issued an appeal for calm, while the Regional Committee of the CNT called upon the workers to cease fire. The same message was broadcast over the radio that night by the *Caballerista* Hernández Zancajo and the two anarchist Ministers, García Oliver and Federica Montseny. On May 5, an agreement was reached based on a ceasefire and the maintenance of the military status quo, with the simultaneous withdrawal of the police and the militias. The leaders of the CNT intercepted the 29th Division, commanded by Gregorio Jover, which had left the front for Barcelona, and convinced its commanders not to intervene in the fighting in the city, and formally expelled the Friends of Durruti from the CNT. New outbreaks of violence, however, violated the ceasefire agreement: an attack by members of the PSUC on the automobile in which Federica Montseny was a passenger; and the assassination of Antonio Sesé, a leader of the UGT who had just become a member of the government. English warships anchored off the coast of Barcelona. The government of Largo Caballero assumed responsibility for public order in Catalonia and appointed General Pozas, a former officer of the Civil Guard and a member of the PCE, as commander of the troops in Catalonia.

On May 6, it seemed that order was restored. President Companys proclaimed that there were "neither defeated, nor victors", and formed a new government, in which neither Comorera, the leader of the PSUC, nor Rodríguez Salas were given positions. The motorized column sent from the Jarama front to reestablish order in Barcelona entered the city, its soldiers shouting, "Viva la FAI": it was under the command of an anarchist officer, Torres Iglesias. The game seemed to have concluded in a draw. The balance sheet in human lives, however, was considerable: at least 500 dead and 1,000 wounded. Among the victims, on the government side, Sesé and a communist officer; on the workers side, Domingo Ascaso and the nephew of Francisco Ferrer. A lot of things had happened, however, on the streets of Barcelona, and in the following days the corpses of two of the leading spokesmen of the revolutionary opposition were found: the Italian libertarian Camillo Berneri, who was kidnapped from his home by UGT militiamen, and

Alfredo Martínez, the secretary of the Revolutionary Youth Front. It was clear that the Russian secret services were at work.

In fact, the “May Events” were the swan song of the revolution. This delayed explosion of the civil war in the rearward, in the context of the civil war itself, would immediately be exploited by the moderate alliance and its shock troops, the PCE. Even though the CNT did everything it could to bring an end to the conflict, even though the POUM refused to take the risk of taking action without the support of the CNT, whose blind prudence it criticized, the Stalinist press focused its attention on this “insurrection”, which it claimed was “prepared by the Trotskyists of the POUM” with the help of the German and Italian secret police. It demanded, with José Díaz, that the “Trotskyist” danger must be eliminated, those “fascists who speak of revolution in order to sow confusion”. On May 15, in a meeting of the Cabinet, the communist Ministers demanded that the POUM be dissolved and its leaders arrested. Largo Caballero refused; the communist Ministers resigned, followed by the republicans and the right wing socialists who supported Prieto. Largo Caballero had no other option than to resign.

With the former Finance Minister, Juan Negrín, as the new Prime Minister, the victory of the counterrevolution would be sealed over the course of the next few weeks. From a bourgeois background, a profoundly moderate socialist, married to a Russian woman, he was the preferred candidate of the Spanish Stalinists to head the government, and at the time they had nothing to complain about with regard to his policies. *La Batalla* was banned on May 28 and its political editor, Gorkín, was arrested and charged with criminal violations for his May Day editorial. On June 16, most of the leaders of the POUM were arrested. They were accused not only of having attempted to overthrow the Republic by violence and to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, but also for having calumniated a country whose moral and material support made it possible for the Spanish people to defend their independence, for having attacked the Soviet justice system—a reference to the POUM’s campaign against the Moscow Trials—and, finally, for “having been in contact with known international organizations, under the general name of ‘Trotskyists’, whose activities within a friendly power show that they are working on behalf of European fascism”.

An enormous scandal immediately ensued. Andreu Nin, arrested along with his comrades, had disappeared. The Stalinists insinuated that he had escaped, and the graffiti scrawled on the walls asking, “Where is Nin?”, were answered by Stalinist agents with this obscene rhyme: “In Salamanca or Berlin”. The Minister of the Interior confessed that he could do nothing. Negrín declared that he was prepared to “do everything possible”, but he demanded that he be informed. In fact, Nin would never reappear because he had been murdered. Handed over by the police to the chief of the NKVD (the Soviet secret service) in Spain, Orlov, he was held in a secret prison in Alcalá de Henares and tortured in an attempt to make him confess, following the model of the Moscow Trials. He resisted, however, and his kidnappers, powerless in the face of this tortured man who refused to “collaborate”, had no other recourse than to get rid of him. In fact, Nin’s resistance undermined the scheme of those who would have staged another version of the

Moscow Trials in Spain and probably saved the lives of many other militants.⁵⁷ In any case, the “legal” façade of Stalinist repression had been destroyed and they were forced to resort to pure and simple gangsterism, discarding all judicial formalities.

In the next few weeks following the arrests of the POUM leaders, there were more “disappearances”, under similar circumstances, affecting foreign revolutionary militants who were abducted by the same agencies and murdered: Marc Rhein, the son of the Russian Menshevik leader, Rafael Abramovitch; the Trotskyists Hans Freund, known as Moulin, and Erwin Wolf, the former secretary of Trotsky; the Austrian militant Kurt Landau, who had joined the POUM. In the army, POUM militants were shot after kangaroo military tribunals held by the councils of war: the victims included the former Lérida Commissar of War, Marcial Mena, and one of the organizers of the Catalanian teachers trade union, Joan Hervàs, both of whom were former members of the Workers and Peasants Bloc. The restoration of the power of the State had indeed abolished the illegal apparatuses of the parties, the trade unions and the “dictatorship of the committees”; but it had not abolished the Stalinist secret services, and an omnipotent GPU (the old Russian political police) was allowed free rein—unofficially—to act on behalf of Stalin to settle his political accounts on Spanish soil.

None of his enemies would be forgiven, even if they were not persecuted with the same tenacity as was the POUM, Stalin’s number one enemy in Spain. In August, the Council of Aragon was dissolved, the division commanded by the communist Enrique Lister entered the province of Aragon and carried out mass arrests of anarchist militants and used force to dissolve the rural collectives that had been established there. In September, and once again by means of force, government troops seized the headquarters of the Defense Committee of the CNT-FAI. In May, the supporters of Largo Caballero were expelled from the editorial committee of the newspaper, *Claridad*, which passed into the hands of Prieto’s followers. At the request of the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, the Minister of the Interior sent Assault Guards to occupy the offices of the newspaper, *Adelante*, the journal of the Levant Federation that supported Largo Caballero. Within the UGT, Prieto’s supporters and their Stalinist allies waged a relentless campaign against Largo Caballero. The Minister of the Interior shut down the last newspaper for which Caballero was still allowed to write, *La correspondencia de Valencia*. Unable to utilize normal means for ensuring a majority, the alliance of the “moderates” chose to orchestrate a split, choosing González Peña as President of the socialist-oriented trade union’s national office. Under government orders, mail and checks being sent to the UGT were diverted to the schismatic UGT led by González Peña. Largo Caballero could only attempt to wage a campaign to publicize these outrages: after his first rally at the Pardiñas cinema in Madrid, the government decided to

⁵⁷ The other leaders of the POUM were tried in court in October 1938 and condemned to long prison sentences for the roles they played in the events of May 1937 in Barcelona. The charges of “espionage” and “treason”, however, were dropped. These men, released from prison after the fall of Barcelona, finally took refuge in France. Most of them would be defendants in the 1941 military tribunal held in Montauban, accused of having distributed *La Verité*, an underground Trotskyist newspaper.

silence him; he was interrogated, escorted to his home in Valencia, placed under house arrest, and definitively defeated without having been able to put up a fight.

The “Government of Victory” implemented a whole series of measures that aimed at real normalization. The judges once again took their seats at the front of the courtrooms dressed in their robes, and the Minister of Justice, the Basque Nationalist and Catholic, Manuel de Irujo, insistently made sure that the chief justices were effectively selected from among professional jurists. Numerous prisoners, especially priests, were released. On the other hand, a Court for Espionage and High Treason was created, which would later try the leaders of the POUM: in these new tribunals, the five judges, three military and two civilians, were appointed by the government. The crimes they were supposed to investigate were defined under the heading of “acts hostile to the Republic”, the defense or advocacy of “false news”, the formulation of judgments “unfavorable to the conduct of military operations or to the credit and authority of the Republic”, and “actions or demonstrations that tend to undermine public morale, demoralize the army or weaken collective discipline”. The stipulated penalties, from six months in prison to the death penalty, were applicable even if the “crime” had never actually been committed, if it amounted to a “conspiracy”, “complicity or aiding and abetting”. The leaders of the POUM would therefore receive harsh prison sentences because of their politics, even after the false charges brought by the police and the Stalinists were dropped. The censorship was reinforced, and a decree of August 14, 1937 expressly extended the purview of the censorship to any criticism of the Soviet Union. A police force was created especially for the purpose of counterespionage, the *Servicio de Investigación Militar* [Military Investigation Service] (SIM), controlled by members of the PCE and Russian “technicians”. The SIM, which was completely outside of the control of the Minister of Defense, had more than 6,000 agents, and operated its prisons and “labor camps” without any government supervision.

The Catholic Mass was legalized if held under private auspices, as the first step towards the restoration of the freedom of religious worship. The landowners who had previously been assumed to have “disappeared” who now reappeared and were able to prove that they were not allied with the fascists, recovered their lands; the Collectivization Decree in Catalonia was repealed, as it was alleged to be contrary to the spirit of the constitution. The *Times* hailed State intervention in the operations of the industrial enterprises as the “reestablishment of the principle of private property”, and praised Negrín’s efforts due to his desire to reconcile “the opposed parties in the current Spanish government”. Was it a “Government of Victory”, as the Spanish Stalinists called it, or was it a “Government of National Reconciliation”, as the English Conservatives preferred? At the October 1, 1937 session of the Cortes, Largo Caballero was absent; instead, Miguel Maura was there, as well as the centrist Portela Valladares, and the criticism of his presence that was to have been published in the CNT press was censored. In the Modelo Prison in Barcelona, two and a half of its six floors were reserved for CNT-FAI and POUM prisoners.

“Democratic” Spain, however, was even more isolated than “revolutionary” Spain. This was the period when Russian aid began to decline. The civil war continued, but the revolution had been completely defeated.

9. The defeat and its costs

In the second half of 1937, during the period when Stalinist repression had seized a foothold in Spain by way of the institutions of the Negrín government, the first withdrawals of Russian “advisors” began. Almost all of those known as the “Spaniards” in the Soviet Union were executed shortly after their return to the USSR, including, among others, the civilians Rosenberg and Antonov-Ovseenko, but also Mikhail Koltsov, a special correspondent for *Pravda* who was considered to be a trusted confidant of Stalin, and Stachevsky, the *éminence grise* of the embassy, and also the military officers, including the real organizer of the defense of Madrid, General Goriev. Shipments of Soviet arms rapidly declined. Only for a few months, in 1938, did the reopening of the French border allow the oppression to be lifted somewhat. After May 1937, Spain was nothing but the stage for a civil war, a testing ground for military tactics, a kind of preview and test for the coming world war. After the Munich Accords, Spain’s fate was definitely sealed.

The death throes of republican Spain, the gradual shrinkage of its territory until the final surrender, did not occur without political crises. The first such crisis concluded with Prieto’s dramatic resignation and his explanation for leaving the government: the influence of the Spanish Stalinists and the Russian advisors who had demanded his elimination. The old alliance between Prieto and the PCE would not survive their joint victory over the dual revolutionary and democratic opposition of 1937. Prieto refused to be a tool in the service of a policy that he thought was no longer providing Spain with the benefits it once did, both on the material and political planes. He denounced the interference of the Russian advisors in the direction of military operations, the role of communist militants in the SIM, and the fact that the latter agency was totally outside the control of the government. Perhaps Prieto, “England’s man” in the sense in which that term was often used, was not also the man who would arrange a negotiated peace under the aegis of England, for which the role of the communists in the republican State was undoubtedly an obstacle. This policy was just as vain as the policy entertained, beginning in 1938, by Negrín and Alvarez del Vayo, who hoped to extend the republic’s resistance until the outbreak of the Second World War, after the failure of the “13 point” restructuring plan elaborated by Negrín.

The final crisis began after the fall of Catalonia. Azaña chose to remain in France, while the officers of his military entourage deserted to nationalist Spain. The Negrín government returned to Spain and undertook the organization of a last-ditch resistance. Only the communists supported him. Convinced of the uselessness of prolonging a lost war, most of the professional military staff officers called for a negotiated surrender that would limit the damage. One of these officers, General Casado,⁵⁸ was convinced of the

⁵⁸ Segismundo Casado was actually a Colonel in the army. While he had been promoted to the rank of General, on March 2, 1939, by Negrín, at the same time that he was deprived of his command over the army of the Center, he never accepted the promotion [Editor’s Note].

need to eliminate the communist Ministers and their sympathizers from the government, in order to obtain English support for an eventual mediated settlement. For this purpose he entered into contact with all the other political currents, through the anarchist commander Cipriano Mera, the socialist Wenceslao Carrillo, who was once the right-hand man of Largo Caballero, and the right wing socialist Julián Besteiro, a long-time advocate of a negotiated settlement under the aegis of the English government. Fully informed of these developments, Negrín carried out a sweeping purge of the military high command and appointed communist leaders to the highest positions in the army. As far as his enemies were concerned, this was a veritable coup d'état, which allowed the Communist Party to be the only political faction that would control the inevitable evacuation, with all the consequences that this entailed for its political enemies. General Casado, certain of the support in Madrid of General Miaja—"the defender of Madrid" according to the official propaganda, a former member of the UME, who had been a member of the Communist Party since the beginning of the civil war—and with the additional support of the parties of the Popular Front and the trade unions, with the sole exception of the PCE, proclaimed a Junta of National Defense in Madrid whose supreme goal was an honorable peace. The troops controlled by the Communist Party resisted in Madrid, and this brief civil war within the civil war led to another 2,000 fatalities. During the fighting, the Negrín Cabinet and the executive committee of the Communist Party departed for France in an airplane. The Communist Party had never really seriously considered a last-ditch resistance in this enterprise of liquidation of a doomed regime.

In fact, no compromise was possible, and the civil war ended with the outright capitulation of the authorities, and the occupation of the entire territory by nationalist troops almost without firing a shot. Hundreds of thousands of Spaniards once again attempted to escape, but this time few succeeded. For many, the Calvary of the civil war would end with torture, summary execution or execution after trial, and long years of prison. The armed counterrevolution had finally achieved the program that it had drafted in early 1938, with the complicity of Hitler and Mussolini: this time the Spanish Revolution was completely crushed for a very long time. More than a generation would pass before a still-insecure and indecisive workers movement would begin to reemerge, and almost half a century would pass before the gigantic demonstrations in support of the Burgos defendants would once again make "solidarity with Spain" a current topic for Europe. In order to carry out this mission, General Franco needed almost three years, but also numerous intermediaries and allies. For the workers resistance, which in July 1936 confronted the mercenaries with empty hands, with hunting rifles or sticks of dynamite, had long since been killed off or demoralized: it was first necessary for the revolution to be defeated in the "republican" zone in order for Franco to be able to seal his victory. It would quickly be forgotten in the midst of the world war which soon commenced and which would finally bury the Spanish war in an oblivion that would satisfy many politicians.

The time had come to settle accounts. Every kind of balance sheet was drawn up. The socialist leaders, Araquistáin, Largo Caballero and Prieto, wrote their memoirs: these consisted of justifications for their policies that contributed nothing new. The Communist Party, however, rapidly underwent a crisis, first of all among the leaders who had

emigrated to the USSR. Jesús Hernández succeeded in escaping from the Soviet Union, where José Díaz had died under mysterious circumstances. He arrived in Mexico in 1943 and broke with the PCE almost immediately. He published an autobiographical account that essentially confirmed, with respect to many crucial points of the history of the revolution and the civil war, what the enemies of the PCE had said concerning the campaign to discredit Largo Caballero and replace him with Negrín, as well as shedding light on the circumstances of the assassination of Andreu Nin. Hernández, profoundly demoralized, immediately abandoned all political activity. Enrique Castro Delgado, the first commander of the Fifth Regiment, was even more candid. He was also aware of the settling of accounts among the emigration, and the widespread hatred for *La Pasionaria*; he also managed to emigrate to Mexico, despite the desertion of Jesús Hernández. He would also publish revelations that would only confirm the essential outlines of what was already widely known. He ended up making his peace with Franco. Much more interesting would be the (belated) reflections of Fernando Claudín, the former leader of the Communist Youth and then of the Unified Socialist Youth.

In a work published in 1970, five years after he was expelled from the PCE, he devoted many pages to the Spanish Revolution, which he said was “inconvenient” for Stalin. According to him, the strategy employed in Spain by the Communist International, following the instructions of Stalin, suffered from a major weakness, that of going “against the current of the profound dynamic of the Spanish Revolution”.⁵⁹ He described the efforts undertaken by the leaders of the PCE to restrain and curtail the revolution and to restore the apparatus of the republican State, during the first phase; the vigorously repulsed counterattack by the republicans and moderate socialists, during the second phase; and then the definitive elimination of the communists and the final capitulation. Although he put quotation marks around the word, he concluded that Stalin was guilty of “treachery” because of the subordination of the Spanish Revolution to “Reasons of State of the Soviet power”⁶⁰ and he incidentally stigmatized the assassination of Andreu Nin as “an insult to communism”.⁶¹ Perhaps most interestingly, he includes valuable observations concerning the crisis of the PCE, beginning in 1937, reflected in the discouragement of the militants who had lost all their illusions about aid from the “democracies”: when *Mundo Obrero* [Workers World—Communist daily newspaper], in its March 23, 1938 issue, denounced the view that the war could only result in a Spain that “will be neither fascist nor communist” and affirmed that the “Spanish people will defeat capitalism”, the editors were brought to heel by the editorial staff of the Valencia daily, *Frente Rojo* [Red Front], which was more directly under the control of the party apparatus, which affirmed, in the words of José Díaz, that these two views were both “totally correct and correspond exactly with the position of our party”.⁶²

The polemics concerning the Spanish revolution and war are not even close to being resolved in the anarchist movement. Even in 1937, a group of militants of the CNT-FAI,

⁵⁹ F. Claudín, *La crisis del movimiento comunista*, Vol. I, p. 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp 189-190.

the Friends of Durruti, composed of *faístas* who were disappointed with the policy of collaboration as well as what they considered to be the CNT's surrender in May in Barcelona, drew conclusions that undoubtedly brought it closer to revolutionary Marxism when it wrote that:

“Anti-fascist unity has been nothing but submission to the bourgeoisie.... To defeat Franco, we have to defeat Companys and Caballero. To defeat fascism, we have to crush the bourgeoisie and its Stalinist and socialist allies. It was necessary to completely destroy the capitalist State and establish a workers power based on the rank and file committees of the workers. Anarchist apoliticism has failed.”⁶³

This group would disappear without a trace during the wave of repression of the summer of 1937. From the long history of the debates within the anarchist movement, summarized by Vernon Richards⁶⁴ as well as by César M. Lorenzo,⁶⁵ I will only relate the main outlines: the emergence of a “political” current that refused to condemn the policy of collaboration during the war and firmly condemned anarchist prejudices and revolutionary infantilism. The secretary of the CNT in 1936, Horacio Prieto, was the very paragon of the greatest determination and resolve, and it would be unfair to blame him for the extraordinary acrobatics in which the anarchists have subsequently engaged in the realm of the evil of collaboration, which would reach a peak in 1948 with the proposal of those whom César Lorenzo calls “anarcho-realists” to place the CNT at the service of a plot to restore the Monarchy.⁶⁶ On the other hand, Federica Montseny, the former government Minister, recognized the scale of the mistake she and her comrades made by participating in the government under those exceptional conditions, only to conclude that the old anarchist principles of hostility to all power, no matter what its nature, are still valid.

The most bitter polemic was undoubtedly the one that pitted Trotskyists against POUMists, which commenced in April 1937 in the columns of *La Batalla* and the international Trotskyist press. After the publication of Felix Morrow's book in 1938,⁶⁷ which featured harsh criticism of the leaders of the POUM, Trotsky published a collection of his critical articles and those of his supporters with regard to the course of events in Spain and concluded with this severe judgment:

“Despite its intentions the POUM was, in the last analysis, the main obstacle on the road to building a revolutionary party.”⁶⁸

Thirty years later, in his “Introduction” to the writings of Andreu Nin on the Spanish Revolution, Juan Andrade proudly claimed that his party had “awakened hope among the

⁶³ Quoted by Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁶⁴ *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (1953).

⁶⁵ Quoted in this text several times.

⁶⁶ Lorenzo, *op. cit.*, pp. 384 *et seq.*

⁶⁷ F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, New York, 1938.

⁶⁸ L. Trotsky, “Leçons d’Espagne, dernier avertissement”, *Ecrits*, Vol. III, pp. 533-552.

world's revolutionaries, as a new embodiment of the yearnings for freedom of the workers against totalitarianism and the crimes of Stalin",⁶⁹ while, according to him, "Trotskyism can show no achievements in its résumé... except for having caused even more divisions among the groups in all the countries where they have a presence and for being embroiled more than ever before in fierce internecine conflicts".⁷⁰

There is nothing extraordinary about the persistence of these polemics, rooted in the bitterness of the struggle and in the irreconcilable character of class antagonisms. In the winter of 1970-1971, with the enormous workers demonstrations in solidarity with the defendants in the Burgos Trial, it was resoundingly demonstrated: history has not yet totally closed the door on the fate of the Spanish Revolution, for, despite the massacre of a generation of working class and peasant fighters, its shadow has not yet disappeared from the horizon thirty five years after the civil war began.

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⁶⁹ Juan Andrade, Introduction to A. Nin, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*