

APPLICATION OF THE COMINTERN'S UNITED FRONT
AND POPULAR FRONT POLICY IN SPAIN

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I. Historical Background: The Political Situation in Spain (1929-1936)

In 1930, as a result of the 1929 economic collapse, the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, established in the early 1920s, fell, and with it the reign of Alfonso XIII which had been intimately associated with it. A republic was proclaimed.

The period 1930-1933 saw the bourgeois republic fail in its attempts to cope with the effects of the depression: there were anarchist uprisings and a right-wing putsch -- which were suppressed. Strikes and gang warfare were prevalent. (David C. Cattell, Communism and the Spanish Civil War, pp. 9-12)

The following description of Spain in 1936 by a bourgeois historian gives a general idea of the economic and class situation in Spain in the early and mid 1930s.

Of the active population of Spain in 1936 of eleven million, two million might be named middle class, two million might be named lower middle class (tradesmen or small artisans), four and a half million agricultural workers, and about two or three million industrial workers or miners. The last group, thanks to good organisation and the relative recentness of industrial development, had gained at the hands of the first a reasonable standard of living. Among the agricultural regions, the north, north-east, and the coast along the Mediterranean to Valencia, were covered with small holdings large and fertile enough to support a family. Here there were few large estates. These areas, which were irrigated more than elsewhere, were also comparatively close to the industrial centres in Catalonia and the Basque provinces. The rest of agricultural Spain was underdeveloped and poor. In the two Castiles, Andalusia and Estremadura, out of 1,026,412 "landowners" paying tax, 847,548 enjoyed an income of less than one peseta a day in 1936 money. In the north-west, in Galicia, where a large number of small proprietors cultivated small barren plots, the figures must have been similar. La Mancha and New Castile were chiefly farmed by tenant farmers and small proprietors. Andalusia and Estremadura were provinces of great and mainly neglected estates, from which a multitude of landless labourers (known as braceros) sought to gain a living. Conditions in both areas were in 1936 much the same as they had been since the Reconquista, or even the Romans. At the height of the summer, labourers might gain as much as 6 pesetas a day -- though this was exceptional. From spring to autumn, for four or five months, the average wage for these men was between 3 and 3½ pesetas. For the rest of the year they would be unemployed...

The tenant farmers of these areas were in much the same plight as the other two classes. They were at the mercy of their landlords, from whom they held land on short leases. They usually paid rent in kind or in money, determined by a proportion of the crop and its profits. They were also at the mercy of the money-lenders to whom

they had to have recourse to pay for the tools of their employment.

Most landowners in Andalusia and Estremadura had little feelings toward their land and their labourers. If they found it profitable they would cease cultivation altogether. Many regarded their estates as they would distant colonies, and visited them rarely. They left the administration of their property in the hands of a local agent, the cacique, who also ensured its political docility. Others, who were willing to regard their labourers as slaves, were almost as poor or as indebted as their tenants... (Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, pp. 49-50)

In November/December 1933, a right-wing majority was elected to the Cortes, the Spanish parliament. In its attempts to annul the decisions of the previous "left" government, it ignored legislation which had provided some measure of labor and agrarian reform; opposed autonomy for Catalonia and the Basque provinces, which had been supported, but not implemented, by the previous government; and disregarded republican legislation ending state subsidization of the Catholic Church and the Catholic schools which had been the exclusive educational system in Spain.

In October 1934, the right-wing government ruthlessly crushed a general strike declared by the Socialists in Madrid, Barcelona, and Asturias. The Asturian miners, who received no help from other parts of Spain, had some initial success. The government, with the help of Moorish troops, and the Foreign Legion, forced the miners to surrender on October 17. The whole center of Oviedo was destroyed. Some 70,000 laborers fought the government. 3,000 were killed and 7,000 wounded in the struggle, mostly workers.

Though the Asturias revolt had failed, it struck terror into the hearts of the Right and showed clearly the bitterness beneath the conflict between the Right and Left. On the side of the Left the working masses of Spain were aroused, and the miners became heroes. The use of the Moors and the Foreign Legion, considered foreigners by Spaniards, especially aroused the ire of the people. But more important to the Left was the lesson it taught: in the Asturias uprising for the first time the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the trade union organization of the Anarchists) and the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores, the trade union organization of the Socialists), along with some Communists, had united in their struggle against the Right, and only there had the rebellion reached the proportion of a real revolt. The lesson was obvious and was quickly learned. (Cattell, p. 14)

In January 1936, after the Right-wing government was unable to cope with ever increasing economic chaos, the Cortes was dissolved and new elections called for. A "popular front" was formed by the Socialists, Left Republicans, Union Republicans (a dissident branch of the Radicals, a bourgeois party), the Syndicalist Party, the National Federation of Socialist Youth, the Communist Party (PCE, Partido Comunista de España) and the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, a Trotskyite party). "The anarchists, although not signing the pact of the Popular Front, supported it." (Cattell, pp. 15-16)

Cattell characterizes the alliance as:

only an election alliance although a common program was set up as a basis for campaigning. The program was extremely mild and asked only for the return to pre-1933. It refrained from demanding nationalization of land, industry, or even the Bank of Spain, and there was to be no further persecution of the Church. The agricultural reform was to continue, but there was no mention of mass expropriation and, generally, the program aimed to improve the economic and educational standards of the country. (p. 16)

In the elections of February and March the Popular Front won an overwhelming number of seats in the Cortes as demonstrated by the following figures. (The first set of figures are the result of the February election, the second after supplementary elections held in March.)

Popular Front	256	278
Right (National Front)	143	134
Center (including Basques)	54	55

(Cattell, p. 16; Thomas, p. 93)

Thomas observes that:

If the seats obtained by the Basques were included among their future allies of the Popular Front, the seats of that group would be increased to 261, and those of the Centre decreased to 49.

He goes on to say:

Since the electors voted for alliances and not for individual parties, it was not possible to give an aggregate of the votes cast for each party. However, the aggregate votes for each group were:

Popular Front	4,176,156
Basque Nationalists	130,000
Centre	681,047
National Front	3,783,601

Franco, Chief of Staff of the Spanish Army, urged the interim Prime Minister to declare "a State of War," "the final emergency situation envisaged under the Law of Public Order of 1932," -- to prevent the Popular Front from entering office. (Thomas, pp. 95-96)

The first act of the Popular Front government, headed by Manuel Azaña of the Republican Left Party, was to release all political prisoners, including the Socialists and Catalans imprisoned by the previous regime. It started to implement the program of the Popular Front pact. Thus:

The institute of Agrarian Reform set to work once more. Between 50,000 and 75,000 peasants were settled (chiefly in Estremadura) with

their own land under these auspices before the end of March. Other measures attendant on the amnesty decrees were introduced. This meant, however, that employers had to take back men whom they had sacked after the strikes of 1934 and also to indemnify them for lost wages. At the same time they had either to retain those engaged in their place or to compensate them. This predicament typified the challenge of the new Government to Spanish industry. As a result, the peseta fell, leading financiers began to remove their wealth -- and even themselves -- from the country. (Thomas, pp. 97-98)

Thomas goes on to say that the main problem facing the government, however, was the disorder which spread throughout Spain. The bourgeois historians attribute this to both the Left and the Right. However, Thomas concedes the existence of the

conscious work of the Falange determined to exacerbate the disorder in Spain and so justify the establishment of a regime of "order"... The Falange probably still did not possess as many as 25,000 members in all Spain at the end of February 1936, but this made no difference to their provocative power. Riding around in motor cars armed with machine guns, the señoritos of the Falange did everything they could to increase disorder, from an attempted assassination of the author of the Constitution of the republic...to church-burning -- which would be attributed to the anarchists. The militants of the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) and CNT (the Anarchist trade union organization, referred to earlier in this report) still held totally aloof from the regime. They continued to believe that with an encyclopedia and a pistol they would be free -- free from every political encumbrance. The decline of the Republic filled them with the same ebullient satisfaction as it did the Falange. And the pistoleros of the two groups continued to work in common -- especially against the Socialists... (p. 98)

Among the Popular Front forces, Azaña's influence began to decline, as that of Largo Caballero, head of the Left-wing of the Spanish Socialist Party increased. He called for a government of peasants and workers. (Cattell, p. 17)

The Center made common cause with the right. At the same time, the leading generals, in close contact with the Nazis, planned a military uprising "to save Spain." (Thomas, pp. 99-101)

Álvarez del Vayo points out that the ten thousand officers who had been pensioned off by the Republic in its first years "and who profited by the unprecedentedly generous pension scheme were enemies of the Republic," plotting to overthrow it. (Freedom's Battle, p. 13) Acquaintances who are related to former officers in Franco's Army suggest that they became embittered anti-Republicans because of the forced retirement. All agree that the officers were parasitical, that the peace-time army consumed a huge part of the national budget (thirty per cent). Álvarez del Vayo says there had been one general for every 150 soldiers. They allied themselves with the leading generals through their organization, the Unión Militar Española.

Cattell's description of the attitudes of various parties in the Popular Front toward the growing danger of a military revolt is concise and

is in agreement with other sources.

There was a general awareness from May 1936, not only in Spain but elsewhere, that a military revolt would take place. Nevertheless the government took an optimistic and unconcerned attitude toward the future. The Prime Minister, Casares Quiroga, even mentioned the plot in the Cortes but did not consider it of very much importance. He took only a few precautions to prepare the government's defense against the coup. Beyond moving some of the more reactionary army leaders such as Franco from Madrid, practically nothing was done to prepare for the protection of the capital or the country from an uprising. The Socialists and Anarchists seemed similarly unperturbed; they were riding on a wave of optimism and refused to heed the signs. Their leaders seemed to have considered their strength so great and so awe-inspiring that no group would dare attack a government as long as they supported it, and that should a coup be attempted, the all-powerful masses would bring it to heel quickly. Consequently, only the most superficial preparations were made by the parties of the Left. Largo Caballero asked for arms for the workers and got the expected refusal from the government. This seems to have more or less ended his attempts at preparedness. Even the well-disciplined Communist Party was carried along by the optimism of the times. Unlike the Socialists, however, they did not remain blind to the threat. Eugene Varga, discussing the Spanish situation in the "International Press Correspondence"

("Imprecorr") on June 4, 1936, summarized this feeling of complacency, yet combined it with a certain amount of caution:

"Although great dangers still threaten the Spanish Revolution, there are undoubtedly many new factors present in Spain which are favourable to the revolution and with a correct and courageous application of the united front strategy the final victory of the revolution should be secured."

As the plotting of the right became more and more obvious, the Communists took steps to warn the government and to force it to take action. During the first part of June the Communist newspaper, Mundo Obrero, ran a series of articles demanding these measures against the threat of the right: purging of the army, the outlawing of the Fascist organizations, steps against Fascist terrorism, and the closing of the Fascist press. The warnings were of no avail because the Communists were too weak to have much influence.

On July 17, the army in the Spanish zone of Morocco rose and occupied Ceuta and Melilla. The government still did nothing and issued a proclamation that everything was perfectly normal. Within a few hours after the proclamation there were military uprisings throughout Spain, (pp. 46-47)

II. Comintern and Spanish Communist Party Policy (1929-1936)

In the 1920s, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), which had been formed by former members of the Spanish Socialist Party and some Anarcho-Syndicalists, was very small with little influence.

Degras says of the Spanish Communist Party of the early 1930s:

The CP of Spain at this time had a few hundred members and was said (in the Seventh Congress "Materials") to have been taken completely by surprise by the fall of the monarchy in April 1931; it had paid no attention to the Catalonian and Basque nationalist movements. Péri, sent by the Comintern to Spain, wrote that "eight days after the proclamation of the Republic the characteristic feature of the mood of the masses is the strength of their republican illusions." (Jane Degras, The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents, V. 3, p. 156)

Nin, one of the leaders of the PCE, "who had sought cooperation with the Socialists in the fight against the military dictatorship" (Franz Borkenau, World Communism, p. 403) was "expelled" (Gunther Nollau, International Communism and World Revolution, p. 107) or defected (Cattell, p. 20) from the Spanish Party. Nin then founded an organization which later became the core of POUM (refer to page 302, this report).

Of Nin and his associates, Thomas remarks:

Although not Trotskyist in the sense of being strict followers of Trotsky (they were not affiliated to the Fourth International), these men could justifiably be regarded as such since they were Marxist opponents of Stalin who shared Trotsky's general views... (p. 71)

Cattell remarks:

This problem of deviationists, which was constantly afflicting the young Communist Party and which became very serious with the defection of Nin and Maurin, kept the ranks and strength of the party to a minimum. Only the most docile members remained. At the proclamation of the Republic the party numbered no more than 1,000 members. In the June 1931 elections they put up only eleven candidates for the Cortes, none of whom came close to being elected, and polled only about 60,000 votes in all of Spain. (p. 20)

In April 1931 the Eleventh ECCI Plenum, in a report titled "Accentuation of the Class Struggle, the Revolutionary Surge, the Growth of Conditions of Revolutionary Crisis in a Number of Capitalist Countries," said that in Spain:

where the exploitation of the working class and the poverty of the peasants masses, falling into ruin because of the crisis, the Church, and semi-feudal landownership, and suffering national oppression (Catalonia, the Basque country) have reached an unprecedented degree, the development of elements of a revolutionary crisis can be seen in the tremendous growth of economic and political strikes among the proletariat, in the beginnings of a revolutionary movement among the peasants, in the mass movement of the petty-bourgeoisie against the monarchy (student demonstrations, etc.), in the accentuation of the national-revolutionary movement in Catalonia and the Basque country, in the disintegration of the army, and in the disarray of the ruling classes and their parties. (Degras, V. 3, pp. 159-160)

Cattell cites an article in the Communist International of 1931 which stated "the prospects for the Spanish Revolution are good." Cattell goes on to comment:

From the frequency of the articles and their analysis of the Spanish situation it would seem that the Communists considered the prospects of revolution better in Spain than in most countries of the world, except for China and perhaps India. In the unsettled conditions and extreme poverty and repression of the masses the Communists saw a revolutionary situation similar to Russia in pre-revolutionary days. (p. 23)

The Comintern, in the July 1931 issue of the Communist International (numbers 11-12, p. 329), urged the Spanish Communist Party to form a united front -- from below.

The Communist Party must appeal to all workers, to those organized in the reformist trade unions, to those organized in the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour, and to the unorganized workers to form a united front in order to carry the democratic revolution to the end and to destroy all the relics of monarchy and feudalism, explaining that Soviets must be organized precisely for this aim, as organs for the struggle against counter-revolution, the monarchists and the feudal lords. (cited in Cattell, p. 24)

Degras cites and paraphrases an article from the April 1931 issue of the Communist International which said the Spanish Party was:

still very sectarian, and unable to explain its programme to the masses; it should have called for the creation of Soviets, the arming of the workers, the confiscation of church property, the establishment of peasant committees to take over and divide the land. By issuing, after the fall of the monarchy, the slogan "down with the bourgeois republic," it had isolated itself from the masses and aroused the hostility of the workers, who still had strong republican illusions, sustained by the initial measures of the new government. The Party's immediate program should be: the arrest of the monarchists ministers and leading officials; the dissolution of the secret police; the disarming of the civil guard and the arming of the workers and peasants; the organization of soldiers' committees; the destruction of all religious orders and confiscation of their property and of crown property, etc. To realize this programme it would be necessary to organize Soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers. (V. 3, p. 181)

Degras tells us:

Throughout the year (1932) the Comintern continued to reproach the Spanish C.P. because it was not giving effective leadership to the revolutionary movement, which was still "largely spontaneous." It was charged, in an article in February 1932 in the "Communist International," with sectarian attitudes, anarchist methods of work, and opportunist passivity. The same article referred to the 'socialist and syndicalist strikebreakers and traitors,' and to the 'anti-national butcher government of Caballero and Azaña.' The party must combat democratic and

syndicalist illusions among the workers, organize the masses for the direct struggle for power, win the peasants by launching the agrarian revolution, and expose the treachery of those like Caballero and Azaña who held the revolution back on the pretext of the danger of counter-revolution and restoration of the monarchy...

Bullejos and three of his colleagues -- Adame, Trilla, and Vega -- on the central committee had wished to issue the slogan 'defend the Republic' at the time of Sanjurjo's attempted coup (the right-wing putsch of August 1932, referred to p. 301, this report) but were overruled. They went to Moscow to argue their case, and, having failed to persuade the presidium, resigned on 5 October. On 31 October...the ECCI published a statement on their expulsion from the Spanish C.P. and the C.I.; the statement was signed by the members of the Spanish commission appointed by the Twelfth ECCI Plenum of which Marty was the Chairman.

Excerpts from that statement declared:

In the midst of this rising mass struggle ('the slogan of a workers' and peasants' government sounds' throughout Spain) four former leaders of the Spanish Communist Party...having shown with contempt their lack of faith in the militancy of the workers and peasants, broke with the Communist International. For many months these people fought stubbornly to prevent the creation of a real mass party in Spain...

These four sabotaged the political line of the C.I.... The policy of splitting the masses is the policy of the counter-revolution... For this criminal purpose it uses its social-democratic agents (Caballero and others), gives support to the 'anarchist' leaders who revile communism and try to divert the workers from the fight for the proletarian dictatorship, thereby strengthening the dictatorship of capital... (Degras, V. 3, pp. 244-246)

Hernandez (Ventura), at the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, December 1933:

reported that a group in the Spanish C.P. took the Trotskyite line on Germany arguing that the Comintern and the KPD shared responsibility for the severe defeat, but it had no support. Spanish social-democracy defended not only the capitalists, but the landlords and feudalists as well; it was betraying not only the proletarian but the bourgeois-democratic revolution, with the aim of legalizing the counter-revolution. But it was less dangerous than the anarchists, who by their putschism were helping the fascists. Many workers were deserting the anarchists, but not finding their way to the C.P. The party had not yet convinced the masses that it was the only force capable of halting fascism which, stretching from the extreme right to the anarchists, was gaining influence among the petty-bourgeoisie, the peasants, and part of the working class... (Degras, V. 3, p. 293)

In October 1934, during the uprising in Asturias in which, according to Degras, the "Socialists, anarchists, and Communists collaborated in establishing a local 'Soviet Republic'" (refer to p. 302, this report), the ECCI proposed to the Second International:

to undertake immediately joint actions to support both the fighting Spanish proletariat and the struggle against the support given to the Lerroux government by other capitalist countries... (Degras, V. 3, p. 331)

(The French Communist and Socialist Parties had come to formal agreement on a united front against fascism and imperialist war in July 1934.)

Degras relates:

Vandervelde and Adler replied that after the last twelve years they could not be expected to agree at five minutes' notice to an ad hoc pact -- this had taken months even in France. Adler asked whether the Comintern now recognized that social-democrats were not fascists and traitors, and that the liberties enjoyed in democratic countries were not a sham. Thorez replied that once agreement was reached, mutual criticism would cease, but there was and could be no change in Comintern policy. 'We think that what we did was right.'

At the meeting held to discuss the ECCI proposal, the Second International decided that while its affiliated parties were free to make agreements with Communist Parties, it would not collaborate with the Comintern. (Degras, V. 3, p. 330)

In June 1935 the new program of the Communist Party of Spain was announced; it included the following main points:

- (1) Confiscation of the land from the Grandees, Church, and convents without compensation and the immediate turning over of the land to individual peasants and farm workers.
- (2) Liberation of the oppressed peoples from Spanish imperialism, giving autonomy to Catalonia, Euzkadi, and Galacia.
- (3) Improvement in the conditions of life and work of the laborers (increased salaries, respect for workers' contracts, freedom to unionize, freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly and press, etc.)
- (4) Amnesty for all revolutionary and political prisoners.

Cattell comments that:

The program was very carefully couched in revolutionary terms to appeal to the revolutionaries and in addition called for a United Front of the proletariat, but, on the other hand, it contained none of the usual Communist elements alarming to the Republicans -- destruction of the bourgeois state, collectivization, or nationalization. In fact it was a program few Republicans could not support, even the strong catholic Basque Republicans. It made a direct appeal to the peasants in calling for confiscation of land from the large landowners and for turning it directly over to them. It also made a strong appeal to the anarchists in demanding amnesty for political prisoners.

Cattell cites the speech of the Communist leader José Díaz made November 3, 1935:

We struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for the Soviets. We declare this clearly because we, as a party of the proletariat, do not renounce our objectives. But at the present moment we understand that the struggle taking place is not in the area of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but in the struggle of democracy against fascism as its immediate objective. (Cattell, pp. 30-31)

Álvarez del Vayo speaks in some detail of the Popular Front's Program for the February 1936 elections already referred to on page 303 of this report. He was a left Socialist who became foreign minister of the Republic during the Civil War.

In itself the Popular Front program could not have been more moderate. We Socialists, who were without question the most efficiently organized and disciplined party in the country, had sacrificed many of our oldest and most important claims to the need for forming a wide democratic front uniting all anti-Fascist elements. In the new political constellation the Communists were too small a group to exert any decisive influence. With the exception of the amnesty for the victims of the 'two black years,' which had been the outstanding feature of the popular front campaign, the other points in the Government program could be summed up as a desire to re-establish the Republic -- a most justifiable desire, seeing that it was the Republicans who had been returned to power. This involved respect for the Constitution; reorganization of the legal system in order to ensure its independence; and a continuation of the Agrarian Reform begun in 1931. This Agrarian Reform by no means implied the nationalization of land; on the contrary, it was governed by the principle of indemnifying the proprietors whose large uncultivated estates, survival of a mediaeval system of agriculture, not only condemned the peasants to a life of misery, but also hindered the normal development of Spanish economy... The other planks in the Popular Front platform were the protection of small industrialists and traders; a vast plan of public works; and the creation of new schools and educational centres... For the rest, the Popular Front program embodied the program of the Republic when it first came into being except for the plank on collectivization of large estates originally sponsored by the Socialists. This plank was rejected by the Popular Front with the acquiescence of the Socialists although to do so cost them many votes. Any other liberal party in Europe would have been amazed that such a program of State reform should have been necessary in the third decade of the twentieth century. It was a program which offered every guarantee that the inevitable changes in the political and social spheres would take place without endangering the existence of the Spanish bourgeoisie. (pp. 7-9)

III. Some Observations on Comintern and CPE Policy as Described Above

If, as Cattell claims, the Comintern in 1931 saw in Spain "a revolutionary situation similar to Russia in pre-revolutionary days" (page 307, this report), it is not surprising. The ruling classes were in crisis:

the capitalists, suffering from the economic crisis, were unable to get bourgeois democracy (the republic) to work for them, and were threatened by the growing radicalization of the working class. The landowners were threatened by both bourgeois democracy and the growing resistance of the peasants which threatened their very existence. The growing nationalism in Catalonia and the Basque provinces and its threat to "national unity" threatened both classes. The Army and the Church, political institutions in themselves, intransigent in their resistance to bourgeois democratic reform, let alone socialism, were a threat to both bourgeois democracy and revolutionary struggle.

It seems to me that significant sectors of both the capitalists and landowners resorted more and more to the fascist solution when they saw the (imagined) threat of a bourgeois democratic republic bringing the masses to power. Thomas remarks that the Right saw Azaña's government as comparable to Kerensky's. (p. 99) It is true (and here I get ahead of my story) that when the military uprising took place, it was only with the greatest reluctance and apprehension that Azaña's government appealed to the revolutionaries. (The revolutionaries mobilized against Kornilov's attempt to march on Kerensky's government at Petrograd.)

Was Communist policy correct in the 1931-1936 period? The Comintern correctly criticized the Spanish Communist Party's slogan "down with the bourgeois republic" which followed the creation of that republic. That slogan was contrary to everything Lenin said and did prior to the October Revolution, when the Russian masses, too, had "strong republican illusions." (see page 307, this report) But the questions immediately come to mind: why should the leadership of the Spanish CP have come up with such a wrong slogan? What in the Comintern allowed it to maintain the attitude that would produce such a slogan? In 1932, when some Spanish Party leaders had proposed the slogan "defend the republic!" during an attempted right-wing putsch, their expulsion from the Party was upheld by the Comintern because they had "sabotaged the political line of the Communist International." (page 308, this report) It seems safe to conclude that the wrong "left" policy (condemning the newly-created bourgeois republic) concerned the Comintern much less than a "right" policy of defending the bourgeois republic against a fascist or military coup. (However, I don't know what other positions the expellees may have held.)

It is interesting that in December 1933 a PCE leader characterizes the anarchists as being more dangerous than the social democrats (who were still denounced as counter-revolutionary). (page 308, this report)

Cattell observes:

The Socialists in France, although glad to have an ally against the growing Fascist tendencies of the Right, were wary of this new alliance. Content to call a truce in their war against the Communists, they were sceptical of any close association and resisted all Communist advances for closer unity. In Spain, on the other hand, the Communists had never seriously threatened the Socialists' influence over the workers, unlike the Anarchists, who had always been powerful and equal competitors for the proletarian vote and allegiance. In their rivalry with the Anarchists the Socialists were not above accepting the Communists as allies,

especially as Communist Party membership increased. Two other factors also aided in bringing about a closer association between the two parties. The Socialists, as mentioned previously, under pressure from the masses and because of the failure of the parliamentary system in Spain, had become more and more revolutionary in outlook and, therefore, were growing closer to the Communists in ideology. The deep-rooted sympathy of the Spanish people for the Russians also pushed the Socialists into seeking the Communists as allies.

There is no question that the leadership of the largest segment of the Socialist Party (e.g., Caballero, Álvarez del Vayo) were, by 1934, strongly influenced (and in turn supported) by the Communists. However,

The Communists' influence over Caballero and the Socialists was...by no means complete. Although the Socialists were willing to come into closer cooperation with the Communists, they refused to form a United Front with them, insisting that the Popular Front of all the Left was sufficient. Furthermore, the Communists were often embarrassed by the rash and utopian statements made by Caballero. They tried unsuccessfully to urge moderation in his speeches and advised him to prepare for a possible counter-revolution by the Right instead of weaving dreams of the future.

In March 1936, according to Cattell, the Communist and Socialist youth organizations were unified, the Socialists having about 200,000 and the Communists no more than 50,000. (pp. 32-33)

Under the circumstances that there was a fascist danger, and that the Spanish SP was moving significantly to the left (the fact that its majority supported armed rebellion against a right-wing government in October 1934 is proof of this), it is my opinion that the (albeit loose) alliance between the Socialist and Communist Parties was, in principle, justified.

Before examining the correctness or incorrectness of the Communists joining the Popular Front in January 1936 it is necessary to look at the program of that popular front.

The Popular Front Program was the basis for the implementation of the bourgeois democratic revolution in Spain. Given the condition of a Spain not yet emerged from semi-feudalism and whose masses were more and more accepting revolutionary leadership (from the left Socialists, Anarchists, and Communists)¹, it was not, in my opinion wrong for the Communists to support such a program in February 1936. Collectivization of the estates (which, interestingly, was apparently part of the Socialist program (see page 310), but not part of the Communists' (see pages 309-310), was not part of the Popular Front Program, nor was the nationalization of any sector of the economy (see page 303).

Thomas relates:

Despite the renewed impetus given to the Agrarian Reform, thousands of landless peasants who had voted for the Popular Front considered the pace of relief too slow. In Estremadura, villagers began to go out to the large neglected estates, mark out their claim, assume ownership over

a particular area, and then hold a meeting in the village square on return crying Viva la República. At the village of Yuste, where the Emperor Charles V had passed his last days in a monastery, there was a violent clash between Civil Guard and villagers. Eighteen villagers and one member of the Guard were killed. Despite this apparent victory for the forces of "law and order," such local invasions by the villagers continued. And thereafter the Government did not dare to interfere. (p. 103)

It seems to me that the implementation of a bourgeois democratic program in a semi-feudal country could only revolutionize the peasant masses, not satisfy them.

Lenin, in his polemic against the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries in Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, written in 1905, says:

The bourgeois revolution is absolutely necessary in the interests of the proletariat. The more complete, determined and consistent the bourgeois revolution is, the more secure will be the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie and for socialism become. Such a conclusion may appear new, or strange, or even paradoxical only to those who are ignorant of the rudiments of scientific socialism. And from this conclusion, among other things, follows the postulate that, in a certain sense, the bourgeois revolution is more advantageous to the proletariat than it is to the bourgeoisie. (International Publishers, Little Lenin Library #22, p. 39)

and

Marxism teaches the proletariat not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to refuse to take part in it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie but, on the contrary, to take a most energetic part in it, to fight resolutely for consistent proletarian democracy, to fight to carry the revolution to its completion. We cannot jump out of the bourgeois-democratic boundaries of the Russian revolution, but we can enormously extend those boundaries, and within those boundaries we can and must fight for the interests of the proletariat, for its immediate needs and for the prerequisites for training its forces for the complete victory that is to come. (p. 41)

Lenin, in Two Tactics..., upholds the resolution of the Third Congress (April/May 1905) of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks) which says the bourgeois-democratic revolution can only be assured by the armed proletariat. (pp. 59-60) Thus, it is the Communist Party's Program which disturbs this writer. (see page 309-310, this report). In 1931, the Comintern said the Spanish Party, at the onset of the Republic, should have called for the arrest of the monarchist officials, "the disarming of the civil guard and the arming of the workers and peasants." (see pages 307-308, this report) It seems to me that at least this part of the recommended program could have been adapted to the conditions of 1935-1936. If the demand for the arrest of the Fascist, Military, and Monarchist leaders had been made in the Spring of 1936, when they were actively plotting

against the bourgeois republic, with the concomitant demand for the arming of the masses, the following situation would not have occurred.

On July 17 (1936, the Prime Minister Casares) acted...as if he supposed that the revolt would be confined to Morocco. This caution naturally infuriated the left-wing leaders, who anticipated a rising at any moment on the Spanish mainland and who thought that whatever arms the government possessed should be handed over to them. But this revolutionary action was refused by Casares, who announced that anyone who gave arms to the workers without his orders would be shot. In consequence, the streets and cafes of Madrid throughout the **night of July** were choked with voluble people, none of them knowing what was happening, and all of them angry because their lack of arms prevented them being able to take precautions to save themselves if a rising should occur...

The first news given by the government of the rising was in the morning of July 18 when Madrid Radio announced that "no one, absolutely no one on the Spanish mainland, has taken part in this absurd plot," which would, the government promised, be quickly crushed in Morocco. However, while these words were being heard without belief by the citizens of Madrid, risings were in fact taking place, as agreed, throughout Andalusia. Nearly everywhere on July 18 the Civil Governors in the large towns followed the example of the Government in Madrid, and refused to cooperate fully with the working-class organizations who were clamouring for arms. In most cases, this brought the success of the risings and signed the death warrants of the Civil Governors themselves, along with the local working-class leaders. Had the Rebels risen in all the provinces in Spain on July 18 they would probably have been everywhere triumphant by July 22, when they expected to be. But had the liberal Government of Casares Quiroga distributed arms and ordered the Civil Governors to do so too, thus using the working class to defend the Republic at the earliest opportunity, it is possible that the rising would have been crushed. (Thomas, p. 135)

IV. The "Government of the United Front"

In his speeches to the Seventh Comintern Congress, Dimitrov spoke of the "Government of the United Front," which he called

Primarily a government of struggle against fascism and reaction.
It must be a government arising as the result of the united front movement and in no way restricting the activity of the Communist Party and the mass organizations of the working class, but on the contrary, taking determined measures against the counter-revolutionary financial magnates and their fascist agents.

At a suitable moment, relying on the growing united front movement, the Communist Party of a given country will declare for the formation of such a government on the basis of a definite anti-fascist platform.

He went on to list "the objective conditions which would make the

formation of such a government possible":

First, the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie must already be sufficiently disorganized and paralyzed, so that the bourgeoisie cannot prevent the formation of a government of struggle against reaction and fascism.

Second, the broadest masses of toilers, particularly the mass trade unions, must be in a violent state of revolt against fascism and reaction, though not ready to rise in insurrection, to fight under Communist Party leadership for the achievement of Soviet power.

Third, the differentiation and the Leftward movement in the ranks of Social-Democracy and other parties participating in the united front must already have reached the point where a considerable proportion of them demand ruthless measures against the fascists and the other reactionaries, struggle together with the Communists against fascism, and openly come out against that reactionary section of their party which is hostile to Communism. (Georgi Dimitroff, United Front Against Fascism, New Century Publishers, pp. 69-70)

The nature of the Republican Government in power at the time of the July uprising has, I think, already been characterized by its attitude toward the uprising when it first occurred, as described above.

The Socialists and Communists, according to Thomas, at first did not want the "Left," that is the Socialist Party, apparently the only Left organization in a position to do so, to take over the Republican Government. This was because they thought it "possible to influence Britain and France to help the Republic by maintaining a purely middle-class government." (p. 267) (The British government was, from the first, hostile to the Republic (Thomas, pp. 258, 264); the French Popular Front Government (with some British pressure (Álvarez del Vayo, p. 68) proposed the infamous Non-Intervention Pact, which shut off most material aid to the Republic.) The working-class militias, which were bearing the brunt of the fighting, could have had little confidence in "their" "middle-class" government.

Thomas relates:

On September 4, Azáña reluctantly accepted Giral's resignation as Premier. Largo Caballero, however, the obvious choice for his successor, refused to take office unless the Communist Party also did so. (He invited the Anarchists to join; they refused.) No Communist Party had previously ever joined a western government. The Spanish Communist Central Committee opposed joining for fear of being compromised by a non-Communist policy. Moscow, however, gave instructions to join and Largo Caballero formed his Government on this basis of collaboration with the Communist Party. The Communists explained this action by saying that Civil War demanded unity against Fascism and that the main tasks of the proletarian revolution were already fulfilled. (Thomas, pp. 269-270)

Thomas goes on to say that of the new Cabinet of about twelve, two were Communists: one Hernández, the Minister of Education, later became bitterly

anti-Communist, and wrote an autobiography (published in Franco Spain), which may be the source of the "instructions" from "Moscow," since Thomas gives no source. Álvarez del Vayo, who was, and is, very sympathetic to the Communists, and who was also in Caballero's Cabinet, also says "the Communists did not want to enter the Government." (p. 212) Given this, and the general attitude of the Soviet Union and the Comintern at the time, I don't doubt that it was Comintern instructions that prompted the PCE to enter the government.

Did the Caballero government and the objective conditions under which it was formed correspond to Dimitrov's "Government of the United Front"? Yes. Is the concept itself correct, from a Leninist viewpoint? As I have stated elsewhere, the concept carries with it a foundation for opportunism. However, in the circumstances of the Spanish "Civil War," where the "Government of the United Front" did indeed correspond to the quite general conditions which Dimitrov says must exist for it to be formed, the formation of that government seems to have been correct. Does the existence of a legitimate "Government of the United Front" assure that the struggle against fascism and, ultimately, for the proletarian revolution, will be carried out in a correct and principled way? No. Had the "main tasks of the proletarian revolution" been fulfilled, as Thomas said the Spanish CP said? (I have not yet found a corroboration.) Absolutely not².

When the Communists entered the United Front Government, the Party took on an active leadership role in support of the government and its policies.

In a Program announced in January 1937, the Spanish Party called for the following "Eight Conditions of Victory":

- (1) The entire power must be placed in the hands of the government...
 - (2) The introduction of compulsory military service -- the only way of rapidly creating a great, organised, disciplined and powerful people's army.
 - (3) Iron discipline must be established in the rear...
 - (4) The principal branches of industry, and primarily the munitions industry must be nationalised and reorganised to meet the needs of the front and the rear.
 - (5) A Council of Industrial and Economic Co-ordination must be set up consisting of representatives of the People's Front from all branches of industry... This government body should administer and regulate production. The decisions of the council must be obeyed unreservedly.
 - (6) Workers' control must be set over industry, which must work in accordance with a plan laid down by the Council of Co-ordination.
 - (7) Agriculture must produce everything required by the front and the rear in accordance with a plan...
 - (8) Agricultural production and industrial production must be
-

coordinated.

Cattell tells us:

The Communist Party was one of the first groups to offer to disband its militia into a regular army under the government.

Of the Communist insistence on a unified, disciplined army, Cattell comments:

The Communists continued throughout the war to press their slogan of 'absolute unity in our army,' but the individualistic Spaniards never completely submitted to Communist discipline. The Anarchist militias continued in existence and not until the end of 1937 were they brought under central authority; even then they did not submit completely to rule from above. Nevertheless, all observers agree that out of general chaos the government, driven by the Communists, created a modern army capable of withstanding for three years the combined forces of Franco, the Moroccan legions, the Spanish Foreign Legion, several Italian divisions, and sections of the German Army. It would be quite true to say that without the Communists as the unifying and driving factor, the Loyalist forces would have been defeated long before 1939. (Cattell, p. 88)

The Communists introduced a system of political commissars throughout the Army which they, in the main, controlled. Cattell tells us:

The propaganda of the commissars followed closely the line of the Communists and the Republicans -- supporting military discipline, complete mobilization, love for the fatherland, independence for Spain and democracy. Revolution, socialization, collectivization, and dictatorship of the proletariat were never mentioned.

Cattell characterizes the Party's economic and labor policy as follows:

The Communist attitude toward industry changed from one of reluctantly 'following the trend' to demanding discipline, a central plan and absolute control by the central government... They never called for the abolition of the workers' committees but they pushed for "all technical direction under one person, with full powers to carry out completely his orders on production and with full responsibility." The overall production program was to be set by the state through a Council of Industry. Private enterprise was still to remain with the joint control of workers and management under the state, but the important armament and transport industries were to be nationalized, at least during the war... The syndicates were likewise, to develop a new outlook in respect to their industrial and production relation. The two main tasks of the trade unions were (to improve the situation of the working class) and 'to collaborate with the government to better organize production...'

The Communist "pressure" to implement this policy (including that from Soviet economic advisors) made it possible for the Republican economy to be placed on a war footing. (Cattell, pp. 88-89)

The CP adamantly resisted the collectivization of land. In this they were opposed most vehemently by the Anarchists. Thomas remarks:

Neither were strong enough to force their own solution. So the question of expropriated property was left suspended, most large estates being run by municipalities (or committees where these still existed separately) with the old labourers working under much the same conditions as of old. (p. 363)

Stalin, in December 1936, sent Largo Caballero a letter advising him, among other things that, in Thomas' words:

peasants' and foreigners' property should be respected... (p. 365)

There is no question that the Spanish Party saw its primary task as supporting the Republican government and helping it defeat fascism. Everything it did, every position it took, including those briefly described above, indicates that.

Dolores Ibarruri, "La Pasionaria," probably the Spanish Party's most effective leader, certainly the most popular among the masses, said:

Today the most revolutionary thing is to win the war, which means winning the first battle against fascism on an international scale. (Cattell, p. 90)

Justifying its popular front policy, the Communists said there was a "new type of democracy" in Spain. Cattell opines that this was "the prototype of the present (1955) "People's Democracy." Dimitrov, as Cattell points out, stated at the VIIth Comintern Congress that the government of the united front could be a form of transition to the proletarian revolution such as Lenin said was necessary in "Left Wing" Communism..., and, in fact, cites Spain as an example of where the Government of the United Front "help(s) the millions to master as rapidly as possible, through their own experience, what they have to do, where to find a radical solution, what party is worthy of their confidence..." (United Front Against Fascism, New Century ed., p. 75)

Cattell cites Ercoli (Togliatti) from his book The Spanish Revolution, published December 1936:

It is a distinctive feature of this new type of democratic republic that fascism...is being suppressed by the armed force of the people, and that in this republic there will be no place for this chief and bloodthirsty enemy of the people. Should the people be victorious, fascism will never be able to enjoy there such freedom as, for instance, in France, the USA or England, where it makes use of bourgeois democracy and the rights granted under it to destroy democracy and establish completely arbitrary rule. Secondly, the material basis of fascism will be destroyed in this republic. All land, all enterprises belonging participants in the fascist revolt have already been confiscated and handed over to the Spanish people. (Cattell, p. 91)

The ECCI, in a manifesto issued on the twentieth anniversary of the

Russian Revolution, November 1937, said much the same thing:

Inspired by the victories of the working people in the USSR, the Spanish workers and peasants are fighting for a new type of democratic republic wherein the proletariat is the leading force of the nationwide struggle, where there will be no place for fascism, where its economic basis has been uprooted, and where the material guarantees have been created for the defence of the rights, liberty, and interests of the people. (Degras, V. 3, p. 415)

To the Communist movement, the defeat of fascism and the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution were at the head of the agenda in Spain -- and rightly so. But to say that it is inevitable that a government that is "for" "the people" would come out of the defeat of fascism is dangerously wrong -- as the aftermath of World War II has shown us. (The concept was called "Browderism" then.)

V. Some Conclusions Recapitulated

I shall not describe and examine the application of the united front and popular front policy during the course of the war because, in my opinion, there was little change in any of the essential features that have already been described above.

My conclusions regarding the correctness of the united front and popular front policy in Spain have already been made, but since they are scattered throughout this paper, I shall recapitulate some of the more essential ones.

(1) The facts that Spain had not completed its bourgeois-democratic revolution and that the majority of the Socialist Party upheld armed struggle against the bourgeoisie and reaction justified the Communist Party's united front alliance with the Socialist Party, even prior to the war, as well as its entry into a popular front alliance. However, it was unprincipled for the Spanish Party to have abandoned its maximum program as it apparently did in June 1935.

(2) The nature of the fascist threat justified the Communist Party's entry into what corresponded to Dimitrov's "Government of the United Front." (pp.314-315, this report) That concept of Dimitrov's seems principled only if all of his "objective conditions" existed. (see page 314, this report) In Spain they did (please refer to footnote #2).

(3) The view that the threat of reaction and fascism could be eradicated under any bourgeois government is not Leninist. The view that any bourgeois government could develop into a socialist government is not Leninist. Exploitation and oppression are integral to any bourgeois political system and it was unprincipled for the Comintern (in the person of Togliatti) to indicate otherwise. It was unprincipled to imply that any bourgeois government would obviate the ultimate necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat. (see page 318, this report)

Although it was not mentioned in this report, the creation of the

international brigades met the highest standards of communist internationalism, as did the sending of Soviet aid to the Republic. Those too were part of the application of Comintern united front and popular front policy.

VI. Footnotes

¹In that the left Socialists and Anarchists sought the destruction of the bourgeois government, they were revolutionary. However, both their methods of bringing about that destruction and the political alternatives to the bourgeois government which they proposed did not correspond to the best interests of the workers and peasants.

²For a more thorough discussion of the theoretical weaknesses of Dimitrov's "Government of the United Front," see our paper The Seventh Congress of the Comintern on War and Revolution, particularly the section "What is the Class Character of a United Front Government?"

VII. Books Used

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