

THE CENTENARY OF ANDRÉS NIN

THIS YEAR marks the centenary of Andrés Nin, the outstanding leader of the Catalan working class. Although we are far from uncritical of his role as leader of the POUM, it is fitting to honour the man whom Trotsky described as an 'incorruptible revolutionary'.

A founder of the Spanish Communist Party, Nin became its permanent delegate in Moscow and secretary of the Red International of Labour Unions. He was removed in 1927 after declaring his solidarity with the Opposition, and returned to Spain in September 1930 to establish the Communist Left (CL), Spanish section of the International Left Opposition (ILO).

By 1933, the ILO was warning that the CL's insistence on autonomy in the realm of national tactics threatened a split. Thereafter, Nin's politics were characterised by centrist mistakes. In September 1934, the CL paper *Comunismo* reported its break with Trotsky over the 'French turn' into mass reformist parties.

The POUM was formed in September 1935 when Nin's group fused with the much larger Workers and Peasants Bloc – a right centrist, semi-Bukharinist grouping. It joined the Popular Front in January 1936, participating in an electoral bloc with reformist, Stalinist and bourgeois parties the following month. After the outbreak of civil war in July, the revolutionary instincts of the rank and file swung the POUM to the left. But in September, Nin joined the bourgeois Popular Front government of Catalonia as Minister of Justice. The POUM agreed to the disbanding of the workers' committees established by the revolution, and failed to enter the mass, anarchist-led CNT trade union federation, dissolving instead into the reformist UGT where its influence was overwhelmed by the Stalinists.

Even after Nin's removal from the government in December, the POUM continued to vacillate, combining revolutionary rhetoric with ambiguous positions on the state and army. Unable to give a lead during the Barcelona May Days in 1937, the POUM 'fell victim to the contradictions of its own policy' (Trotsky). But Nin's errors did nothing to excuse him in the eyes of the Stalinists. He remained passionately opposed to them, and for this he was tortured and murdered.

The murder of Nin

An account by POUM leader Julián Gorkin

THE NEWS of the first of the Moscow Trials – the trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and other Bolshevik leaders – reached us in Spain a month after the fascist military uprising, as we were hard at work organising the defence of the revolution.

Few people understood the truth of the matter, but the intensification of the terror in the USSR was to have fatal consequences in Spain. How, when Stalin was engaged in liquidating the Russian Revolution, could he at the same time give genuine aid to the Spanish Revolution?

As an internationalist party, for the POUM to have kept silent on this would have been an act of self-betrayal. They protested publicly, and it was the only protest to be heard in Spain. This revolutionary stance was to earn the POUM the first 'Moscow Trial' outside Russia.

A short time after, the POUM was confronted with another question of conscience: under pressure from Stalin, the Norwegian government ordered Trotsky to leave the country, and one after another every move to find exile elsewhere failed. Before him, as Trotsky himself said, lay 'a planet without a visa'. At that time it could not have been foreseen that the doors of Mexico would be opened to him.

In accordance with a decision of the Executive Committee, Nin and I called on the President of the Catalan Generalidad (Assembly) to request that Trotsky be granted the right to political asylum. Contrary to a baseless international propaganda campaign – which is still going on today – the POUM was not a Trotskyist party; in fact it is true to say that its only relations with Trotsky consisted of vigorous polemics. The POUM's gesture was simply in response to the most elementary duty of solidarity.

Our request was refused. Obviously, had it been agreed to, Trotsky would have been assassinated three years earlier than he was – and all the POUM leaders with him.

Immediately, a systematic campaign of slander and defamation was unleashed against the POUM. It was the Communists who shouted the loudest about anti-fascist unity; but they used this to cover over their tactics of infiltrating workers' organisations and liquidating everyone who opposed them. While they were engaged in taking over the Socialist youth and the Catalan Socialists, and sharpening the divisions within the Socialist Party and the UGT, they were preparing to crush the POUM and all anti-Stalinist tendencies in the working class.

Consul Antonov-Ovseyenko, effectively controlled by 'Pedro' – Ernő Gerő, the first representative of the Comintern and the NKVD in Catalonia – subordinated everything to this objective, while Ambassador Rosenberg, in his almost daily visits to Largo Caballero, insistently spoke to him about two questions scarcely in the orbit of diplomacy: the formation of a United Party of the Proletariat and the liquidation of the POUM.

At the same time, the supply of arms to Catalonia – and the fronts served by it – made dependent on the political liquidation of the POUM and CNT opposition. Despite the fact that 60 per cent of the gold reserves of the Bank of Spain were sent to the USSR, this criminal policy was to be extended a few

months later to the whole of Republican Spain.

From Brussels, Victor Serge, who fortunately for him had left the USSR a few months before the great 'purges', sent us a *Pravda* article of December 17, 1936, which said with brutal frankness: 'As for Catalonia, the elimination of Trotskyists and anarchists has begun and will be pursued as energetically as in the USSR.' Serge commented:

'The POUM will have to fight on two fronts – against the fascists and against the Stalinists. Since the other democratic tendencies, in Spain and internationally, see fascism as the only counter-revolutionary danger, you will have to face the Stalinist peril alone. But be careful: don't fall for some provocation and get caught.'

In another letter in mid-April 1937, he said:

'A leading member of the CPSU came through Brussels and coldly informed the Belgian Communists that the GPU is preparing at the first opportunity to suppress five thousand members of the POUM and the CNT. You can be sure this is the case.'

We had no doubt that a major provocation was being prepared in Catalonia. Where it would come from was the question. In its May 1 Manifesto, the POUM said to the workers: 'Don't fall into the trap of the provocation prepared by the Stalinists.'

In the early afternoon of the 3rd, police chief Rodríguez Salas, the blind tool of Ernő Gerő and Antonov-Ovseyenko, forcibly occupied the Barcelona Telephone Exchange, which had been controlled since the beginning of the war by representatives of the CNT and UGT. By the evening, barricades had spread throughout the Catalan capital. The struggle went on for four days. According to some calculations it left nearly a thousand dead and over two thousand wounded. Those murdered – and horribly mutilated – by the Stalinists included the Italian anarchist professors, Berneri and Barbieri.

This violent provocation – which all the evidence shows to have been coldly premeditated and prepared – was to have tragic consequences for the pursuit of the war. On May 15, when the Council of Ministers was in session in Valencia, the Communist ministers Uribe and Hernández abruptly demanded the dissolution of the POUM and the jailing of its leaders. When they referred to the 'Barcelona events', the four ministers belonging to the CNT tried to show where the provocation came from. Largo Caballero vigorously refused what was demanded of him.

Following a previously agreed plan, Uribe and Hernández provoked a crisis within the government. Then, with the direct complicity of Negrín, Alvarez del Vayo and other socialists close to the Stalinists, in one way or another, they arranged for the formation of a new Largo Caballero government, in agreement with the wishes of the President of the Republic.

In line with this same plan, they had Negrín appointed as the new head of the government. Shortly afterwards the Espionage Tribunal was set up. On June 16, independently of the governments of Valen-

Amnistie Générale pour tous les prisonniers antifascistes.

Libération immédiate de tous les Camarades du P. O. U. M.

Nous n'admettons pas le principe d'un procès contre les camarades du C. E. du P. O. U. M. sans la garantie de la présence d'une délégation ouvrière internationale.

Nous protestons contre les exécutions sommaires et les assassinats de Camarades du P. O. U. M.



Où se trouvent André NIN et les autres disparus ?

A French leaflet demanding the release of the POUM prisoners and information as to Nin's whereabouts

cia and Catalonia, the Soviet secret service proceeded to arrest Andrés Nin, ex-secretary of the Profintern in Moscow, ex-Councillor for Justice in the Generalidad and political secretary of the POUM. The leading members of the party, arrested on the same day, were never to see him again.

On these events and many others relating to Stalin's policy in Spain, all kinds of evidence exists today, and dozens of books have been written on the history of it. The most important of all are two testimonies from within the Communist camp: that of General Krivitsky, former Soviet secret service chief in Western Europe, who 'committed suicide' in a Washington hotel, and that of Jesús Hernández, ex-director of the main paper of the Spanish CP, ex-minister and ex-Commissioner-General for War, and a member of the EC of the Comintern until its dissolution.

Krivitsky shows, among many other things, that on Stalin's orders Yezhov converted Spain into a 'Soviet province', and that all activity in Spain, both foreign and domestic, in one way or another passed under the control of the GPU. On the murder of Nin – Stalinism's most scandalous crime in Spain – Hernández's revelations are particularly sensational. The Spanish-language edition of the book containing them is entitled *I Was Stalin's Minister (Yo fui ministro de Stalin)* and the French edition was called *The Great Betrayal (La grande trahison)* – the titles in themselves are significant. All I shall do here is to summarise these revelations.

One day Hernández was urgently invited by Rosenberg to the embassy. There, under the pseudonym of 'Marcos', he was presented to Slutsky, head of the Foreign Division of the GPU in Western Europe.

Was he following the POUM's efforts to obtain entry into Spain for Trotsky, Hernández was asked. And had he read *La Batalla's* critique of the USSR? It was a matter of the utmost urgency to act against this 'counter-revolutionary band': under the direction of the leading agents Orlov and Bielov and quite outside of the party and its Spanish bodies, the GPU was preparing for action. His collaboration as a minister was needed, he was told, so that the POUM leaders could be arrested.

In the course of the same interview Rosenberg stated that though he had often told Largo Caballero that Stalin was taking a personal interest in the liquidation of this party, the head of the government refused to listen to him. Slutsky made a threat against him.

In another part of the book, Hernández reveals that the decision to liquidate Largo Caballero was taken in the course of a Political Bureau meeting attended by Togliatti, Stepanov, Codovilla, Gerő and Marty; during the same meeting it was agreed to offer the presidency in the new government to Dr Negrín.

Two or three days after the Cabinet was formed, Colonel Ortega, the new Director-General of Security, told him that Orlov had got him to sign several warrants for the arrest of leaders of the POUM, without his superior, the Minister of the Interior, being informed.

The same day he had a visit from Orlov who spoke to him of collusion between a major group of Falangist spies, already under arrest, and the POUM leaders; the plan was to arrest the POUM leaders, taking them by surprise, but the government was to be notified only after they were arrested. Hernández replied:

'What you want is to put on a show trial of Trotskyists in Spain to demonstrate that

you were right to shoot the opposition in the USSR. I saw the article in *Pravda* two months ago announcing this "purge". If you put on such a show trial I warn you that all your "evidence" will convince no one.'

The general secretary of the Spanish CP, José Díaz, was seriously ill at home. Hernández went to see him and told him what was going on. Díaz exclaimed dramatically:

'I feel a great disgust; for myself, for everything. My faith is shaken. I would rather die than have to live through this spiritual death. I gave myself over passionately and unreservedly to the ideal aim the USSR represented; to defend the USSR and Stalin I would have sacrificed my wife, my child, my parents; but today everything is falling apart. I cannot go on.'

He called in Ortega who came in shaking. Ortega confirmed the facts of the matter: in the name of the Central Committee, Togliatti, Codovilla and La Pasionaria had obliged him to transmit a telex to Commander Burillo, head of the Catalan assault squads, with the order to arrest the POUM leaders. Consul Antonov-Ovseyenko and the Russian chargé d'affaires, Stachevsky, had received the order to round them all up; and the police brigades charged with carrying this out were already in Barcelona.

In Hernández's book there is a passage which sums up the whole situation:

'The war allowed the GPU to work freely in Republican Spain and Orlov's men had set up a strong police organisation through which they ruled as if over a conquered country. The arrests of the POUM members were justified in the eyes of the orthodox because to them the friends of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and Bukharin were counter-revolutionaries, agents of fascism and enemies of the people, who had to be executed in every corner of the entire world where they might take refuge. In order to convince the militants of the world that Stalin was not alone in having the Old Guard exterminated, Spain was to be given as an example. There too, in a democratic country, governed by the popular front, they were exposed and executed as traitors.'

Hernández describes the scandal created within and outside Spain by 'this attack on human rights and contempt for democratic laws' and adds: 'Everyone demanded the immediate release of the prisoners and constantly asked: Where is Nin?'

During a visit to Negrín, he saw a pile of telegrams 'from every corner of the world asking the government where Nin was and protesting against the jailing of the POUM leaders'. When Negrín asked him did he 'see a solution which could save the government from the discredit into which it had fallen', Hernández said to him:

'The only solution for the government is to take into its own hands the responsibility for the trial of the POUM. In that way the persecution becomes official. That way we could put an end to the attacks on the GPU, which is seen as responsible for the affair and outside the control of the Spanish authorities.'

Everything relating to the POUM trial and the course imposed on Nin by the GPU has been described in a book entitled *Political Cannibals: Hitler and Stalin in Spain*. Nin was transferred from Barcelona to Valencia and from there to Alcalá de Henares, where he was kept a prisoner in a

THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENT

The Comintern's Third Period errors in Spain

An article by Andrés Nin which appeared in *Communismo* in March 1932 under the title 'The open letter of the Communist Left and the party congress'

building guarded by the Communists. One night, his cell was invaded by ten men, among them Orlov and Vittorio Vidali (Carlos J. Contreras, Eneas Sormenti, agent for the Comintern and the GPU in Mexico from 1928, later one of the organisers of Trotsky's assassination, and since the end of the last World War, Communist chief in Trieste). They took Nin away; and in order to have it believed that the kidnapping was the work of the Nazis, they tied up the two guards and in the cell they left a briefcase containing documents belonging to German intelligence and a sum of money in marks.

The judge named to investigate the affair managed to establish the truth but he was threatened with death and even with the kidnapping of his wife and daughter who had taken refuge in a small seaside town. Nin was transferred to El Pardo, then under a Communist commander, which became the late Franco's residence.

What happened then? El Campesino [Valentin González] swears he was killed there, and then buried close by. Hernández learned what had happened from one of his attackers, a party member; he does not reveal the man's name because he is still – against his own wishes – in the USSR. This part of the Spanish Communist ex-minister's account can only be reproduced in full:

'Andrés Nin, who had been a friend of Lenin, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Trotsky, was murdered in Spain as his comrades of the Bolshevik Old Guard had been in Russia. Orlov and his gang kidnapped Nin in order to extract from him a "confession" to the effect that he had acted as a spy for Franco.

'His torturers, expert in the art of "softening up" political prisoners and dragging "spontaneous" statements out of them, thought that Nin's sickly disposition gave them a valuable aid for their infamous work. I am in possession of this information about Andrés Nin's death through one of Orlov's trusted men who later was to inform me of the plan to murder Indalecio Prieto.

'Nin's torment began with the "straight" procedure: implacable interrogation for ten, twenty or thirty hours during which the torturers took turns, always putting the same questions and giving the same orders: "confess", "come out with it", "make a statement", "it's in your own interest", "you can spare yourself this", "it would be better for you if . . .". Advice, threats, insults . . . A scientific procedure aimed at destroying the individual's mental energy and demoralising him . . .

'But Andrés Nin put up an incredible resistance. He did not capitulate, he resisted. His torturers grew impatient. They decided to abandon the "straight" method and test his "strength": tearing away strips of his skin, crushing his limbs, taking physical suffering to the limits of human resistance.

'Nin bore the torture and the pain, the most refined torments. After a few days his face was nothing but a shapeless mass. Orlov, frenzied and maddened by the fear of a scandal which might lead to his own liquidation, frothed with rage before this sick man, who suffered in agony without "confessing" or denouncing his own party comrades.

According to Hernández, the author of the plan was Orlov's closest collaborator, Vittorio Vidali. He concludes:

'The day after Nin's death, comrade X, to whom I referred earlier, told me that the following message had been sent to Moscow: "Affair A.N. concluded by procedure A." The initials are those of Andrés Nin. But what was procedure A? In the code used by the Soviet delegation, A meant death. If Nin had not been liquidated, the delegation (Togliatti, Stepanov, Codovilla and Gerö) would have transmitted a different message.'

These are the bare facts. During the 22nd Congress, Khrushchev announced his intention of bringing many of Stalin's crimes out into the open. Nothing would be easier than to bring the killing of Andrés Nin into the open.

Ernö Gerö and La Pasionaria live in the USSR. Orlov fled to the United States, but Vittorio Vidali still represents the Kremlin in Trieste. Codovilla (known in Spain as Medina) is still the Communist representative in Buenos Aires. And Palmiro Togliatti ('Alfredo' in Spain), who according to Hernández transmitted the news of the killing to Moscow, is still in Rome, as the head of the Italian Communist Party. All of them now put themselves forward as 'de-Stalinisers'. They have an excellent opportunity to prove that they are.

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THE FUNDAMENTAL error of the International and its 'executants' in Spain during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship lay in considering this to be a purely fascist regime which could be brought down only by the insurrection of the working classes and peasants. This erroneous conception distorted all the political views of the Party (as far as one can talk of views in referring to this Party since the lack of them was its distinguishing feature) and determined the tactics which isolated it completely from the masses.

The Party, loyal to the abstract schematism which in recent years has come to replace Marxist dialectics in the management of the International and its branches, confused all the harsh forms of bourgeois dictatorship with fascism, forgetting that the latter constituted something new which had risen up after the imperialist war and which was characterised by the utilisation of the petty bourgeoisie by capital as a mass movement for the destruction of the workers' organisations. Primo de Rivera's *coup d'état* was a typical *pronunciamiento* which was not based on the active collaboration of the petty bourgeoisie but rather on their indifference and weariness. And the regime was set up, a military dictatorship of which several examples can be found in nineteenth-century Spanish history. Obviously, deep down, generally speaking, both military dictatorships and fascist dictatorships – and parliamentary regimes too – strive after the same goal: to secure the domination of the bourgeoisie; but there are differences in the relationships and combinations of class which the revolutionary strategist must take into account if he wishes to prepare an effective policy based on the study of reality and not on the abstract.

These are the extremely important differences which the International's unfortunate theorists failed to take into consideration and which were the source of all their constant tactical errors. The plan could not have been simpler: on the one side the bourgeois dictatorship in all its forms (military dictatorship, fascism, parliamentary rule, 'social-fascism'); on the other, the revolutionary proletariat. The immediate consequence of this false position was the absolute impossibility for manoeuvre, the impossibility of neutralising the petty bourgeois masses and even gaining their sympathy, of using the democratic slogans to their own benefit, of assembling the popular masses for the revolution. The possibility of a bourgeois democratic regime succeeding Primo de Rivera's dictatorship was completely rejected. Primo de Rivera – the International said, and its Spanish followers repeated it parrot-fashion – can only be brought down by the working class and peasant masses. This erroneous concept was joined by the famous theory of the 'third period', which occurred to the unhappy Molotov (in the post-Leninist International 'hitting on an idea' has taken the place of Marxist analysis), according to which Europe had entered a period of immediate battles by the proletariat for power, when, on the contrary, capitalism was going through a stage of relative stabilisation and the working classes found themselves on the defensive. Assuming such a premise, could one conceivably consider the possibility of a democratic phase in Spain before the proletariat found itself in a position to seize power? Clearly, a mistaken appraisal of the situation was to lead to the wrong tactics; but what did it matter as long as the 'principles' were saved? A plan is drawn up, an abstract formula launched and the facts have to adapt themselves to this plan and to this formula. And if this is not the case, so much the worse for the facts. Naturally, history follows its course and reality shows the unsoundness of the plan at every step; but this does not silence the International's bureaucrats. When the catastrophe is imminent the zealous 'executants' of the 'general line' will get the blame.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Primo de Rivera's fall – easy to foresee in the preceding months – should catch the Party completely unawares. Things were not happening as they had been laid down in the International's plan. Primo de Rivera, ignoring the wise forecasts of Stalinist augurs, had decided to leave without waiting for the insurrection of the working classes and the peasants to throw him out. The Party's bureaucrats were taken completely by surprise. If they had been revolutionary Marxists and not poor civil servants with no other desire than to serve and please their superiors, they would have corrected the error which was staring them in the face, and fitted their tactics to objective reality.



Andrés Nin (1892-1937)

But Moscow stuck to its guns; Manuiski, the official on duty for affairs in the Latin countries, said that the political developments in Spain were less important than any strike in a European country, and the Spanish Stalinists, instead of surrendering to reality, declared that nothing had happened and that the only news was that one general had replaced another.

It was obvious, however, that 'something' had happened, and something very important. Primo de Rivera's fall, and his replacement by a regime such as that represented by Berenguer's government was easily foreseeable by anyone who did not have their political vision blurred by bureaucratic schematism. The reader will allow me to quote a lengthy extract from my booklet *El proletariado español ante la revolución*, as incontestable proof that the Communist opposition of the left had seen this fundamental question far more clearly than the Party. Here is what I said:

'Primo de Rivera was replaced by General Berenguer. Some members of the revolutionary camp, who unfortunately have abandoned the Marxist methods of analysis of objective situations, declared that in Spain "nothing had happened", that the situation remained the same as before. This conclusion was erroneous, a logical consequence of a completely incorrect conception which had taken hold in certain sectors of the Communist movement and which consisted in maintaining that the military dictatorship could not be brought down except by the violent action of the working masses, who would in turn destroy bourgeois rule. Since the facts turned against this plan there was no alternative but to say that *nothing had happened*.'

Experience has shown how profoundly mistaken this conception was. As Lenin used to say, 'In reality there are no hopeless situations for the bourgeoisie'. Capitalism is still strong and can still fall back on infinite resources. It is obvious that if the workers' movement had not been in the disorganised state of ideological confusion in which it found itself at the time of Primo de Rivera's fall, that if at that moment a big Communist party had existed capable of leading and guiding the actions of the masses, the bourgeoisie would have been denied the possibility of operating, and the working classes would have seized power. But these factors were missing, and because of the circumstances set out above the possibility of a new attempt at democracy arose. This question is extremely important, because it is found in analogous if not identical form in other countries, principally in

Italy. There are Communists in Italy who maintain that there is no possibility of a new bourgeois democracy in that country. If this is true as a general view in the sense that democratic forms of bourgeois domination cannot resolve the internal contradictions of capitalist rule it is certainly not true with respect to the immediate outlook. Whether Mussolini's fascist regime is replaced by a bourgeois democratic regime or by a proletarian dictatorship depends on the correlation of social forces at the time that fascism crumbles. If at that moment the Italian Communist Party has not won the hegemony in the upheaval of the large popular masses in the country, the possibility arises of a new period, whether it be brief or lengthy, of bourgeois democratic rule, supported by the petty bourgeoisie and the democratic illusions of the proletariat.

Spanish experience has shown the possibility of this variant. At the time of Primo de Rivera's fall, the petty bourgeois masses, called upon to play an extraordinarily important role, were unable to follow the working class revolutionary party simply because this, in reality, did not exist. Because of this, big opportunities arose for the development of the democratic demagoguery. The situation was, however, so confused that the direct step to democratic rule was dangerous and impossible. The reader will allow me to quote a passage from an article published by me on the eve of the fall of the military dictatorship in a foreign magazine. In this article I said:

'When the time comes for the dictatorship to prepare to leave and look for a successor, there are neither parties nor men, and – as Cambó rightly observes in his book on dictatorships – organised parties and disciplined forces to govern are lacking, and along with the dictatorship political parties or forces have either disappeared altogether or have become greatly reduced in size.'

The industrial bourgeoisie, of which Cambó is the visible head, does not constitute an exception in this sense. The Regionalist League, so strong in former days, hardly exists as an organisation. But even if, by taking advantage of the constitutional regime, it managed to reconstitute its forces, which is not impossible, it would not be in a position to take on the full responsibility of power . . . Objectively the necessary premises for a revolution exist. But at the present moment there is no organised political force in Spain, neither among the industrial bourgeoisie, nor among the working classes, capable of taking the power into its hands.