The Spanish Civil War in Euzkadi and Catalonia
contrasts and convergences

Miguel Romero
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Foreword

Like many others, this Notebook was conceived and developed on the basis of lectures given several times and the course of Research and Education in Amsterdam, as well as work done in the framework of academic requirements.

The history of the Spanish Civil War is a rich and complex subject which can be approached in different ways. A first, rather simplistic, reading is to see in the Spanish events a conflict between democracy and fascists. Another is to see the 1936-39 conflicts as a preview of the Second World War with the confrontation between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. A third, minority, historicist current interprets this period as the last expression of the big revolutionary wave which swept through Europe in the inter-war period after October 1917.

As Miguel Romero demonstrates, the Spanish Civil War was three things at once and a historian must bear in mind these three completely interwoven dimensions: the defence of the Republic under threat from the Francoist military rebellion (which can be considered as the Spanish form of fascism); the international dimension of the conflict (Italian and German intervention, non-intervention by the French and British, the mobilization of the workers' movement in the International Brigades); finally the confrontation within the Republican camp between the Popular Front controlled by the Stalinist forces and the labouring masses of the anarcho-CNT and the Marxist POUM.

During the 1930s, the Spanish state represented the "weak link" in the European imperialist chain, as had the Tsarist Russian Empire during the First World War. But the Russian Revolution opened a cycle of anti-capitalist struggles in Europe while the Spanish Civil War marked the end of this cycle. Could it have given new life to the class struggle and been a turning point in the European situation, putting an end to the accumulation of defeat (Germany and Hungary in 1919, Italy in 1920, and 1922-25, Britain and China in 1925-27, Poland in 1926, Germany in 1933 and Austria in 1934)? This is not a question of rewriting history to accord with our wishes, but only to point out that it does not follow a predetermined path, but there can be different outcomes to each crisis. The choices and actions of men and women decide which possible outcome will become reality. Nobody had a recipe for the triumph of the Spanish revolution, and Miguel Romero does not pretend to give it to us after the event. He simply reminds us that the decision of the Popular Front to crush the revolution in Catalonia was neither inevitable nor necessary. Events prove that it was in fact disastrous.

This Notebook for Study and Research is not a new historical synthesis of the Spanish Civil War. There is already very extensive literature on this subject, of which the bibliography in this ASR gives only a glimpse. Miguel Romero is certainly not a historian of events but a revolutionary activist who questions conventional history and tries to look at it from the point of view of the defeated and oppressed. Leaving aside all revolutionary rhetoric, this basic methodological starting point makes it possible for him to show that the defeat of the revolutionaries in the Republican camp paved the way for Franco's victory.

The originality of this study is the way in which it integrates the national question into its analysis of the civil war. In the Basque country and in Catalonia, defense of the Republic, revolutionary mobilization of the workers and the anti-fascist struggle took place in two different and specific national contexts. Retracing the tormented history of the autonomy statutes of Catalonia (1931) and Ezkadi (1936) from the fall of the Alfonsine monarchy to the victory of Franco in 1939, Miguel Romero develops a comparative analysis of the civil war in the two countries. He notes that the inter-Republican majajolic conclusion to the conflicts should not hide the very different dynamics of the social and political forces in the two situations. In Catalonia the Republican camp was dominated by a leftist nationalistic force — Ezkadi — and became the scene of an authentic proletarian and popular revolution, incarnated by the central committee of the anti-fascist federation led by the CNT and the POUM. In Ezkadi, the repression to the French intervention was from the outset totally under the domination of the dominant bourgeois, conservative and Catholic — current of Basque nationalism. In following these two distinct paths that came together in defeat, Miguel Romero criticizes certain traditional interpretations, according to which the Catalan revolution and the defence of the Basque national identity were incompatible with the anti-fascist struggle. In Catalonia, the crushing of the revolution by the Popular Front disarmed the Republicans with fascist reaction. In Ezkadi, the left's underestimation of the importance of the national question made possible the affirmation of right-wing nationalism in the leadership of the Republican camp, which also had catastrophic consequences for the outcome of the war.

Pierre Rousset, Enzo Traverso

The Netherlands
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Chronology

1930: January: Resignation of Primo de Rivera. End of the dictatorship.
1931: April: Republican majority in municipal elections. Abdication of Alfonso XIII and proclamation of the "Workers’ republic".

December: approval of the new constitution, as well as the Catalan autonomy statute.
1933: January-March: Hitler takes power in Germany.
1934: October: formation of centre-right government of Leopoldo O’Draíle. Mass reaction expressed in the call for a general strike by the Workers’ Alliance. Workers’ rising in Asturias, followed by the formation of a government with the socialists, the anarcho-syndicats, members of the BOC and, at the last minute, the official Communists. The repression ended in a bloodbath (80,000 imprisoned, 5,000 dead and 5,000 wounded). In Madrid there was a violent general strike and in Catalonia the October events, marked by a semi-violent general strike led by the Workers’ Alliance — without the CNT — and by the resignation of the Catalan government. Abdication of Catalan autonomy.
1935: August: Seventh Congress of the Communist International which adopted the strategy of the Popular Front.

September: Foundation of the POUM.
1936: February: victory of the left coalition known as the Popular Front in the elections.

May: Azara is elected president, Cóspero Quiroga prime minister. The only criticism comes from Joaquín Maurin.

June: general strike and victory of the Popular Front in France.

July: military rising which marks the start of the Civil War and the revolutionary process in most of the Republican States.

August: Italy and Germany mobilize alongside the military in revolt. Soviet consul arrives in Barcelona. September: constitution of the Non-Intervention Committee on the initiative of the French Popular Front government. It includes 25 European countries (including Germany and the Soviet Union). Its aim is to impose non-interference by the rest of Europe in the Spanish civil war. This paralysis signifies de facto recognition of the legitimacy of the military revolt. Largo Caballero is named prime minister. The CNT and the POUM join the Catalan government.

1937: December: the POUM is excluded from the Generalitat government because of the pressure of the PSUC and with the agreement of the CNT.

1938: February: fall of Malaga.

March: republican victory in Guadalajara against Italian troops.

April: bombing of Guernica by German aircraft. Guernica, a Basque town of seven thousand inhabitants was completely destroyed. Thanks to the famous painting by Picasso, it became a symbol of Francoist barbarity.

May: after the attempt by the Generalitat to re-establish control over the central telephone exchange of Barcelona occupied by CNT workers, there is a workers’ uprising supported by the militant anarcho-syndicalist base and by the POUM. The intervention of the FAI leadership — Garcia Oliver, Montaner and Vázquez — makes possible a return to normal after a vague promise of reconciliation. The insurrection was followed by a Stalinist-type wave of repression principally aimed at the POUM (arrests of Nín and Landaua), but which also targeted anarchist circles.

June: fall of Bilbao. Start of repression in Catalonia: the POUM is banned and its leaders arrested.

September: capitulation of the Basque army at Santona.
1939: October: the Vatican officially recognizes the fascist regime based in Burgos.

March: Battle of Ebro, which marks the last big Republican military offensive.

September: Munich agreement, with the capitulation of the democratic European powers to German expansionism.


1939: January: fall of Barcelona to fascist troops.

February: fall of Catalonia. The Franco government recognizes in France and Britain.

March: occupation of Madrid by Francisco Franco, after the coup d'état by Colonel Casado which is an expression of the sharp conflicts between the Republic right and the CNT on the one hand and the PCE-PSUC on the other. Definitive fall of the Republic.

April: the United States recognize the new fascist Spanish regime.

August: Ribbentrop-Molotov pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Collapse and death of the Republic — at home and abroad — of the Republican forces who suffered dearly from the effects of the defeat.

October: creation of a Republican regular army, initially co-existing with the anti-fascist militia formed during the popular uprising. Approval of the autonomy statute for Catalonia by the Republic.

November: arrival of the International Brigades in Madrid.

Introduction

For Enrique Rodriguez, friend and comrade, who, like him, fought with dignity for the socialist revolution during the Spanish civil war.

The revolutionary left does not take much interest in historical debates. This is perhaps due to the attraction of today’s great events and to the fact that analogous reasoning sheds little light on them.

Writing from this point of view, I believe history remains an important field for ideological struggle — modern bourgeois ideologies are founded on colonial historical manipulation, particularly where popular revolutionary movements are concerned — and for political education, provided we ask of it only what it can legitimately deliver: an understanding of the past.

The Spanish Civil War holds an important position in the history of the European workers’ movement. It is one of the events of the interwar period whose outcome determined the course of the international situation. It was a testing-ground for ideas, for political and military strategies, for cultures — in short for the fundamental issues of our epoch. We have an enormous bibliography at our disposal on this theme, comprising more than 16,000 books, among which there are general studies of the highest quality. I am thinking particularly of The Revolution and the War in Spain by P. Boulé and E. Témime, The Spanish Revolution by R. Bloch and Recuerda tu ayer by R. Fraser, three works which can be considered as complementary. This Notebook is based on these as well as on other works. It aims, while respecting the historical truth, at a political activist’s understanding of a limited portion of the civil war, the question of power in republican Catalonia and Euskadi.

The text must inevitably assume some knowledge of the general facts of the civil war and this may give rise to some problems of understanding for readers unfamiliar with the material. This introduction cannot and does not pretend to resolve these problems. I will limit myself to a few elements as a reminder to those already familiar with the subject, which may be of help to those who are not, particularly if it moves them to read the books I have just mentioned.

Spain in the 1930s

At the start of the 1930s, Spain was a backward capitalist country, still essentially agrarian, but already marked by the influence of industrial development — "proto-industrial" as some would have it: its inhabitants numbered 23.5 million. The active population was 8.5 million — the majority in the primary sector (agriculture 45.5%, industry 26.5%, services 27.9%). Despite growing urbanization since the beginning of the century, only about three out of every ten people lived in towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants. Industry was concentrated in the periphery: Barcelona, Bilbao, and Asturias, followed by Madrid, the capital. The most numerous industrial working class sectors were building (400,000 workers), the metal industry (around 340,000, textiles (300,000, of whom about half were women), and mining (176,000). Excepting the Basque metal industry, large-scale industry hardly existed.

Finance capital controlled the country’s economy: six major groups dominated industry and services. The agricultural sector was typically oligarchic: ten thousand families owned half the land.

The urban and rural petty bourgeoisie represented around half the active population and played an important social and political role in Spanish society.

Finally, foreign capital had an important presence in certain key sectors: American in telephones, British in basic metal industry, and the Andalusian copper mines, Belgian in the railways, and so on.

The bourgeoisie was as weak as economically as politically. This was most evident in the crisis of the Spanish nation-state. In Catalonia there was a majority national consciousness and very influential nationalist organisations. The traditional party of the Catalan bourgeoisie, the Lliga, was losing its role and was replaced by a new foundation, founded just before the Republic was proclaimed in 1931: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (The Catalan Republican Left or ERC).

In Euskadi, the nationalistic movement was weaker, but already represented a social and political force which was to develop rapidly under the Republic. Its main organization was the Basque National Party (PNV), founded at the turn of the century by Sabino Arana, with an ideology permeated with racism and reactionary Catholicism. After a long period of crisis, the party had been on the rise since 1930, marked by a political evolution in which its traditional roots coexisted with republicanism.

The extreme backwardness of Galicia, another oppressed nationality, held back the development of a nationalist movement, which failed to constitute a mass movement during this period.

The political weakness of the Spanish bourgeoisie was also reflected, characteristically, in the virtual powerlessness of the church and of the army. The church’s members numbered 130,000, in a country where there were only 55,000 university students (and an illiteracy rate of 45%). As well as its active membership, the church also disposed of an economic empire comprising buildings, banks, mines, transport enterprises, and so on.

As for the army, its service record consisted of the
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The workers' movement

Since 1923, Spain lived under the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, who described himself formally as a “military director” nominated by King Alfonso XIII. By the end of 1929 it was obvious that the dictatorship had failed to resolve the crisis of the monarchy and modernize the economy and political regime to meet the needs of the industrial and financial bourgeoisie. This failure was to lead to a mortally wounded monarchy and a politically disorganized, though enfeebled bourgeoisie.

When the dictatorship fell, the workers movement was, to used Maurin’s phrase, a sleeping giant. At that time Socialism and Anarcho-syndicalism were the two fundamental currents of the workers’ movement. They experienced the dictatorship in a very different way.

The Socialists collaborated with Primo de Rivera until the fall of this regime. They had nevertheless preserved considerable strength; in 1930 the Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party (PSOE) had 16,878 members and the General Workers Union (UGT) — which it led — had 287,333. It underwent considerable growth under the Republic: in 1934 the PSOE claimed 100,000 members and the UGT 1.2 million.

The Anarcho-syndicalist trade union, the National Confederation of Labour, had been heavily punished and practically dismantled by the dictatorship. But from 1930 onwards it regrouped rapidly, regrouping under the electoral wing of the workers’ movement with about the same membership the UGT. In 1927 the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) was formed and rapidly took control of theCNT, leading it under the Republic in an insurrectional direction together with trade union struggle based on direct action and clearly opposed the reformist trade unionism of the Socialists.

In 1930 the CNT was just a group of 800 members in the grip of the sectarian divisions of the “third period”. Until the insurrection of 1934 (see chapter 1) it did not grow significantly. On the eve of the Civil War, however, it allowed itself to join the Workers’ Alliance (Alianza Obrera), the unified leadership of the struggle, which it had always denounced as the “Holy Alliance of the counter-revolution”. Its policy of resistance until the end of the insurrection conferred on it a prestige which helped it grow substantially. Even so, on the eve of the civil war which erupted on 18 July 1936, it had only 50,000 members.

A few days after the beginning of the civil war, the very weak organization of the PCE in Catalonia achieved an important political success when it fused with socialist and nationalist groups to form the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) under the auspices of the Communist International. The PSUC’s initial membership was about 7,000.

The profoundly sectarian and bureaucratic nature of the PCE had provoked, at the dictatorship’s end, a split of several federations, of which the most important was certainly the Catalan-Basque Federation led by Joaquín Maurin. This organization was behind the creation of a “mass front”, the “Workers and Peasants’ Alliance” (Bloc Obrero y Campesino), which had only 5,000 members in 1934. During the Republic’s early years, the BOC followed a vacillatory course, tending to adapt to the nationalist organization Esquerra. But from 1933 onwards, it moved clearly to the left. It was the BOC which launched the idea of organizing workers’ alliances, which were the protagonists of the workers’ movement’s recuperation until the insurrection of October 1934.

Finally, the left opposition was organized from the end of 1930 around a small nucleus of militants. In spite of a remarkable effort of revolutionary propaganda, its growth was quite limited; in 1934 it had 287,333 members. At the end of 1935, against Trotsky’s advice, the Communist opposition joined the BOC to form the Workers’ Party of Marxist Unity (POUM). This revolutionary organization’s main influence was confined to Catalonia, where it had 7,000 members when the civil war began. These were the protagonists in the events which now unfolded.

The Anarchists in the Workers’ Movement

The Insurrectional Process

The Insurrectional Process

The experience and situation of Euskadi were represented a left political current within the traditional Catalan nationalist movement. This was a very broad and heterogeneous movement, which consolidated itself under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, following the initially-collectivissimo attitude of the upper echelons of the Union Sindicalista (USC) and notably of Cambó, whose efforts were not compensated by its subsequent timid rectification. The Esquerra was a sort of “party-movement” comprising the corresponding to what the historian E. Ucelay terms the “populism” of its political programme. [8. The numbers in square brackets refer to the bibliography at the end of the Notebook.]

From the beginning it could call on a vast network of social, cultural, professional and other organizations rooted in Catalan society, thanks to a system of indirect affiliation. Indirect affiliation allowed it to political represent this heterogeneous and varied social tissue, and to establish links — vague and sometimes conflict-ridden, but also very effective at decisive movements such as the 1936 elections and above all the civil war itself — with the workers’ movement (its Achilles heel, because it never secured a significant implantation). Finally, this populism converged with an identification with its social base which could resist the gyrations of practical politics which, in the ERC’s case, as with many parties of similar characteristics, were much below and often in conflict with its programmatic declarations. This is the primary explanation for its success in the 12 April elections.

This victory was followed by a “gesture” which seemed very important to me: the proclamation of the Catalan Republic by Macia on 14 April. In general, militants have paid more attention this fact than have historians (Andreu Nin, for example, considered it “the most revolutionary act of 14 April”). Its effect on the immediate course of events was limited: the situation was rapidly recuperated through the creation of the Generalitat, a pre-autonomous regime created by agreement with the central authorities of the Republic. However this act had very important consequences for the relationship between the ERC and the movement of civil society and its decisive influence on the general situation in Spain and notably on the course of the war in Euskadi and Catalonia. It is useful to refer to this to give our work a general framework. I shall deal with this under four headings: the proclamation of the Republic; the statutory process; the elections of October 1934; and the events of February 1936.

The proclamation of the Republic

The great victory of the 12 April 1931 elections in Catalonia was the Esquerra ERC. This might be considered surprising, since the party was really a recent creation. But the ERC was a very special party. It represented a left political current within the traditional Catalan nationalist movement. This was a very broad and heterogeneous movement, which consolidated itself under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, following the initially-collectivissimo attitude of the upper echelons of the Union Sindicalista (USC) and notably of Cambó, whose efforts were not compensated by its subsequent timid rectification. The Esquerra was a sort of “party-movement” comprising the corresponding to what the historian E. Ucelay terms the “populism” of its political programme. [8. The numbers in square brackets refer to the bibliography at the end of the Notebook.]

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The Comunista Tradicionalism movement, with an especially strong base in Navarra, was clearly anti-
republican and, in general, anti-democratic. The situation was even more ambiguous. It is not 
wholly mistaken to view this itself as a "Basque republicans carrying the cross of Christ", which 
according to Tuñon de Lara was advanced at Zaragoza in 1931. In any case, in the Spain 
of the 1930s, the terms "republican" and "cross" seem fairly contradictory. Probably, for the 
PNV's sake, the second was more important. The fact is that the NVV 
did not sign the pact of San Sebastian and did not join 
the republican bloc. Mistrust, if not overt hostility, marked the history of the Republican 
Bloc. The final, and, thus, almost inevitable result, was a decisive 
anti-republicanism of the Basque political parties of the time. The party based on 
the stagnation of the Socialist bloc organization, were fundamental 
causes of this relationship of hostility and mistrust. But the 
situation contributed to the sharpening of the conflict. 
First of all, the PNV, according to Aranha, had only 
"relative weight in general Spanish politics" [1], 
much less than that of Catalan nationalism. This refers 
to a real problem: the marginalization of Basque 
nationalism in the major issues facing the country at the 
time, especially with respect to the 
republican bloc. The main PNV's main 
competing body was within the Basque socialist movement, a 
fundamental social component of nationalism, which 
formulated the construction of, and hostility towards, 
the national question of the Spanish 
Basque Country, and socialists expressed themselves 
openly in relations with the PNV.

The statutory process

These different points of departure had profound 
consequences for the two statutory processes. 
In the Basque case, the process was relatively quick and 
simple. Esquerra clearly wanted an agreement and its 
support for the Nuria bill was purely formal.2 It 
immediately accepted the text proposed by the 
parliamentary commission.3 However the text 
which was approved in a euphoric 
town in Navarra on 14 June by 
was approved majorly but 
and approved in 
and approved in 

3. In spring 1933, the mayor for autonomy movement led by José An-
tonio Aguirre, mayor of Gernika (Bilbao), launched by the 
PNV and supported by the traditionalists and independents, who 
controlled most Basque towns (except the Nervión basin where there 
were left tractions), ensured the Basque statute was 
seen as an agent of the 
PNV, which, especially in Navarra, where there 
was an established statute and the imprisonment of the 
PNV leaders, 
reinforced the Basque nationalist 
consciousness in the time, and contributed to the development of 
the Basque nationalist movement. The text approved 
and the text approved 
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to his electoral goals in Euskadi. From this standpoint 
one can better understand the oscillations of Basque 
socialism in relation to the statute, which 
contributed to the extraordinary situation 
separating the popular socialist and nationalist sectors.

After the 1933 referendum the Basque statute was 
blocked until the victory of the Popular Front.4

October 1934

The important events of October 1934 (the Asturian 
insurrection) directed their fate almost exclusively to 
the people of Euskadi and Navarra. This moment of 
extraordinary political activity was marked by 
the Basque workers' movement's role in 
the conflict. The workers' movement played a dominant role in 
not as the obvious consequences of the 1934 
defeat showed. 

Finally, we must note that these events marked a 

There were three poles of reference in Catalonia: 
a) Alianza Obrera, which tried without success to 
deploy a general strike with an insurrectional dynamic 
(attacked only with the localities were drawn in). From this 
setback was born the communist current which gave 
birth to the POU until the end of 1935, a party which 
the Socialists, based on the relative 
longstanding of the socialist political leaders of the 
PCE, acting as an autonomous force within the 
organization, which had reunified at 
In the Basque case, in contrast, the much more 
time, the localities were 
the Catalan government, notably the ERC, 
which determined the framework of this 
the Basque Country the clarification was necessary and 
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The central programme of what was called the 
Popular Front included the 

The February 1936 elections

To conclude this chapter we shall add some 
cumulations on the results of these elections which once 
more eliminate the supposed differences between 
Catalonia and the Basque Country. 

The central programme of what was called the 
Popular Front included the 

5. Historia of great value, politically closed to the "revolutions" of the 
PCE. The review Homen eta Orain was the CP journal in Euskadi. 
The date of the article is the second half of 1980.
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Catalan statute of autonomy. Here we can see the importance which the republican and left forces assigned to Catalonia. It also explains the strength of the Front de Esquers electoral coalition, clearly hegemonized by the left. The electoral victory was important, notably in Barcelona, where the Front secured around 64% of the votes. But the result was secured by the nationalist right, organised in the "Order Front" led by the Lliga — 35% of the vote — proves that its influence was far from negligible. This only makes its disappearance as an active force with the outbreak of civil war more striking.

In Euzkadi, the battle unfolded on three fronts, opening in a parliament polarized between three more or less equal forces. After an initial setback in February, the PNV secured 9 deputies, the right (8 of which 7 from Navarra) and the Popular Front 7. In the provinces the PNV and the Popular Front divided the seats of Biscay and Guipuzcoa between them, in Alava the Popular Front got one seat and the right got one. The right won all the seats in Navarra. If elections are a distorted reflection of social reality, we must conclude that in the light of events the distortion in this case was minimal.

In spite of their divided presentation at the elections, and even though the Popular Front's programme studiously avoided the question of the Basque statute (in fact the statute of autonomy was included in the programme of the basque coalition, but only as an electoral expedient), the result of the elections and the dynamic of division which they initiated, made it possible to recover the statute of autonomy in a climate of collaboration between the PNV and the leadership of the Popular Front (and particularly Prieto, as we shall see). The latter proposed once again a pragmatic formula to resolve the problem: a brief statute as close as possible to Catalonia's. The war readily interrupted the parliamentary negotiations.

In concluding this chapter we must insist on one point: the difference between the "political centre of gravity" in Euzkadi and Catalonia. This element is in my opinion more important than social and political analogies which can be made between these two nations.

In Catalonia the centralist right was very weak; the nationalist right had a certain electoral weight but was politically defeated by the ERC; the hegemonic nationalist force was a clearly republican organization, and in Catalonia the political centre of gravity was clearl y on the left. In Euzkadi the centralist right was very strong in Navarra and carried some weight in Alava, though much weaker in the other Basque provinces. The hegemonic nationalist organization, the PNV, can be considered a "centre" party, with all the ambiguity this term conveys. The hegemonic organization in the workers' movement was Prieto socialism, which can likewise be considered as in the PSOE "centre". Its general line identified with a project of reform within the limits of republican legality and was decidedly opposed to the revolutionary left, at that time a tiny minority in Euzkadi. In this situation the centre of gravity was much further to the right than in Catalonia. I think that this is the starting point for the social and political dynamics of the civil war, so different in the two cases.
In the province of Guipuzcoa, after having stopped the troops of Carrausco Amilibia from entering the town, and simultaneously creating the first units of the military union sent by Mola from Navarra. Here the workers’ militias, notably the communists and anarchists, were the main instrument of military resistance and incapable of organizing a political power, even embryonic, capable of structuring itself and centralizing at a provincial level: from this point of view local junta were insignificant. Perhaps this community, which included militarily sensitive to the national question — Argiarraga and Larrañaga, who replied to Calvo Sotelo rather oddly for this current: “A red Spain is a broken Spain” — put their allegedly had put behind them this direction (although no precise documents have been found to prove it), but they were too weak to carry them out. The lack of political leadership in military strategy appeared very clearly in a book-written by the anarchist militant Chiapuzo who refers to the retreat in the following terms: “We acted as if we were coming back the next day” [11.28]. Even if his alternative model was the traditional anarchist scorched-earth policy, his judgement gives some idea of the level of disorganization, as do other testimonies. 

The situation was more confused in Biscay. In general historians treat the situation before the government (Junta) was formed in a very superficial way. It is surprising that no-one has taken into account the statements of Jose Maria Arenillas, a point which seems to be at odds with the position of secretary of the government of Bizkaia. If we accept the premise that the governor played no active role, Arenillas cites the fact that the banks granted new powers of credit to it that they had refused to the government of a Basque government, as we shall see later on.

3) Whether or not the PNV was present within this body has some importance. According to Arenillas, the PNV’s policy was expressed in pressure on the governor for him to wind up the committees and create a “government of defence” which came into being, effectively, on 12 August. As an example of the “political normalization” that this government represented, Arenillas cites the fact that the banks granted new powers of credit to it that they had refused to the government. It is interesting to stress certain aspects of the PNV’s position in Navarra. Here, the position made public on 23 August leaves no doubt and, according to Garmanedia, it was not the result of pressure from Mola: this declaration involves an explicit rejection of the position adopted by the PKK, which we shall discuss further on and whose term takes up a position towards “critical support” of the insurgents rather than neutrality (that, at least objectively, is the sense to be attached to the words about “neutral politics”). Such a stance is even more surprising in Navarra, where the governor played no active role in the committees. It is surprising that no-one has taken into account the government of Biscay. In one of his articles [10] he proves it), but they were too weak to carry them out. The lack of political leadership in military strategy appeared very clearly in a book-written by the anarchist militant Chiapuzo who refers to the retreat in the following terms: “We acted as if we were coming back the next day” [11.28]. Even if his alternative model was the traditional anarchist scorched-earth policy, his judgement gives some idea of the level of disorganization, as do other testimonies. 

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involved particular attention to the nomination of the military. Llano played a decisive role in frustrating general Goded’s plans. Moreover the Generalitat was charged with the maintenance of public order and the dispersion of the troops from the Basque capital and taking arms depots which were taken by storm, in spite of the Generalitat’s efforts to stop them. This is the key to understanding later events, both political and military.

As for the social support for each of the camps, the striking thing is the extreme weakness of the military insurgent. According to the historian, Pau Puig, Comunión Tradicionalista offered Goded 700 men for Barcelona and 5000 for the whole of Catalonia to support the coup, while CEDA (The Autonomous Spanish Union) offered the coup 200 and the Falange a hundred. The principal force of the coup were very broad arming of the masses thanks to the barracks orientation. Over the cultural contracts had radicalised the Catalan peasantry, which not only mobilised massively against the military uprising but bypassed its traditional political leadership, the ERC.

Finally the war profoundly altered the political relation of forces and political institutions. Since February 1936 the ERC saw its social base decay even further as a consequence of the defeat in the Front National. The radicalization of the Unió de Rabassaires, which I referred to above, was the best expression of this. The exceptional popular legitimacy which characterised the Generalitat weakened following the political and social polarization in the first months of 1936. Confronted with the threat of a coup, Companys reacted with effective but parliamentary measures. For its part, the CNT, through its Committee for Federal Action, was the most important force within the POUM. This was preparing an insurrectional extra-parliamentary response to the coup. The POUM, with weaker forces but with considerable political weight, took the same orientation. And above military tasks, these two organizations proclaimed that, faced with the threat of a coup, the only response could be "revolution". But the word "revolution" did not have the same meaning for the POUM, and nothing was said here about it. Fusi had a clear concept of the tasks of the moment, with one exception, flowing from the experience of 1934: to make a revolution the people must be armed. Through the hard practical experience of the three July days, the insurrection triumphed, that is to say the extra-parliamentary road, based on the armed power of "the streets". This is why the CNT, the organization which played the central role on the streets, found itself at the centre of the political scene while the Generalitat crumbled.

The country was on the threshold of revolution in the strictest sense of the term: the passage of power from one class to another. But the threshold was never crossed. For Companys, the "police" was "dual power" of an absolutely exceptional type. I think that to understand the facts one must first see how this "dual power" was institutionalized. We shall follow the events in order, according to the path taken by Koldo San Sebastian, say to me, you can see the document absolutely exceptional type.

10. The pastoral letter Non Lici (it is not allowable) was issued by the Largo Caballero government radically changed the situation. First, correctly establishes a parallel between the government of Largo Caballero and the future Aguirre government. The consequence was a recognition of the leading role of the Basque government, republican power was rebuilt in a Euzkadi reduced to the territory of Biscay alone.

11. Coman Ona said that he would be considered as the spokesperson for the Popular Front in the Basque Country, sent a report to the Secretary of State in which he explained the main aspects of the POUM. He makes clear that participation in the war on the side of the Republic is a choice of the Popular Front, and that it is the POUM’s duty to create a new political force in Euzkadi and Catalonia, which in his opinion the pastoral letter Non Lici does not represent an obligation.

12. As for the Basque state, which is very wide ranging, much more so than the Catalan one, although for the time being in so much more complex a situation, the military uprising in Catalonia had to be brought in from the outside. It was no accident that Llano de la Encomienda, General of the Catalan army, whom we shall meet in the next chapter, trying to run military operations in the North was loyal to the Republic, since the existence of the Generalitat government itself...
announced on 21 July in the official bulletin of the Generalitat. As a result, there were effectively two powers in place, objectively incompatible with each other and without a clear, but with a strange, relationship, a relationship which refuses any theory that "power comes from the barrel of a gun". For those who held the arms and the effective power of decision absolutely necessary at that time purely nominal — reduced, as has been said, to "a rubber stamp" which Company would place on all the militia committee's decisions, an apparently formal and innocent gesture but one worth an entire treatise on the state — and which was soon to propose on the form of organization its adversaries should adopt. It is true there was a deadly struggle for position, only one of the protagonists had understood what was at stake.

**Dual power**

It is very difficult to define theCNT's role. According to Ucelay, "The CNT believed it was leading a process of social transformation, spontaneous and natural, when in fact it merely presided over it" [15.162]. In my opinion, in spite of its strength and its majoriti character, the CNT did not lead this process, in the sense that it never had a politico-military project, nor a clear understanding of the fundamental tasks and goals of consolidating a revolutionary power. Bolloten "underlines certain inferences, illuminating and pathetic, which help us to understand the problem. The first comes from Abad to Santillan: "We could have declared our dictatorship absolute, declare the" Generalitat" in place with Companys at its head", the second from Helmut Rödiger, representative of theAIT in Barcelona: "Those who say that the CNT should have established its dictatorship in 1936 don't know what they were demanding. The CNT would have had to adopt a programme for government and the exercise of power, an authoritative plan for running the economy and a experience in running the state. Now, if they had such a programme before 19 July, it would not have been the CNT but a Bolshevik party. The application of such a policy would have dealt another strong blow to the insurgents."

We therefore end up with a completely asymmetric dual power: the strongest on the social and military terrain was politically the weakest; the socially and politically weakest power was politically the strongest. This same situation was reproduced within the Marxist forces who supported both camps. The POUM was probably the closest to what it is said was to be an "army". It declared a separate state, set up a network of local and departmental committees which organised the social, economic and political life of federation during the civil war. Above all at the municipal level, that is to say, in power, but the Generalitat's Central Committee, was the fundamental authority, responsible for dealing with organizational and logistical problems, problems of forming cadres in the Popular School for the War, and so on. The committee was also responsible for repressive functions which we shall return to. It is true that this structure functioned for only two months, but it nevertheless represented a form of popular power, enjoying great authority among the population and which profoundly reorganised institutional forms of conduct. Its protagonists may or may not have been perfectly aware of what they were doing but this in no way detracts from the nature of the organization. Its disappearance marked a profound turning point in the revolutionary situation. I do not think it helps us understand them to compare them with "Juntas" or "Cantones".

As regards the military situation, it seems important to specify the CNT's role during the revolutionary period. [20.90] Though it had a genuinely "uncontrolled" aspect — in contrast, Vilar remarks, to the repression of the military insurgents which was totally "controlled" — this repression was ferocious and was pursued even after the Committee of Militias formed "control paroles", and on many occasions was conducted by them.

A revolutionary process of necessity develops mechanisms of coercion, which can be very severe during a period of prolonged civil war. But outside of the collective necessities of the revolutionary process, there inevitably arise sentiments of vengeance, which may reflect the humiliations and repressions suffered over the years, both collective and individual. It requires a concentrated effort by the revolutionary party in order to build the legitimacy to keep, these mechanisms of coercion under control. Unfortunately this was not the case in Catalonia. But it must be added that these raw figures do not adequately convey the reality. They do not convey popular memory: from the "Tragic Week" up
to the repression which followed October 1934. Nor do they convey the role of the curates in agrarian society, their identification with the bosses and landowners.

For an entire century the parish priest was the first in the Spanish Civil War in Euzkadi and Catalonia. Miguel Romero

and taken up in Felix Morrow’s "The Social and Political Role of the Church." In a situation of popular power such as existed in Catalonia, the news of an agreement between the church and the military insurgents could not but engender the sentiment of popular vengeance, fruit of accumulated humiliation for generations.

I shall deal with the problem of collectivizations and, more generally, of the revolution’s economic-social activities in the next chapter, the better to develop the comparison with the Basque country. This will also allow us to study the evolution of political economy before and after the formation of the Taradellas government, which put an end to the situation of dual power.

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This period was marked by expropriations of food from the shops and stores, carried out by the CNT unions.

The military problem and that of public order was even more acute. Proposals to militarize the militias in 1936 had not advanced much in spite of the support of the CNT’s main leaders, as a result of opposition from the base. One could say that only in Spring 1937 was a "true" military command established according to the norms established by the republican government.

On this there were no relevant conflicts. However on the organization of public order, the problems were serious and constant, notably after the appointment of Rodriguez Salas in December 1936. The most dramatic moment after the May crisis came about at the end of February when the security council of the Generalitat ordered the dissolution of all the vigilance patrols and the unification of all police bodies. Some days later the Generalitat demanded the return of all arms and explosives in the rearguard. None of these measures were accepted or carried out by the CNT and the POUM. Meanwhile armed confrontations between CNT militants and the Generalitat forces were multiplying. The sharpening of this whole range of conflicts further polarized the political alternatives.

During the first months of 1937, the POUM’s youth organization (the ICI) and the Young Liberrarians (Juventudes Libertarias) were creating the Revolutionary Youth Front with substantial mass influence, and radically opposed to the JSU, the youth organization of the PSUC. Let us add, in parenthesis, that this was the last chance for a change in the relation of forces in favour of the revolutionaries, but after the May events the front divided in two and the young libertarians came closer to the JSU (again) The Front’s fundamental orientation was “the defence of the revolutionary conquests and the liquidation of the survivals of the bourgeoisie past”. The JSU’s orientation, according to a document published in April 1937, was the following:

a) to defend the Democratic Republic;

b) to be the “governmental” youth, supporting the legitimate government of the Republic;

c) to defend the unity of all anti-fascists to guarantee national independence (of Spain, not Catalonia) and oppose ultrarevolutionary (“Trotskyist” phrasing [16.199]).

This was the cauldron which boiled over in May. Rodriguez Salas’s decision to retake the telephone exchange, which was under CNT control, does not have to be explained as a plot. It was a marginal operation, but completely consistent with the attempts to sap the base of the revolutionary movement, which was still preserved of considerable forces. Perhaps he did not foresee the sudden and massive response of CNT and POUM militants, on which this action served as a spark.

This proposal was not accepted. Perhaps it was an exaggerated response, reflecting the desperation of the moment, but in my view the objectives it set out were the most reasonable under the circumstances. The CNT-POUM leadership once placed its trust inCompanies promises that there would be no reprisals, and deployed all its efforts to convince the militants to abandon the barricades, without the slightest guarantee that they could attain their goals. It was in fact a capitulation. There is no basis for seeing it as inevitable. However, in my opinion, one cannot consider the May events as a missed chance to relaunch Catalonia on a revolutionary path, as was claimed in particular by the Trotskyist militants — a very small minority — and taken up in Felix Morrow’s book “Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain”, a journalistic report whose revolutionary spirit is equalled only by its lack of political and historical interest.

On May 5 the central government, with Company’s express support, took over the functions of public order and the defence of Catalonia. On May 12,000 men were sent by the central government to take control of the situation. The revolutionary process was definitively defeated, in spite of the POUM’s declarations, taking its illusions for reality, in which it obstinately portrayed the outcome as a “partial victory for the proletariat”. Some weeks after, the party was illegal and its militants persecuted, or, as in Nîmes’s case, assassinated. Bilbao fell within days.

The causes of the defeat in Euzkadi

The offensive launched by Franco’s troops towards the end of March in the North gave Euzkadi a decisive role in the war’s future. The struggle which unfolded over almost three months was marked by the crushing military superiority of the fascist troops. The truly heroic capacity for resistance of the military and popular forces of the republican Basque Country served only to delay the defeat. For the Republic the importance of this defeat, symbolized by the fall of Bilbao on 19 June, explains the bitterness of the polemic on the causes (Garmendia’s quotations from
Largo Caballero government and, more generally, the policy of the Popular Front. Theoretically, if constructed on a healthy and useful mobilization of the working masses, and if it could have chosen by the parties, and by a same orientation and with the same goals: to reassure engagement, as the preservation of threats from the activities of the more radical political forces or institutions.

This characterization becomes more of a moot point if the refusal to accept political commissioners, which discouraged it, knowing that it gave him a certain influence on him of certain political currents — undoubtly the PCE. After the Villareal defeat there were other forms of military cooperation in the North. The problem was on the one hand the militarization of the militias ended up as the creation of party battalions, in the tradition of the republican camp. Only on the eve of defeat did anything that might be called a regular army make its appearance. This was not specific to the Basque country. What was specific was Aguirre’s attempts to favour his own party battalions at the expense of those of the other basque political force or institution.

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But the most serious conflict originated in the de facto sovereignty which the Basque government assumed in the leading role of the military effort. Aguirre never accepted the existence of an “Army of the North” and consequently never recognized the authority of Llamo de la Encomienda, who was appointed military head of the region by the Basque government in December 1936. Paradoxically Aguirre was able to base himself on a declaration by Largo Caballero in which he said that this army “did not exist” [1,268], a declaration which was expressed in practice, militarily, in an attitude of tolerance towards the sovereignty of the Basque government in military matters. In this respect it is interesting to recall a proposal from the Popular Front concerning the nationalization of the Basque Popular Front — to submit the leadership of the Basque army to the law of the central staff [1,560].

To my knowledge this was the only attempt at compromise to co-ordinate military operations in the North within the spirit of the statute of autonomy. The most significant attempt at military collaboration between the republican command and the armed forces was the Villareal operation, whose failure in Fusi’s opinion, brought about a decisive deterioration in these relations. Garmendia offers a very interesting explanation for the different significance which the Villareal operation had for the republican command (a diversionary operation to relieve the Madrid front) and for Aguirre (to conquer Vitoria and then to advance to Guipúzcoa — a very different “usage”, I agree). The real difference in objectives throws light on the lack of political and military coordination between the central and Basque governments. Aguirre was to complain bitterly at the failure of Villareal, ascribing responsibility to Captain Cuiat, head of operations in the North, who was supposed to coordinate with the Basque military leadership (Aguirre alludes to “the influence on him of certain political currents” — undoubtly the PCE).

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Company's objectives). But even so we should point out that the arguments used to justify this political decision revealed dramatic confusion about the relationship between the Committee of Lleida and the Catalan government. The people talked about the "duality of functions" and not of powers, and to the Generalitat is ascribed the "level of administrative and executive decisions" (which does not correspond to the experience of the previous months, during which the committee had functioned with full executive powers). This same confusion appeared in another well-known argument put forward not just by Pujol and Oliver, but also by Andreu Nin — seeking to justify the formation of the Taradellas government: it was a question of "legalizing the conquests of the masses". This idea of the need to "legalize" these achievements with a republican institution is very revealing of the political weaknesses of the "revolutionary power" which I have already referred to. It was the subject of a debate in the Catalan parliament, where POUM, which we know thanks to the writings of Juan Andrada, according to him the determining argument in reaching this decision, adopted with only his weak opposition. 13/292

Andreu Nin sought to justify the formation of the Committee of Lleida (led by the CNT) on the 24th of July with a "decree-law" on the collectivizations and on worker control, as the expression of continuity with revolutionary Catalonia (which distinguished it radically from the government of the CNT and ERC). Nin understood the problem very quickly and based its growth among these sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, notably Barcelona — since July, were spontaneous, imposed by the war situation. After the military revolt was crushed, the working class had come back to their factories but found that the bosses had fled; as a result collectivization and self-management, very widespread in Catalonia — notably Barcelona — since July, were spontaneous, imposed by the war situation. After the military revolt was crushed, the working class had come back to their factories but found that the bosses had fled; as a result collectivization and self-management, very widespread in Catalonia, became the preconditions for restarting production. Thus, as a result of a dynamic phenomenon during revolutionary processes, the dynamic of the social forces unleashed went beyond the economic programmes envisaged by the revolutionary organizations. It should be remembered that in July 24, the CNT's orientation in this sphere were very sharp. Without doubt these risks were real: the problem is to know how the decision made by the POUM could have helped avoid them.

Nin posed two conditions for his participation in the government: a majority of workers' organizations and a programme of "socialist collectivization". It is surprising how similar Marxist like Nin could propose such conditions, which he should have considered completely secondary in defining the government's role. Even more surprising is to note that he was to play a decisive role in the dissolution of the committee of Lleida (led by the POUM, and which Companies feared would receive anyone coming to dissolve it "with gunshots") 19. We should understand why by chance the dissolution of the central committee of militias happened 24 hours after Nin had persuaded his Lleida comrades to do likewise. Nin's words when he took over cannot but engender a certain perplexity: "I come with a mission to legalize and recoup what the working masses have already done in the streets". The reality was that the revolutionary committees had restored the legitimacy of republican power and in so doing committed suicide. Treholl, spokesperson of the PSUC, put things very clearly in an editorial on September 30 itself: "The duty to dissolve them cannot come from the swampland of which irresponsible acts, dictated by proletarian revolution, have precipitated it" (18.294).

One cannot explain the rapid dissolution, without resistance, of such a broad political structure as the committees, simply as a product of the failures of the organizations most closely identified with it. The "political counter-revolution" of which we spoke, was presented to the mass of workers as a formal administrative changeover and not as a rupture in the revolutionary dynamic which had existed since July. The continuation, instead of being a fundamental social component of Catalonia. Impressing measures of collectivization on them was not just irrational from an economic viewpoint like for example in small commerce or the service sector, where there are many anecdotes about collectivized hamburgers, hairdressers and theatres — but also created serious conflicts with the popular base of the revolution and above all with the POUM which many feared was to come into conflict with the Catalan government. On August 11 created the Economic Council of Catalonia as a body of the government that must be in accordance with "restoring and normalizing the Catalan economy in a moderate manner" (20.71).

In its conception and composition, the council was the precursor of the Taradellas government, which was to be formed in the succeeding months. It also reflected an evolution in the "dual power" situation in a direction favourable to Company's interests. The council elaborated a text containing elements both of a programme and of a plan of immediate action. Its name, "Plan for the Socialist Transformation of the Catalan Economy," shows the way in which the war provoked an economic foundation that was also ideological. In the context of the Catalan economy, this experience took place in dramatic conditions, because of the turmoil which the war produced. In the narrow field of the boycott it was also because of the boycott by the central government and the open hostility manifested by a number of Catalan political forces which played a more and more important role — notably the PSUC. We should not claim to sum up in a few lines the complexity of this frustrated revolutionary experience. I have only pointed up the problems which in my view have to be taken into account by anyone who wants to interpret the events of those months. One final word on this question. Enrique Ucelay has recently added his interpretation of the collectivizations to the many other extant interpretations of the collectivizations. It does not lack originality. In his view, what was involved was a "Catalan form reflecting the tendencies of our epoch towards the welfare state" (15.168). This approach serves as a particularly telling abstraction, which flows from an incomprehension of the struggles of the Catalan people to transform their society in a revolutionary manner. Without this straining of the political concept, we cannot properly grasp the Catalan experience of the period. It was not a "revolution" which completely ignored the social content of the collectivizations by the workers themselves (which had nothing at all to do with the capitalist state, even
From its foundation the PSUC defended, with remarkable indiscipline and firmness, an explicit line of reconstructing republican power and of radical approach to the revolutionary dynamic supported by the CNT and the POUM. The official history of the party attributes to the line the spectacular growth which it went through during the first months of the war; conversely this growth is presented as the proof that its line was “correct.” This assertion deserves to be analysed. In reality at least three elements lie behind the PSUC’s growth: a systematic effort to organize petty-bourgeois sections disturbed by the revolutionary course of events (for whom the CNT*21 was the main organization [13.525]); a systematic effort to occupy the national and local apparatus of the Generalitat, deployed with particular intensity after the formation of the Aragones government (Togliatti, who in general was very critical of the PSUC, praised it on precisely this point: “The party must lead a consistent struggle to enlarge and re-enforce its positions in the army, the police and the state apparatus” [17.15]); the use of Soviet aid in its favour, representing a central element of its activity from October 10 when the supply boats began arriving. In my view this third factor was decisive.

The battle against the POUM was indeed unleashed by the Soviet ambassador. The POUM had denounced the soviet interventions which sought to prevent its entry into the Junta for the defence of Madrid at the end of November. On the 28th a Soviet consulate published a note from Treball accusing the POUM’s newspaper, La Batalla, of “being part of the international fascist press.” Immediately the PSUC seized the occasion to launch a campaign to expel the POUM from the Generalitat government. A few days later, on 17 December a so-called “trade union unity” government was formed from which the POUM was excluded. This fact testifies to the enormous influence acquired by the Soviet consulate and the PSUC. But this measure could not have been taken without the approval of the CNT, which did not even understand that it was the ultimate target of the conflict between the PSUC and the POUM. The CNT justified the composition of the new government with a declaration which does not belong to the most glorious pages of Spanish anarchism: “We hope that this solution to the crisis will bring forth neither complaints nor reproaches. The POUM and the PSUC, the two adversaries whose conflict has provoked the present situation, are excluded from the council of the Generalitat. The two are represented in the UGT (the declaration forgets to mention that the three ‘representatives’ of the UGT in the government were well-known PSUC leaders) and have the same ideological roots, even if minor tactical differences continue to divide them. Neither one nor the other has the right, in our view, to make an outcry” [13.539].

The POUM’s outcry resumed with the following notice: “after having obtained this immediate result, does anyone think that the party in question will renounce its aims? With our elimination, it has won the first round. For the moment it does not feel it has the forces to go further” [13.538]. Subsequent events confirmed this judgement. While the campaign against the POUM continued, confrontations, including armed ones, mounted between the forces of the Generalitat — over which Rodriguez Salas, PSUC leader, exercised growing control as Commissioner for public order — and groups of CNT militants. In reality, they were putting into practice the measures of reorganization and control of all armed bodies which the different Generalitat governments had tried in vain to do since September.

The CNT did not understand the political aspect of the problem of power, but its base knew, or had a premonition, that giving up their arms meant the suppression of all revolutionary conquests. That is why the many attempts of the Generalitat governments remained on paper. But from February 1937 onwards the phase of decisive confrontation began, which I shall try and analyse in the next chapter.
The Spanish Civil War in Euzkadi and Catalonia

Miguel Romero

IV. Spring 1937: Defeat

It is a quite striking fact that two such extraordinary victories as the defence of Madrid and the battle of Guadalajara did not have the positive effects which might have been expected — neither in the sense of political clarification nor on the morale and unity of the republican camp. This was a good indication of the crisis tearing it apart to the point where it was no longer absorbed by the conflict between different political orientations and strategies that it could hardly even learn lessons from popular struggles. Above all Madrid, but also Guadalajara, proved the efficacy of the methods of popular revolutionary war in the face of the Francoist troops. Yet these victories were of no appreciable effect on the events to come in Euzkadi and Catalonia.

The Francoist camp, on the other hand, proved perfectly capable of learning lessons and making a turn in military tactics to serve its interests. On March 21, Franco decided on an orientation to a prolonged war and fixed his first objective as the conquest of Euzkadi and the definitive political crushing of the revolutionary process in Catalonia. I am not claiming there is a parallel; the two very different processes developed with a large degree of autonomy. But together they provide the essential data needed to understand both the Francoist victory as the defence of Madrid and the battle of Guadalajara.

The events which we are going to deal with now are only the development, to their ultimate conclusion, of the problems we have already seen in the preceding chapters. This is why the clearest approach is to show how this happened without following a strictly chronological order. We begin with the May events.

Catalonia: the May events

A civil war within the working class, within the framework of a second civil war in which the mass of working people found their own face in strike in the face of a powerful reactionary force, is such a complex and dramatic phenomenon that it explains why, more than fifty years after the end of the civil war, polemics on its interpretation are still raging. It is less easy to understand, however, that the polemics continues to affect the facts themselves. Thus, if I myself am in the bibliography used in this work: Tufte says “In Barcelona it was the most extreme anarchist sector which, in the senseless attempt to precipitate their revolution, destabilized the republican state” [1.131].

Garmenila refers to the “May events in Barcelona, with the insurrection of the POUM militiamen and a part of the anarchosyndicalists” [7.40]. Uclay presents the facts with the following words: “The incident (the assault on the telephone exchange) laid bare the internal conflict between the various anarchist groups, of whom some were trying by means of street violence to take the initiative which the FAI-CNT had lost during the preceding summer and autumn. At the same time the POUM (which also had its internal debates) sought to impose a Leninist leadership on what it saw as a libertarian incoherence, and so “save the revolution” [15.170]. Finally Pierre Vilar presents a list of “party interpretations” of the different “provocations” (“For the POUM the provocations came from Moscow, via the PSUC; for the POUM the CNT they were a Catalanist plot from Paris for Franco from thirteen of his agents in Barcelona…”).

We should therefore recall the PSUC campaign against the POUM, its accusations of “fascism”, of playing the role of the “fifth column”, etc., as well as the conflicts and divisions which they engendered in the organizations of the popular masses. This conflict reflected, in an exacerbated form, the strategic battle between revolutionary positions and those which were fighting for a complete reconstruction of republican power. But this conflict was to grow sharper on other terrains where the main power blocs were present: on the one hand the CNT was directly touched by it and, on the other hand the institutions of the Generalitat were a component part of the struggle.

Since December a conflict over supplies had been brewing between Councillor Comorera and the CNT unions which held him responsible for the lack of food. The PSUC responded by raising the stakes in the conflict and mobilizing the popular sectors which it controlled under the slogan “Fewer Committee, more bread and only one government: the Generalitat”. These demonstrations, which proved that the PSUC was perfectly conscious of having failed in its goal of stopping the revolutionary process, continued throughout the entire months of 1937. At the same time...
Coming within the space of about a month, the conclusion of the governments of Largo Caballero, Tarradellas and Garmendia, the turning point in the unfolding of the war. In the last analysis these three governments have a common significance: the reconstruction of republican power. However, they acted within very different political and social situations. Each followed its own road, in the framework of a situation which had changed globally, marked by conditions of a different nature: if in the previous phase the "divergences" between Catalonia and the Basque Country were dominant, in the second phase the "convergences" tended to impose themselves.

A decisive common element, of a political and ideological character, is the absolute priority given to the objective of "winning the war." From autumn 1936, the strategic definition of the republican camp for the first months after the uprising — whether to make revolution in order to win the war, or win the war by reversing revolution — and its political objectives — was practically resolved. The formula attributed to Durutti "renounce everything except victory" is a good summary of the turnabout made by the main revolutionary current. The POUNM ensemble continued to defend a revolutionary line, under conditions which we shall see later on. "Winning the war" meant four things in essence: re-establishing republican administrations as the sole political authority; organizing a regular army under a single leadership; an end to the collectivization policy, continuing nationalization to that strictly necessary for the conduct of military operations; and presenting the war as a national-democratic struggle against fascism to facilitate the national alliances needed for its pursuit. This is the general framework for studying the course of events in Euskadi and Catalonia.

**Euzkadi**

The varying interpretations of the political significance of the Basque government represent, in my opinion, the best starting point for analysing this period. Gurutzetamendi and the Popular Front disappeared behind what one can term an antifascist national front under PNV hegemony [7.27]. Tulion has a similar position. Fusi approaches the issue from another angle which brings to light a very important question. In his view after the Aguirre government was formed the war in the Basque country took on "the characteristic qualities of an exceptional war through aggression" [1.45]. This interpretation, which raises a series of problems on the analysis of the war in Euzkadi, including the explanation for the defeat, merits a more detailed treatment.

Let us briefly recop the conditions under which the Largo Caballero government was formed. It was called the "Popular Front Government" to stress the "left turn" which it represented in relation to its predecessor, the Giral government. It is undeniable that its intention was a balanced force within the Popular Front coalition towards the workers' organizations, both in the weight of the socialists and in the entry of the PCE and the CNT ministers further reinforced this. But this does not suffice for a political characterization of a government.

In reality, the fundamental difference between the Largo Caballero and Giral governments is that the latter was a phantom without the slightest authority, whereas the former attempted to mobilize all possible forces to build an effective political authority within a republican framework. On the other hand, the designation "Popular Front Government" is insufficient to characterize its political line and fails to distinguish it from others. An effective summary of its line can be found in the speeches of José Dix, the general secretary of the PCE, which was a minority force but was to become the most consistent defender of the policy of "winning the war." In a speech to the Cortes on 1 October 1936 Dix said: "We, the Communist Party, say that everyone, workers and democrats, must travel a long road together, and convince ourselves that our common interests will not seem to be supported by solidarity and fraternity... some have tried to characterize our government as communist, socialist or seeking particular social goals. In all seriousness we reply to those who spread such ideas by explaining that the present government is a continuation of the preceding one it is a democratic republican government by whose hands we have fought in the past..."

This is the general framework for studying the course of events in Euskadi and Catalonia.
The Pact of Santaña

The Spanish Civil War in Euskadi and Catalonia

Michael Romero

during the later phases of the war — confirming the cynical and bitter judgement of Azurá [7.73] was once again effective. The fact that Franco's hegemony accorded the PNV in the leadership of the politics of the Basque Country.25 In conclusion we should recall what we said in the last chapters: the PNV was able to govern almost without opposition. Fraser refers to a critical document from parties of the Basque popular front which was made public just before the Francoist offensive. But his account calls into question the consistency of these criticisms with the practice of these parties [6.11.135].26 The criticisms, when they arrived, were far too late. The December 1937 Euskadi Communist Party document claims that the PNV is not interested in settling accounts as a self-criticism. The Euskadi Communist Party, like the Spanish Communist Party, did not have the slightest legitimacy in criticising those other parties. The situation became desperate. Aguirre was removed from the leadership of operations (for reasons which are not clear) and replaced by Ajuriguerra.

On May 16, he ordered Onaindia to convey to the Italian consul Cavalletti in Bilbao the Italians, conscious of our problems, would guarantee the safety of the civil population, with the assurance that would remain until the end to avoid a farce. If we should come to this point that the Pact of Santaña began to take shape.

On June 19, Bilbao fell: the PNV took responsibility for freeing Francoist political prisoners and from preventing any decision which could only lead to catastrophic results for the nationalist themselves.

As a consequence of the application of the plan the PNV, established an important offensive launched by the Northern army, and to this end launch an appeal to disobey the detention orders directed against them by General Canaris.

On the 14th the Francoist offensive on the Asturias began. Nationalist battalions which risked isolation ended. As Lejarcegui and Ugarre say: "our efforts were directed towards two objectives: first, to avoid any participation in battle by our troops, and second to demobilise the front so that the 'Italian' division of Catholic people could be formed".

On the 23rd, all nationalist units managed to evacuate. Ajuriaguerra and the other nationalist leaders chose the EI Dueso penitentiary which was envisaged that the nationalist political and military leaders would gather in a building surrounded by Italian troops, who were to guarantee their safe evacuation did not arrive. Ajuriaguerra tried to initiate an appeal to disobey the detention orders directed for a delay of 48 hours in the date fixed for surrender: 24 August.

From this moment things began to go wrong. Failures in communication with the Italian general staff led him to think that the terms of the surrender had not been respected and, consequently, that the agreement no longer held. The boats charged with the evacuation did not arrive. Ajuriguerra tried to initiate an appeal to disobey the detention orders which led to no practical result. Finally the boats arrived but the intervention of the Francoist marine held back the evacuation. The government feared that if they were to evacuate the people of the Basque region as the result of the situation of the Basques prepared to struggle until death for "right and the freedom of their race, the only faithful to the Catholic world when the struggle of the Basque and Spanish people against the Italian invaders was ended, while fearing that the military forces would not obey their commanders. But there was a misunderstanding with severe consequences. We would therefore understate to what extent the PNV wanted a farce ("surrender must take the exact form of a military operation: it must appear as an "Italian" victory and not the result of diplomatic negotiation.

The performance would serve to hide the reality from the republican government, in which the nationalist leader Irujo continued to take part, and would absolve the PNV and the Basque government of all responsibility. This could be very important if the Republic retook the offensive and won the war (it should be remembered that in winter 1937, the outcome of the war was by no means decided). The aim of the performance established, what was now justifiable consequence of the republican policy.

The demoralization in the nationalist battalions was total. Ajuriguerra met with the military chiefs to organise the surrender in July to inform the Italian military government of the characteristics of the Basque people, of their nationalist ideology; an issue which might be expected found Count Ciano, Mussolini's Minister of Foreign Affairs, completely indifferent — and to express "the hope that the Duce would support our aspirations".

Mussolini informed Franco of the PNV's positions and gave his opinion as to their capacity to reach an agreement which would commence with the fall of the Northern Front and would safeguard "the moral aspect of the Catholic world when the struggle of the Basque people against the Italian invaders was ended, while fearing that the military forces would not obey their commanders. But there was a misunderstanding with severe consequences. We would therefore understate to what extent the PNV wanted a farce ("surrender must take the exact form of a military operation: it must appear as an "Italian" victory and not the result of diplomatic negotiation.

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was the objective of Cardinal Pacelli’s intercepted telegram of May 12 1937 [7.45]. Garmendia interprets this telegram, as well as the contacts made at the same time between the spokespeople of Mussolini and Franco with Onainsia, as initiatives corresponding to an interest “which could be nothing other than the interests of the Vatican”. Why could not this interest also have been Franco’s, with the Vatican’s complicity? I see no reason to exclude this possibility.

During the whole of the civil war, Francoism played very effective “politics” with excellent results. In the situation in the Basque country towards mid-May, to advance the notion of a “separate peace” was a time bomb with potentially demolishing effects. Perhaps, in the battle for the North, Franco possessed more than superior aircraft and artillery; perhaps his political superiority also contributed in a decisive manner to the catastrophe at the end of June.

Garmendia asks why no-one called Aguirre to account after the defeat and his installation in Catalonia [7.63]. In my opinion there are two reasons: the first, of a diplomatic character, is that Negrín’s efforts to reach an “honourable peace” whilst the first, of a diplomatic character, is that the presence in his government of a Catholic “the Vatican”. The military wanted to crush the workers’ movement. We have never doubted the proletarian movement. We have never doubted the proletarian movement.

Comrades: the Spanish army, renowned for its incompetence, is famous not for its victories but for its defeat. At most it can boast victories in the wars that preceded the country this attempt to install a bloody revolution, but it failed. In the hard-won battles of our country, in the revolution, and it is transformed into a veritable red army. We will accept no pretext for watering down these workers’ militias, which have been defended by the working class, which has not been resolved. Well, comrades, all these concrete objectives of the democratic revolution have not been realised by the liberal bourgeoisie, which has shown itself incapable of realising them for five years now; but by the working class, which realised them, in a few days. You already know how the problem of the church, of the land, of the army, of the exploiting classes. A bourgeois government, class, which will never betray. The struggle continues throughout Spain. Should the working class now defend the bourgeois republic in hand? Are the Catalan workers, the Spanish workers, making these enormous sacrifices, shedding their blood to return to the republic of Senor Azana?

The working class of Catalonia and Spain does not fight for the democratic republic. The problem of the church, of the land, of the army, of the purging of the magistrature and the catalan question have not been resolved. Well, comrades, all these concrete objectives of the democratic revolution have not been realised by the liberal bourgeoisie, which has shown itself incapable of realising them for five years now; but by the working class, which realised them, in a few days. You already know how the problem of the church, of the land, of the army, of the exploiting classes. A bourgeois government, class, which will never betray. The struggle continues throughout Spain. Should the working class now defend the bourgeois republic in hand? Are the Catalan workers, the Spanish workers, making these enormous sacrifices, shedding their blood to return to the republic of Senor Azana?

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organised in Catalonia and acted as a completely autonomous state. The working class has resolved all the fundamental problems of the democratic revolution. Today, the bourgeoisie's legitimacy has no more meaning. Comrades, on 19 July, Spanish fascimilitudes, clericalism and militarism perished, but only Spanish fascism, clericalism and militarism. The capitalist economy also perished, for ever.

The revolution and the war are inseparable

We are now told that we have an immediate goal: the battle on the front. We are told that the war must first be won, and then we shall see. But these two questions cannot be separated. Pure technique cannot win this war. Otherwise, given its superiority in armament and discipline, the military bourgeoisie would have won on July 19th. Why didn't they win? Because we have what they do not: hope for a new society, which we oppose to those fighting for a society which is inevitably condemned to disappear. This is why, comrades, the struggle, social and political conquests are as important as military victories.

If we finish capitalism off, if we lead the revolution along the socialist road, then we will create, and are already creating, a movement in Spain which is so powerful, and a revolution which is so deep, that all other conquests, fascist and reactionary rockabye can only break apart upon it.

This is why we say that each concession, each step backwards is a present to the enemy.

For a workers' government

Obviously, comrades, we must confront immediate problems. We need a strong government, that is the general view of the popular masses of the country. We need a strong government, but not with the meaning that bourgeois elements gave this term in the past. We need a strong government, founded on the highest authority - that which flows from the confidence of the workers - and which is ready to fight to the end. Who can provide such a government? The one just elected in Madrid. We honestly don't think so. The work of class needs far more than a ministerial declaration from a government chosen by the president of the republic. Any of the old left governments, presided over by any other party and that had made such a declaration. It was a government which aspired to represent all Spanish, a government riddled with democratic bourgeois prejudices, a government completely incapable of meeting up to the needs of the situation. We say that in this situation, the only adequate government is a government with no bourgeois ministers, a pure workers' government. It should not represent simply the workers' interests but those of all layers of the Spanish proletariat. In fact the revolution we are participating in today is not the revolution of a party or of an organisation but of all the working class, made up of its parties and its organizations. No one should lay exclusive claim to this revolution because it belongs to everyone, to all working people.

TheCNT, the FAI and the problems of the revolution

At a moment of such great historical responsibility, the proletariat must march forward as a whole, from a government been chosen by the president of the capital, the workers of Valencia created a popular executive committee which is in reality no less than the government of the proletariat revolution in the Levant.

That is why, comrades, the popular executive committee of Valencia shares our point of view. We now say that Valencia and Catalonia form the vanguard of the Spanish revolution and will lead it forward.
libertarian communism and that the situation obliges us to pass through several transitional stages, which means that now the CNT and the FAI recognize the need for political power. I think, comrades, that we can perfectly easily reach an understanding on this point. You could, for example, have refused to enter a government, because the name makes you take fright. For our part, we say that what counts is not the form but the content. If you do not want to characterize this absolutely vital leadership body as a government but as an executive committee, or a revolutionary committee, or a popular committee, but let us do our duty and constitute it.

It is obvious that in Spain today we have a political system which does not correspond to the present situation, and that it is absolutely incomprehensible that in these circumstances there should be in Catalonia a government formed by representatives of the republican left, just as it is incomprehensible that today there should be a Spanish government with bourgeois minister. There is another problem on which we had differences even with our anarchist comrades. This is the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat? It is authority exercised solely and exclusively by the working class of workers, the suppression of all political rights and all freedom for the representatives of the class enemy. If that is the dictatorship of the proletariat, comrades, then I declare that the proletarian dictatorship exists in Catalonia today.

Since we have no other differences, we can perfectly easily find agreement with the CNT comrades on it, if you prefer it, let's not speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We can give it any name you please. What counts is to agree, ourselves and the anarchists, that in the present period there can be neither political rights nor freedoms for the bourgeoisie, but only for the working class.

Some days ago, the CNT published a manifesto in which it stated that it wanted to oppose any proletarian dictatorship exercised by a party. As for ourselves, comrades, we declare here that for us the proletarian dictatorship is the dictatorship of all the working classes of all popular classes and that no trade union or political organization has the right to impose its own dictatorship in the name of the interests of the revolution. And, in this sense we should add that if the CNT, the socialist party or the communist party claim to exercise an exclusive monopoly of the revolution, they will find us ranged against them. The dictatorship of the proletariat is workers' democracy exercised by all workers without exception.

We also oppose any attempt to install a personal dictatorship. We consider the proletarian dictatorship the most advanced expression of democracy. Bourgeois democracy is simply a cover for capitalist dictatorship, for capitalist exploitation. This is the dictatorship of a minority of the population, of the minority of the exploiters, over the immense majority. The dictatorship of the proletariat suppresses political rights, but only those of a tiny minority, the exploiters. This is the government of the immense majority of the population against this group of exploiters.

Let us set to and create this workers' democracy. Here as elsewhere, our party is ready to fight side by side with the CNT and with the working class as a whole, against any attempt to transform the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of a party or person.

Forward to the socialist republic

I shall conclude, comrades. We are living in the middle of a decisive stage of the revolution. Shame on you if we cannot profit from this conjuncture! History rarely offers such opportunities.

We find ourselves in a unique situation. The Spanish workers are armed. In previous experiences, here as in the rest of Europe, the liberal bourgeoisie and the demagogic petty bourgeoisie disarmed the working class to crush it later. But we say, comrades, that in the present situation the proletariat must accomplish an elementary duty: it must not let itself be disarmed. The workers must keep the weapons with which they go to the front so that they can use them against the rule of the bourgeoisie when they come back.

Comrades, there is a hard struggle ahead of us, but we have already won some important successes. During the last few weeks that Catalan working class has proved its spirit of sacrifices and organizational capacities. Do you think it means nothing to have...

II: Extracts from the POUM programme

The present stage of the Spanish revolution represents a moment of transition between fascist counter-revolution and the democratic socialist revolution.

This situation has existed since 1931 and can be maintained for a certain period with oscillations, sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right. However, there is only one choice in the last analysis: socialism or fascism. We have on the one hand the example of the Russian revolution and, on the other, that of Italy and Germany. Either the counter-revolutionary forces of the big bourgeoisie and the feudlal layers will triumph, imposing the most implacable and unbridled fascism, which will mean the organic disappearance of the workers' movement for an entire period, or the class of the working people will win, establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat which will accomplish the democratic revolution betrayed by the petty bourgeoisie, in order to pass directly to socialist revolutions. The character of the revolution in our country is not simply democratic, but democratic and socialist.

In our epoch, the democratic revolution is tightly linked to the socialist revolution and can only be completed if the proletariat takes power. It can no longer be maintained on the basis of democracy. It evolves more or less rapidly, according to circumstance, towards a dictatorship of the fascist type because fascism is the political manifestation of the decadence of the bourgeoisie.

The working class is the only guarantee of an authentic democracy. Thanks to its revolt against the counter-revolution, the workers will come to take the road of socialism.

The proletariat must transform itself into the true hero of democratic conquests. It must become the great liberator, bringing long-awaited answers to the problems of the democratic revolution: the problems of land, of the nationalities, the economic and the political conditions.

The dictatorship of the proletariat, which is transitory and persists only until the withering away of political and class differences, will not destroy democracy, but will consolidate it even further by creating a genuine democracy, workers' democracy.

The workers' party thinks that the fundamental premises for the unification of revolutionary Marxists are the following:
1) the Spanish revolution is a revolution of a democratic and socialist type. The dilemma is: social democracy or fascism. The working classes cannot take power peacefully, but only through armed revolution.

2) once power is taken, the dictatorship of the proletariat must be established during a phase of transition. The organs of power of this dictatorship presuppose the broadest and most thorough workers' democracy possible.

3) a workers' alliance is needed both nationally and locally. It must inevitably pass through three phases: first it must be the organ of the united front, leading offensive and defensive legal and extra-legal actions, and then it must become an insurrectional organ of power.

4) the problem of nationalities must be recognised. Spain must be transformed into an Iberian union of socialist republics.

5) after the first phase of the revolution, a democratic solution must be given to the problem of the land. The land to those who till it.

6) in case of war, the imperialist war must be transformed into a civil war. No confidence should be placed in the League of Nations, the united front of imperialism.

7) our unified party will remain outside the second and third internationals, which have failed, and will pursue its fight for world revolutionary socialist unity on new bases.

8) the USSR must be defended, without supporting its policy of compromise with the capitalist states but rather through international revolutionary action by the workers of the world to support the right to criticise the policy of the leaders of the USSR that are prejudicial to the advance of world revolution.

9) our unified party will be permanently based on democratic centralism.

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**Contrary to what might be thought, our interpretation of the popular front does not contradict our signing the platform which served as the basis for the formation of the POUM.**

The leadership of the POUM was not different from the leadership of the Communist International. In 1924, a new course was initiated in the Third International. Internal democracy disappeared. Bureaucratic leadership was imposed. The Russian section became hegemonic. Other national sections were completely subordinated or openly against the Third International. The policy of the Communist International was either "Putschist" (Estonia, Bulgaria, China) or completely opportunistic. Its previously revolutionary line was completely broken. It went from one atrocity to the other in a completely empirical fashion, totally abandoning the essential principles of Marxism.

This wrong orientation, whose most important consequence was the defeat of the Chinese revolution, continued to worsen after 1928 with the so-called "class against class" and "social-fascist" policies. The Communist International, already totally dominated by the Russian section, ceased to be a revolutionary instrument and gradually transformed itself into an instrument of the Soviet state. Between 1928 and 1933, the Communist International and its sections, underestimated the imminent fascist danger, supporting the thesis that to destroy fascism, it was first necessary to finish off social democracy. This sectarian and anti-Marxist attitude contributed to the triumph of Hitler in Germany. The Communist International carries as much responsibility as the Second International for the catastrophe undergone by the working classes of Germany and the entire world. After the defeat of the working class in Shanghai when the workers' movement had been crushed by the Kuomintang (KMT), the national organization of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the IC considered the KMT to be a fascist force and had to permit the Chinese CP to work with it (see Erald Isaac La Negociade la revolucion Chinesa 1924-27, Gallimard, Paris 1967).  

3. The International Congress for Revolutionary Socialist Unity, known as the London Bureau, was a product of the IAG (International Action Committee - International Workers' Committee). This group of left communist and socialist opposition organisations founded in 1932, was represented in Britain, the Netherlands, Swe­

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* The Spanish Civil War in Euskadi and Catalonia

Miguel Romero

1. In Spring 1934, following the directions of the Communist International, the small Communist Parties of Bulgaria and Hungary undertook weekly marches and demonstrations in Sofia and Budapest and smashed in crushing defeat and brutal suppression (see Pierre Frank, Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste 1919-1943, La Hulot, Paris, 1979, pp. 344, 351, 362, 394).

2. The Cento pact (December 1927) was signed by the Chinese Communist Party on Stalin's orders, when the revolutionary wave had already died down. The timing had been chosen by the Chinese Communist Party to exploit the moment when the workers' movement had been crushed by the Kuomintang (KMT), the national organization of the Chinese bourgeoisie. The IC considered the KMT to be a fascist force and had to permit the Chinese CP to work with it (see Erald Isaac La Negociade la revolucion Chinesa 1924-27, Gallimard, Paris 1967).

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**The Spanish Civil War in Euskadi and Catalonia**

Miguel Romero

1. The Spanish civil war included a colonial problem which could have been decisive for the revolution; that of the Rif territories. An uprising in the Rif would have had immediate military advantages: it would have allowed us to attack Spanish Morocco in a rear-designed fashion base of operations, thus favouring a victory of the republican forces. Negotiations had taken place between the Moroccan nationalist movement and the Spanish authorities, which had no outcome because of the attitude of the latter. To clarify this unknown and hidden page of the history of the Spanish civil war, we think it is useful and interesting to publish a transcribed of the oral testimony of David Rouss, who was present at these discussions.

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**I was at the time a member of the political bureau of the POUM.**

The POUM belonged to the International Committee for Revolutionary Socialist Unity, whose centre is to be found in London, which regroups the independent socialist and communist parties which are outside the Second and Third International.

The International Committee for Revolutionary Socialist Unity is not the embryo of a new international, but the centre of convergence of the revolutionary socialist parties who fight for the construction of world revolutionary unity on new bases.

But my principal difficulty was the lack of direct relations in Spain and notably with Barcelona. When I left Paris this problem was not posed, and we had therefore not discussed this in the POUM leadership. Jean Rouss was, at that time, in Barcelona, and he was as good without saying, in close contact with the POUM. But should we want for Jean Rouss? Now at that time Robert Louison, who was in contact with the CNT and the FAI, and thought about the question of Spanish Morocco while in Barcelona, he had no contacts in Morocco, and it was at that point that he...
The decisive element was the Central Committee of Militias which was dominated by the CNT and the Fal. Therefore, for the negotiations to succeed, they had to be held with the Central Committee of Militias. The latter, informed of our presence and our objectives, came to visit the POUM. As always at that time operations were carried out in a singular way. One day an armed group arrived opposite the POUM building. There were rather curious exchanges between the POUM, the CNT, and the Fal, and we went off, arms and all, with the CNT and the Fal. We had been received by the Central Committee of the Militia. I don’t remember the names, in any case they were the leaders of the Central Committee of the Militia.

They gave us a villa in Barcelona where, for the whole of September, the negotiations were carried out. I played the role of an adviser to the Moroccan delegation, that is of course I hid myself behind the Moroccan delegation. That is, the P.O.U.M played no role in this affair, it was a diplomatic negotiation between the authorized Moroccan representatives of the Action Committee and the authorized representatives of the Central Committee of Militias. But as an adviser, I took part in editing the fundamental elements which finally constituted the draft of a treaty of independence. The moroccans posed the following principle: we are ready they said to start a military uprising in the Spanish Zone in the Rif, but we will only do it on one express condition: that you recognize our independence. Nevertheless the draft treaty followed the main lines of the Franco-Syrian treaty which had been signed in that period. Therefore we had a text, which whilst recognizing independence, maintained close links between the former metropolis and the former colony. At the end of September, the terms had been definitively settled. The Central Committee of Militias approved the draft and we passed to the second phase.

The draft was submitted to all the delegations, without exception, of the Catalan parties. The Catalan parties, all without exception, approved the draft treaty of independence, even the Communist Party. And then we passed to a third phase: the Generalitat government had to approve the text of the treaty which would then become an official treaty between the Moroccan delegation and the Generalitat government. There was a ceremony with signatures, photos, films, etc. ... So it was a rather official event. Relations had already been created with the Moroccan tribes in the Rif. The question of money and arms had been settled, and the Spanish government explained to the Arab delegation, that they could not countersign the Barcelona treaty but that they were ready and that it was possible to begin operations forthwith, but on one condition only: that of the Barcelona treaty, which, it must again be stressed, was a treaty of the Franco-Syrian type.

The break came at this point. They came back to Barcelona where they rejoined me and we went back to France. Shortly after their return to Paris they themselves met Leon Blum, with whom they had a rather rushed interview. I am ignorant of its content. Then they returned to the French Zone of Morocco.

Tha’s the story of this negotiation with the Central Committee of Militias.

David Rousset, Paris.

The Spanish Civil War in Euskadi and Catalonia

Miguel Romero

things. They had not been able to avoid it in Barcelona where things were posed rather differently, but they didn’t want it to continue for too long. So, Wazzani and Abjelil went to Madrid alone, and I was not able to take part in the conversations. I therefore reported what they told me. They found themselves face to face with Largo Caballero who was, of course, subject to very strong pressure from Paris and London. Paris and London had been informed — how I don’t know! but it was obviously natural and inevitable — about this project and were absolutely hostile to it. For Paris, it was understandable since the Leon Blum government obviously wondered what would happen if this ever led to independence for the Rif. As a result, the Spanish government explained to the Arab delegation, that they could not countersign the Barcelona treaty but that they were ready to give money and arms so that operations could begin. Then we came up against the conduct of the Moroccan delegates. If I had been there, I must say that I would have advised them to accept the means to act, but that didn’t take place. They conducted themselves as a delegation representing a bourgeois movement, which did not want to undertake operations without the requisite political guarantees. They explained to the Spanish government that they were not agents of the Second Bureau (the Secret Service) that they were ready and that it was possible to begin operations forthwith, but on one condition only: that of the Barcelona treaty, which, it must again be stressed, was a treaty of the Franco-Syrian type.

The break came at this point. They came back to Barcelona where they rejoined me and we went back to France. Shortly after their return to Paris they themselves met Leon Blum, with whom they had a rather rushed interview. I am ignorant of its content. Then they returned to the French Zone of Morocco.

Tha’s the story of this negotiation with the Central Committee of Militias.
Names and abbreviations of organizations

AIT (Asociación internacional de trabajadores, International Workers' Association): the Internationale of the anarchosyndicalist tendency, reconstituted in Berlin in 1922 by the various libertarian organisations, of which the CNT was the most important.

BOC (Bloc Obrero y Campesino, Workers' and Peasants' Bloc): founded by J Maurin in 1930 with the aim of creating a left national movement with a petty-bourgeois and popular social base which, against the Liga catalana, became the main Catalan political force during the Civil war.

CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo, Spanish Confederation of Labour): a left national movement with a petty-bourgeois and popular social base which, against the Liga catalana, became the main Catalan political force during the Civil war.

FAI (Federación Anarquista Iberica, Iberian Anarchist Federation): founded in 1927 in collaboration with the Portuguese anarchism (which was quite powerful before the Salazar dictatorship), it represented a sort of “anti-party” within the libertarian movement. During the republican period it followed an insurrectionary line whose principal theorist was García Oliver. Falange (Falange): a minority organisation before the uprising, founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera along European and above all Italian lines. It acted as a counter-revolutionary vanguard, adopting a demagogic political language.

GEPIC (Gremios y entidades de pequeños comerciantes e industriales, Associations and units of small merchants and industrialists): an organisation of the small and medium Catalan bourgeoisie which was used by the PSUC in order to counteract the revolutionary potential of the working class.

CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autonomas, Spanish Confederation for Autonomous Rights): a conservative group that came out of the PCE in 1929. From the beginning it had clearly separatist tendencies and a Catholic and anti-republican force in Asturias in 1938. In 1932 it was integrated into the Nationalist party of the basque country.

GPO (Gremios y entidades de pequenos comerciantes e industriales, Associations and units of small merchants and industrialists): an organisation of the small and medium Catalan bourgeoisie which was used by the PSUC in order to counteract the revolutionary potential of the working class.

CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores, General Confederation of Workers): founded in 1879 by García Oliver. In 1932 it was integrated into the Nationalist party of the Basque country.

PSUC (Partido socialista unificado de Catalunya, Unified Social Party of Catalonia): coming from the same source with which it was the first party to claim allegiance to the Francoist regime, it represented a sort of “anti-party” within the libertarian movement. Its main opposition was to the anarcho-syndicalist organisation of the CNT.

UC (Unión General de Trabajadores, General Workers' Union): founded in 1917 by García Queipo and Pablo Iglesias. During the civil war it was the second largest trade union in the workers' movement after the CNT.

Glossary

Abad de Santillán, Diego (1879-1983): anarchist leader and theoretician. He began his military activity in Madrid, where he was a student. In exile, he belonged to the Argentine government and the theoretical organ of the POB.

García Oliver, Diego (1879-1983): officer of the Republican army, mainly responsible for the coup d'état against the Pre-Franco government, which marked the final act of the war without any concessions by the insurgent troops.

Casares Quiroga, Santiago (1894-1950): republican leader and Galician regionalist. Several times Prime Minister, he is renowned for his frivolous comments about the uprising.

Companys, Lluís (1883-1940): lawyer. Close to the CEDA in the twenties, successor to Maura in the leadership of the ERC, he was at the head of the popular action in 1936 but supported the crude economistic policies of the蕭熙對. In 1936, he showed his abilities by integrating the anarcho-syndicalists into the government. Imprisoned by the Gestapo in France, he was shot at Mont-sur-Rolle by the insurgent troops.

Córdoba, José (1896-1942): former CNT leader, he became general secretary of the PCE in 1932. Exiled to the USSR in 1938, he committed suicide in unclear circumstances.

Durruti, Buenaventura (1893-1936): legendary figure of Spanish anarchosyndicalism. Under the dictatorship he took part in numerous assassinations of Franco and thus found thanks to an international campaign. He moved to Latin America and on his return, when he was already a mythical figure, incarnated the insurrectional line. Leader of the popular mobilizations during the July days, he formed the militias which fought first at Aragon and then on the Madrid front. His burial in Barcelona was the greatest gathering ever seen in Spain.


García Oliver, José (1901-1981): anarchist leader, representing the revolutionary line before being placed in the commission which officially observed the election process in the LargoCaballero government, he was one of the defenders of the official line.

Gil Robles, José María (1898-1980): a conservative political man, leader of the CEDA. The defeat of the fascist coup d'état in Spain and proclaimed his willingness to liquidate the republic. After the war he was ex-
Nin P. Perez, Andreu (1892-1937): militant from his youth, he was a federalist-republican, an internationalist, and an anarchist in the period of the workers' repression and finally, in Moscow, a member of the Moscow Soviet and secretary of the ISR. After joining the Left Opposition, he returned to Spain where he led the ICE until the POU was founded. The main leader of this party in Murcia, his absence, he became Minister of Justice in 1936. The next year he was kidnapped and killed by the GPU. He has left us an important historical legacy.

Orwell, George (1903-1950): Pen name of the British writer Eric Blair, sympathizer of the Independent Labour Party, who joined the POU milita and lived through the war and events of May 1937 in its ranks. Author of the very fine reportage Homage to Catalonia (1938).

Passell, Eugenio (1876-1958): cardinal, secretary of state of the Holy See during the Spanish civil war (because Pope Pius XII in 1939).

Prieto y Toledano, Francisco (1883-1962): sociologist because he opposed the Franco dictatorship. In 1935 he wrote to Franco asking him to take power, explaining that Trotsky himself had inspired the Spanish revolution. He was shot by the republicans in Alcalá de Henares in 1936.

Primo de Rivera, Miguel (1870-1930): classical representative of Spanish militarism. Prime Minister under the monarchy of Alfonso XIII, he became dictator between 1923 and 1930. He was able to survive thanks to the government's concentration camps.

Trotsky, Leon (1879-1940): historical leader of the Spanish "radicals". On the eve of "Tragic Week", he tried to disarm the Catalan workers' movement with powerful artillery and with Catalan domination. Minister of the first republic government, he evolved towards the extreme right, up to the point of supporting the military coup d'état.

Maurin, Josué (1896-1973): one of the representatives of the CNT at the founding congress of the Red Trade Union International, he took part in the creation of the CNT, from 1913 in Barcelona and in 1930 when he refused to "condemn Trotskyism". Unpopular leader of the CNT and the main animator of the Workers' Alliance, he was captured in Galicia in 1936 and was able to survive thanks to a series of favourable circumstances. In exile he became a social democrat.

Mola Videla, Emiliano (1887-1937): general in the Spanish army. One of the "brains" of the military conspiracy against the republic, he led the Francoist army's military and repressive operations in the North.

Negrín López, Juan (1889-1956): doctor and "notable" of the PCE, he became head of the government thanks to Prieto, replacing LargoCaballero. To him is attributed the idea of continuing a "humanitarian" war, avoiding the outbreak of World War II. His involvement with the PCE could appear as a total identification, but in reality he had his own project. At the end of the civil war, Cánovas's coup d'état interrupted his growing conflicts with the PCE.

Nin Pérez, Andrés (1892-1937): militant from his early youth, he was a federalist-republican, an internationalist, and an anarchist in the period of the workers' repression and finally, in Moscow, a member of the Moscow Soviet and secretary of the ISR. After joining the Left Opposition, he returned to Spain where he led the ICE until the POU was founded. The main leader of this party in Murcia, his absence, he became Minister of Justice in 1936. The next year he was kidnapped and killed by the GPU. He has left us an important historical legacy.

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In the "lectures" series

The Spanish Civil War in Euzkadi and Catalonia

Miguel Romero

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This issue of the Notebooks for Study and Research is not a new historical summary of the Spanish Civil War on which there is already very extensive literature. Miguel Romero is not a historian but a revolutionary activist who questions conventional history and tries to look at it from the point of view of the defeated and oppressed. Leaving aside all revolutionary rhetoric, the basic methodological starting point makes it possible for him to show that the defeat of the revolutionaries in the Republican camp (particularly in Catalonia in spring 1937), paved the way for Franco’s victory.

The originality of this study is the way in which it integrates the national question into its analysis of the civil war. In the Basque country and in Catalonia, defence of the Republic, revolutionary mobilization of the workers and the anti-fascist struggle took place in different and specific national contexts. Miguel Romero develops a comparative analysis of the civil war in the two countries. He notes that the shared tragic conclusion to the conflicts should not hide the very different dynamic of the social and political forces in the two situations.

Miguel Romero was born in 1945 in Melilla in Spanish Morocco. A revolutionary and a Marxist, he started his political activity during the Franco dictatorship. Between 1966 and 1971, he was a member of the Frente de Liberación Popular, a revolutionary organization of Guevarist orientation. A member of the Liga Comunista Revolucionario, the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state, since its foundation in 1971, he is currently editor of the fortnightly Combate newspaper and the Spanish edition of the Inprecor magazine.