

A NOTE ON COMMUNISM IN SPAIN BEFORE THE FRANCO REGIME.

In spite of the prophecy attributed to Trotsky in the early twenties that Spain would be the next country in Europe to embrace Bolshevism Communism as a political force was of no importance whatsoever until the second phase of the Spanish civil war. It was in the autumn of 1936 that the Republican Government, deserted in its hour of need by the democracies (as it appeared to Spanish liberals), was obliged to accept the assistance, such as it was, proffered by the Soviet Union against the Axis-sponsored military rebellion, and the insignificant cadres of the Communist Party i.e. the Spanish section of the Third International were suddenly swollen by a large influx of mainly middle-class elements - Army officers, Government officials etc - who thought to find in the Party the moral leadership of the Government cause. Throughout the civil war the Communist Party - numbering perhaps half a million at its peak period - was never predominant in the actual Government but was just one element in a coalition of Left groups and working-class organizations. The well-established U.G.T. (Union General de Trabajadores) and C.N.T. (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) continued to share between them the trade union field.

2. During the last years of the Restoration period (1917-23) there had been a considerable amount of working-class agitation and sporadic outbursts of violence belying the moderate tradition of Spanish Socialism, but, centred as it was in Barcelona and the industrial regions of the north, it was directly connected with the peculiarly Spanish phenomenon of anarchosyndicalism, which was fundamentally opposed to the doctrine and practices of Russian Communism. So insignificant was Communism as a political force at that time that the Dictator, General Primo de Rivera, did not bother to suppress the party newspaper *Mundo Obrero*, which continued to appear from 1923 to 1930. (It was in fact suspended for a brief period by his successor, General Berenguer, but re-appeared during the campaign for municipal elections which brought about the downfall of the Monarchy and the establishment of the Republic in April, 1931.)
3. During the years of the Dictatorship the Communists did, it is true, develop small groups of sympathizers within the orthodox trade unions, and make a start with proselytizing among the masses - they were particularly active in their propaganda among the landless and feckless labourers in Andalusia. But they made little headway, and Communism does not figure among the political forces of the Left that came together in the Pact of San Sebastian of August, 1930 and, eventually ushered in the Second Republic.
4. In 1931 Communist Party membership was about on a par with that of the Communist Party in Great Britain, and its influence was nil. (The figure was certainly well under 10,000). Among the 470 deputies elected to the first or

Constituent Cortes in June, 1931 was one Communist. One Communist, again, was the sum total (a different person and a freak candidate) in the second Cortes following the elections of November, 1933, which initiated what the Left supporters came to call the bienio negro. Communism played no part in the Asturias rebellion and similar acts of protest against the Rightward trend of the administration in October, 1934. Thereafter the progress of 'reaction' in Spain, itself buoyed up conspicuously by the apparently triumphant course of National Socialism in Germany and Italian Fascism, at home and abroad, inevitably encouraged a swing towards the other extreme. Even so the Communist Party was still very much a 'courtesy' partner in the Popular Front engineered at the end of 1935, on the pattern of France, to fight the elections of February, 1936. It was simply as a result of a gesture of solidarity on the part of the other groups that the third Cortes summoned in March, 1936, found itself blessed with 16 Communist deputies. The new Azana Government of February, as indeed, too, the Government of Señor Giral, formed at the outbreak of the rebellion in July, was a coalition of moderate Republican groups, not even the Socialists were included.

5. By the spring of 1936, however, the impatience of the masses, the rank-and-file working-class parties, for overdue reforms, was no longer to be restrained. The outward and visible sign of this rising tide of discontent was the enrolment en bloc of 'Socialist Youth', 100,000 strong, in the Communist Party and the attempt of the militants such as Alvarez del Vayo and Luis Araguistain, to make of Señor Largo Caballero, the Socialist and trade union leader, a Spanish Lenin. Internal dissensions between the Caballero and the Prieto factions of the Socialist Party were another source of weakness.
6. Thus, at the outbreak of the military rebellion, no party was better placed for the struggle, none so coherent, so disciplined, so sure of itself. When power passed into the hands of the popular militias, it was natural that the Communist Party should take its share in the Government, and the Largo Caballero Government set up on Sept 3rd, 1936 included two or three Communist Ministers (in minor posts). It did not include the Anarchists, who, however, were admitted (four Ministers) in a re-shuffle on November 3rd. It was this Largo Caballero Cabinet which set itself to the task of building up the new Republican Army on the basis of the popular militias and introduced the system of Political Commissars, borrowed from Soviet practice. Dr. Negrin was Minister of Finance in the Largo Caballero Government. Fierce rivalry and dissension between Socialists and Communists, inside the Government as well as in the country, marked the first winter of the civil war. According to Señor Madariaga the Kremlin, having decided to take a hand, was dissatisfied with the stubborn old Socialist war-horse, Caballero, and, regarding Alvarez del Vayo as too lightweight, cast about for a more pliable tool. They found such a person, as they thought, in Dr. Negrin, a respectable

right-wing Socialist, and, following the break-up of the uneasy partnership of the Caballero Government, Negrín became Premier of a new Cabinet installed in Valencia (to which the previous Government had been forced to move by the siege of Madrid) in May 1937. Thenceforth Dr. Negrín acquired the reputation (not altogether warranted) of being the catspaw of Moscow.

7. Communist Ministers remained in successive Governments and Dr. Negrín showed himself to be the indispensable war-leader. The Communists (and the Prime Minister) became identified with the resolve never to capitulate - they were what the French in World War I had called the jusqu'au boutistes; but their authoritarian ways and the discipline they imposed were a continual strain on the individualist Spaniards. In the end it was the Casado revolt inside beleaguered Madrid - against Communist dominance - which provoked the final collapse of Republican resistance. Thus the other Spaniards allied with the Communists in the freak circumstances of the War had themselves ultimately thrown off the Communist yoke.

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