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Spain: The Struggle Goes On

Albert Meltzer

May 1939

The death of the Spanish struggle has, naturally, attracted the vultures flocking around the corpse. It is hardly necessary to warn readers of a Socialist forum for Socialists, against the lies that are inevitably levelled against the Revolution by the supporters of Franco: regrettably, it is necessary to warn them against similar lies emanating from the supporters of Negrin and the other opponents of working-class Socialism.

It is necessary to recall that at the outbreak of the Fascist rebellion, the Popular Front Government was weak and powerless. Only the working-class took the initiative in suppressing the rebellion.

And the workers did more than act against Fascism: they proceeded with the revolution. The anarchist method of revolution – socialisation from below and workers' direct control of industries and farms (many of the local collectives being living examples of anarchism in practice) – was mainly followed, owing to strong influence of the C.N.T.-F.A.I. on the masses.

Because of the war, the revolution needed arms. Because of the of arms it was obliged to maintain co-operation with the liberal bourgeoisie, who could obtain arms (to some extent) from abroad. Spain, not an industrial country, could not, like

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this country for example, produce enough arms for herself; the arms blockade prevented importation of arms. The working masses outside Spain, in large numbers, duped by the reformists and Popular Frontists, did not send those arms themselves. Their reformist leaders presumably thought the way to send arms was to utter mild protests to the capitalist governments (or, more likely, realised that that was the way to get votes: one remembers Morrison maintaining that Spain could be saved if he were sent to County Hall!).

The Spanish Revolution was therefore obliged to get arms where it could. Russia, for instance, sent arms. True, she insisted on full payment, the arms were often worthless, heavy political conditions were attached – but still, Russia sent arms. It was Russia's arms that helped crush the workers' revolution!

Under these conditions the C.N.T. did its best to carry on the struggle to win the war and the revolution. Its best men were killed at the front and in the rear: Durutti, Berneri, Ascaso, gave their own lives in the struggle.

It is clear, at this time (and from this distance!) that the C.N.T. made mistakes. It should never have joined the Cabinet; but should have kept aloof from the Cabinet as it kept aloof from the Cortes and from the Popular Front. The C.N.T.-U.G.T. unity and the U.H.P. was sufficient. In addition, it is clear that the C.N.T.-F.A.I. Should have threatened to sabotage the Anti-Fascist Front in order to blackmail the Negrinists, instead of allowing the Negrinists to threaten to sabotage that Front to blackmail the C.N.T. and the whole revolution.

However, the mistakes were made. The revolution was crushed. The war was lost.

After Fascism had been successful in Catalonia, Negrin and the Communist leaders escaped to French territory and declared from there their firm resolve of fighting on till the last men were killed. the last men failed to see the point of this, and the formation of Junta of Casado was a recognition that all hopes of a military victory were impossible. Whether

justified or not, those in the firing-line realised they were unable to succeed on the military field. The lesser evil was to surrender, and to liquidate the barricades; since victory being impossible, the consequent massacre by Franco would come anyway, and the further massacre entailed by further fighting saved.

But the surrender does not mean the end of the resistance to Franco and the struggle for revolution. It simply implies that the Civil War is over. The only way out of the Civil War had become Franco, or Negrin established by French-British intervention (which was not forthcoming, in any case); the Civil War has therefore been ended, but not the Revolution. The Spanish proletariat returns to the guerilla tactics of the days before 1936; but with memories of the "Glorious July" and experience of Popular-Frontism. Once more the old organisation must be rebuilt: and the old struggle, that continued during the Monarchy, the Dictatorship and the Republic, taken up again.