

FORCES MAKING FOR REVOLUTION IN SPAIN By BERT WOLFE

The following article is the first of a short series to be written by Comrades Wolfe and Herberg on the present situation in Spain. The introductory article published in this issue was written by Comrade Wolfe two years ago (in October, 1934) while the events of the October uprising were still in progress, but has not hitherto been published. Only the last paragraph is new, yet the entire article has a timeliness which demonstrates once more how fruitful is the Marxist method for analyzing and interpreting history on the wing. —Editor.

Peculiarities of Spanish Development

Spain, more even than most lands, refuses to yield her secrets to abstract analysis conceived in terms of the generalities common to all modern European countries. The present events and perspectives can be understood only if the peculiarities of Spanish development are kept in mind.

1. Spain is a land of prolonged feudal decay and arrested capitalist development. One of the most backward lands of Europe, it was nevertheless the first country to lay the foundations of modern capitalism. Having gotten off to an early start, the Hispanic peninsula did not maintain its lead, and from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries has been going through a process of "inglorious and slow decay."

2. The structure of Spanish economy and politics may best be characterized as a kind of centralized localism. In this respect, its centralization is more nearly comparable to that of an Asiatic despotism than to the centralism of such a land as France. Whereas absolute monarchy was historically an instrument of the nascent bourgeoisie to break down feudal localism and lay the foundations of economic and political unity, in Spain as in the Orient, absolute monarchy and the bureaucratic centralism of the Republic that succeeded it, have been based on a decentralized economy and the retardation of capitalist development. The most industrialized sections of the Spanish peninsula, Catalonia and Portugal, far from supporting centralization, have actually been separatist. It is a fitting symbol of this bureaucratic military-feudal centralization that its axis is not Barcelona, center of Spanish trade and industry on the Mediterranean, nor Lisbon, center of Iberian trade and industry on the Atlantic, but Madrid in Castille (the land of the castles) which, in the words of the poet Margall, "can never see the sea."

Again and again this political center has proved itself the throttle of national development. It is not an instrument of the bourgeoisie against feudalism and for national unity. It is an instrument of a decaying but tenacious latifundial feudalism against the nascent bourgeoisie and against economic unity. It is unstable and easily overturned. Then Spain resolves itself into dissimilar local economies. Napoleon found this nerve center lifeless. He smote it with his mailed fist and it fell apart. But to his astonishment as the center collapsed, Spain suddenly manifested life in all its parts. Their energies had been released by the removal of the dead weight of centralized bureaucracy, and his Spanish campaign proved the beginning of the end for Napoleon.

3. "Imperial" Spain lost its last overseas colony in 1898 when in the modern world imperialism was just beginning! The revenue from its ill-administered colonies had elevated the monarchy into a relative independence from capital-

ism. The loss of Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippines, symbolized the last stage in three centuries of "inglorious decay" and in the realm of thought, the profound disturbance expressed itself in the movement of the *Generacion de '98*. The monarchy lost its visible means of support, and the Moroccan disasters of the '20's completed the process, causing the monarchy to collapse.

A Rachitic Ruling Class

4. The Spanish possessing classes have long been afflicted with a constitutional weakness, a sort of anemia, rendering them capable of vigorous social or political action. What else can be expected of a decayed aristocracy and a stunted bourgeoisie? That is why Spanish politics has about it an astonishing air of unreality. . . . Its party labels, codes, constitutional devices and prescriptions, are shadows of the institutions of other European lands. The political unreality of its institutions is a reflex of the economic unreality of its centralism. This explains the astonishing "lyricism" of Spanish politics and such peculiar institutions as *rotativismo*, a system whereby under the monarchy two groups of politicians, one calling itself "liberal" and the other "conservative," and neither with a real party behind it, succeeded each other by agreement, alternating at rhythmic intervals as if governed by tidal forces or sun spots or some other "natural", non-social determinant. It explains, too, the light-hearted use of resounding phrases with no concern for content, which enabled Spain politicians to write into the Republican constitution, "Spain is a workers' republic of all classes." This helps, too, along with the general backwardness of economy and class development, to explain the anti-parliamentarism of so large a section of the Spanish proletariat.

The Role of the Army

5. As appropriate to such a political structure, the army plays an exceptionally important role and the officers' corps has an exceptionally high political specific gravity. The special interests of the semi-independent bureaucracy reach their high point in the special interests of the military caste. Hence all previous revolutions began in the army. Even the Republic of 1931 was preceded by the Jaca military uprising of 1929. The division among the officers' corps in that uprising was interesting. On one side the engineers, the bicycle corps, the miners and sappers, the artillery, the air force; on the other the command of the infantry, cavalry, the bulk of the army. On the one side, the advanced technique, the younger sons of the bourgeoisie, in revolt; on the other, the traditionally military arms, the younger sons of the landowner aristocracy, loyal to the monarchy. In such peculiar forms do class forces break through in a "classless" bureaucratic-military machine.

The Church

6. As befits a land of arrested development and prolonged feudal decay, the clergy also represents a bureaucratic force of great importance with strongly marked special interests. The clergy was weakened by the fall of the monarchy, traded and compromised with the compromising bourgeois republic, but set into play its marvelous forces of organization and propaganda to restore the rule of the landowners. It provided the ideological banners and organized forces for the recent coup d'etat in the form of the Lerroux-Gil Robles government. The new government has been called fascist. But it should rather be called clerical-military-fascist with clergy and military predominating over elements of fascism in its make-

up.

7. The labor movement, too, shows peculiarities in its development. Of these we have space only for one. Generally, when they say "red and yellow" in Spain they are not thinking of Communist and Socialist but of Anarcho-Syndicalist and Socialist unions. Communism is thus far a relatively negligible force. Until recently the Socialist movement was the reflex in the working class of petty bourgeois liberal ideology and the anarcho-syndicalism of petty bourgeois radicalism.

The Birth of the Republic

The events of 1929-36 have their antecedents in the feverish growth of Spanish industry during the World War. As the solitary neutral country in Southern Europe Spain found an unexpected and unlimited war market. Its industry, unequal to the task, swelled up like a balloon. Followed a mushroom growth of bourgeoisie and proletariat and a sudden impetus for the bourgeoisie to free itself from moldering feudal fetters. With the end of the war, the balloon of Spanish industry collapsed and a fantastic post-war crisis shook the ancient structure to its depth. Strike waves, peasant insurrections, movements of the bourgeoisie, unrest in the army, a catastrophe in Morocco—the throne tottered.

From 1923 to 1929 the Spanish old regime sought to solve its insoluble problems by the time-honored device of a military dictatorship. It is the fashion in journalistic circles to call all personal dictatorship fascism but the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was no such thing. It had no petty bourgeois or proletarian mass base. It had no extra-legal armed bands to bring it to power. It employed no social demagoguery. It was, in fact, with certain modifications, only one more of the long chain of military dictatorships traditional with Spain throughout the 19th century.

The dictatorship smashed the syndicalist unions but it accepted the cooperation of the leaders of the Socialist Unions. It lowered the level of wages. It crushed the peasant movements. It granted monopolies to bourgeois-feudal favorites. It tried public works, high tariffs to protect an unprotected industry and economic nationalism on the basis of nationalized poverty. It enlarged the only public possession which Spain could boast: the public debt was increased by one-third. But essentially the dictatorship solved none of the problems it was created to meet.

The Fall of Primo de Rivera

While Spanish economy tottered through the storms of internal crisis it was overwhelmed by the whirlwind of the world-wide crisis in 1929. The peseta dropped to new lows; the cost of living skyrocketed to new highs. The year 1929 opened with an insurrection in the army. Followed a strike wave, student demonstrations and peasant movements. In January 1930 the military dictatorship collapsed without as much as an uprising. The air went out of a punctured balloon. Alfonso tried to save his skin by treachery to his dictator, but it was too late.

The new government that succeeded Primo de Rivera permitted a couple of months of free press and speech and municipal elections in April 1931. The petty bourgeois Republicans, supported by the workers and peasants, much to their own astonishment swept every city in Spain except four, and the majority of the towns and villages as well. The anarcho-syndicalists "abstained" officially, but the masses of their organized members voted Republican. The Communists, thanks to their sec-



The hated Civil Guard sets up machine guns in the streets

tarian isolation, did not feel the mood of the masses and did not even present candidates. The petty bourgeois and socialist Republicans were but making a time-honored opposition gesture. But Republicans swept the country and the monarchy ran away. Alfonso fled in such precipitate haste that he forgot to take with him a tin box already packed containing three million dollars in cash. However he had been farsighted enough to invest 60% of his fortune in securities abroad and to transfer \$1,500,000 to a bank in London and sink \$700,000 into a chateau in Fontainebleau.

The open-mouthed astonishment of the Republican victors is best portrayed in the words of one of their own leaders:

"The 14th in the morning when we saw that the people had taken the streets, there was nothing we could do ('no tuvimos mas remedio') but to go to the city hall and the parliamentary building and raise the Republican banner."

Such was the "revolution" that gave birth to the Republic of 1931!

Character of the Spanish Republic

Marx once (1854) wrote of a Spanish revolution:

"One of the characteristics of the revolution consists of the fact that the people, at the very moment when it is preparing to take a big step forward, falls under the power of the illusions of the past, and all the forces and all the influence it has conquered at the cost of such sacrifices, pass into the hands of people who appear as the representatives of the popular movements of an earlier epoch."

So it was once more. The masses turned trustingly to the leaders that had been officially tolerated and consecrated by decades of shadow opposition under King Alfonso. Out of them a fantastic government was patched up. Republican illusions seemed inexhaustible. They appeal to Sanchez Guerra but he declared for the monarchy. To Melguades Alvarez, but he did the same! To the exiled monarchist Alba! And as a fourth attempt they selected a second-rate minister of the monarchy, the Andalusian landowner, Alcala Zamora. To their relief he accepted and became the first President of the Spanish Republic!

The Aborting of a Revolution

The aims of the new government might be summed up in the slogan: "As you were." The social-economic revolution had scarce begun but the government declared that the revolution was over. It sought to change things as little as possible, to avoid strikes, to pre-

vent the peasants from seizing the land, and it kept the old bureaucratic-military war apparatus intact. More than that, the energetic Azana as Minister of War, sought to modernize the army. The hated Guardia Civil was not dissolved—it was strengthened. And to it was added another division of pretorian guards, the Guardia de Asalto—shock troop guards. The Director of Public Safety under the monarchy, Galarza, and the Director of the Civil Guard, Sanjurjo, were not removed until Sanjurjo actually attempted a monarchist coup d'etat!

For months after the flight of the king, the frugal Republic continued to use, until they were all gone, postage stamps with the face of Alfonso on them and a black imprint "Republica Espanola" over the stamp—not for nothing are the Spaniards known as the "Scotch of Southern Europe!" Then, at last, a new stamp appeared amid general anticipation. It bore the face of a nineteenth century Republican and the stirring revolutionary motto: "Fomentar el arbol"—Plant a tree! A small detail, but eloquently symbolic!

The Conflict of Parties

The masses exhausted their illusions more rapidly than the Republican politicians, and they looked to each party and tendency in turn for guidance and light on their problems. They offered their confidence to the Socialists, but that then timid party with a popular majority refused to take more than a minority in the cabinet. On Prieto was wished the declining peseta and the bankrupt treasury. His popularity continued to fall with the continued fall of the peseta. Thus the history of Hilferding and Snowden repeated itself. To Largo Caballero, head of the Socialist trade unions, was given the Ministry of Labor. His task was to force arbitration and suppress strikes. Justice went to De Los Rios who had to watch for the execution of the property laws and land laws (the suppression of the peasant movements) and guard the ticklish relations between Church and State. The socialist ministers acted as buffers between the new government and the masses and socialist prestige was dissipated faster than that of the Republic as a whole.

Great sections of the masses turned to the anarcho-syndicalists for leadership. But they were answered with purely negative slogans. In the face of elections, the anarcho-syndicalists advised boycott. But refusal to develop a party of the proletariat tended to tie syndicalized workers and

(Continued on Page 6)

Spanish Revolution In The Making

(Continued from Page 3)

peasants to the parties of the bourgeoisie.

As the indignation of the workers and peasants mounted at the repressive measures of the coalition government, the syndicalists short-circuited the growing tension by a series of ill-prepared and clumsily executed insurrections which depended upon small bands of picked militants and the use of diminutive dynamite bombs. The consequent failures weakened the insurrectionary wing and strengthened the trade union sector of anarcho-syndicalism.

The communists were also briefly offered the confidence of the workers and peasants in the quest of the latter for guidance. But the official Communist Party did not prove equal to the task. The events of 1930 took it by surprise. In the elections of 1931 it did not participate. When the great strike waves began involving virtually the entire proletariat of Spain under the leadership of two big federations of labor (U.G.T. and C.N.T.), each with a membership of a million out of a total proletariat of about three million, the communists were engaged in playing with the attempt at forming memberless unions of their own. When the masses asked questions about their burning problems, the Communists answered with glowing accounts of life in the Soviet Union—as one popular phrase had it, “they talked Russian.”

Trotsky's personal prestige in Spain was great but the Spanish Trotskyites answered concrete questions put by Spanish history with the abstract litany characteristic of international Trotskyism—“Chang-Kai-Shek”, “Anglo-Russian Unity Committee”, “socialism in one country”, “Thermidor”. The prestige of Trotsky was soon dissipated.

The opposition Communist party under the leadership of Joaquin Maurin also proved unequal to the task. It developed great strength in Catalonia but no real national influence. Its regional character and theoretical weaknesses prevented it from giving leadership to the Spanish workers.

Gradually, in the face of all these conflicting forces and inadequate leaderships, the masses began to develop one overwhelming conviction—that unity was necessary if they were to accomplish anything. The elections of November 20, 1933 gave a powerful impetus to the demand for an all-inclusive united front.

The Insurrection of October 1934

An incomplete revolution either goes forward or slides backward. It cannot stand still. Division in the ranks of the workers, incompetence or worse in every tendency professing to offer leadership, disillusion with the republic and the socialist ministers for not making good on the promissory notes of the revolution, all these had their inevitable effect. The masses became quiescent, sections even turned reactionary, and a cleverly framed electoral law and hostile state apparatus caused a defeat for the republican-socialist coalition in the elections of November 20, 1933, laying the basis for a right government. The anti-republican majority began to pave the way for a “peaceful” and legal transition to clerical-fascism.

But the experiences of Germany and Austria had made their impression on the Spanish working class. A left swing began in the Socialist Party. The Young Socialist League prepared to leave the Second International. After a bitter fight in the Party, in which Largo Caballero and Prieto joined the revolutionary faction against the rest of the old leadership, the party declared against coalition, against democratic illusions, for armed uprising and proletarian dictatorship, and against struggles for immediate demands!

Meanwhile, the anti-republican majority took rapid strides towards dictatorship. In the first nine months of 1934 there were ninety-four police censorship “denunciations” of *El Socialista*. A series of reactionary demonstrations were held, a clerical demonstration, a nation-wide landowners demonstration, a student-fascist demonstration. To each of these the proletariat answered with a general protest strike. And when, on the initiative of the opposition Communist Party (Maurin group), an *Alianza Obrero* was formed in Catalonia, a united front including socialists, opposition communists, Trotskyites and other groups, the Workers Alliance idea spread like wildfire, dragging in, against the opposition of their leaders, the anarcho-syndicalist and official communist organizations in Asturias. Finally, in mid-September 1934, less than three weeks before the uprising, the Communist Party reversed its stand that the Workers Alliances were “the holy alliance of counter-revolution” and decided to join them. It was these alliances that led the general strike and insurrection of October of last year.

The October Revolution

The immediate occasion of the general strike was the fall of the Samper government and the formation of a coalition of the right under the premiership of Lerroux, with three clerical-fascists under the lead of Gil Robles in the cabinet. The petty bourgeois Republicans under Azana left the Cortes and appealed for extra-legal, i.e., insurrectionary, defense of the Republic. The petty bourgeois nationalist and syndicalist unions declared general strikes on the fifth of October and the next day the general strike developed into an armed uprising.

The response of the proletariat and peasantry was overwhelming, but the revolution suffered from unclear aims (“save the republic” or “proletarian dictatorship”?), from the lack of a unified party and planned leadership, from the vacillating weakness of the petty bourgeoisie (e.g., Companys in Catalonia), from inadequate work and support in the army. Only in Asturias, where the united front had been most inclusive and the petty bourgeoisie largely out of the picture, was the heroic miners’ uprising equal to the historic tasks that confronted the Spanish masses. That heroism already belongs to the great traditions of the European working class. And the determined struggle carried on there, though defeated, has given pause to the plans for a clerical-fascist-military dictatorship.

The defeat of the October insurrection left the Gil Robles’ clerical-fascist group as the strongest element in the new Lerroux government, but the unanimity and heroism of the mass struggle compelled the preservation of Republican trimmings, stayed the hand of the white terror. The widespread repression only deepened the resistance of the working class and the demand for amnesty for the prisoners that jammed the unjustified arrests. Even the Court direction of fulfilling the program of reaction intensified the resentment among workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie. The Lerroux government could not fulfill its program in the face of the steadily rising tide of opposition, which finally overwhelmed it. The fall of the Lerroux-Gil Robles government led to a brief “transition” cabinet under Portela, charged with conducting new elections. These were the elections scheduled for February 16, of the present year.

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