

# Leon Trotsky

## The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning

(December 1937)

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### Menshevism and Bolshevism in Spain

All general staffs are studying closely the military operations in Ethiopia, in Spain and in the Far East in preparation for the great future war. The battles of the Spanish proletariat heat lightning flashes of the coming world revolution, should be no less attentively studied by the revolutionary staffs. Under this condition and this condition alone will the coming events not take us unawares.

Three ideologies fought – with unequal forces – in the so-called republican camp, namely, Menshevism, Bolshevism, and anarchism. As regards the bourgeois republican parties, they were without either independent ideas or independent political significance and were able to maintain themselves only by climbing on the backs of the reformists and Anarchists. Moreover, it is no exaggeration to say that the leaders of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism did everything to repudiate their doctrine and virtually reduce its significance to zero. Actually two doctrines in the so-called republican camp fought – Menshevism and Bolshevism.

According to the Socialists and Stalinists, i.e., the Mensheviks of the first and second instances, the Spanish revolution was called upon to solve only its “democratic” tasks, for which a united front with the “democratic” bourgeoisie was indispensable. From this point of view, any and all attempts of the proletariat to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy are not only premature but also fatal. Furthermore, on the agenda stands not the revolution but the struggle against insurgent Franco.

Fascism, however, is not feudal but bourgeois reaction. A successful fight against bourgeois reaction can be waged only with the forces and methods of the proletariat revolution. Menshevism, itself a branch of bourgeois thought, does not have and cannot have any inkling of these facts.

The Bolshevik point of view, clearly expressed only by the young section of the Fourth International, takes the theory of permanent revolution as its starting point, namely, that even purely democratic problems, like the liquidation of semi-feudal land ownership, cannot be solved without the conquest of power by the proletariat; but this in turn places the socialist revolution on the agenda. Moreover, during the very first stages of the revolution, the Spanish workers themselves posed in practice not merely democratic problems but also purely socialist ones. The demand not to transgress the bounds of bourgeois democracy signifies in practice not a defense of the democratic revolution but a repudiation of it. Only through an overturn in agrarian relations could the peasantry, the great mass of the population, have been transformed into a powerful bulwark against fascism. But the landowners are intimately bound up with the commercial, industrial, and banking bourgeoisie, and the bourgeois intelligentsia that depends on them. The party of the proletariat was thus faced with a choice between going with the peasant masses or with the liberal bourgeoisie. There could be only one reason to include the peasantry and the liberal bourgeoisie in the same coalition at the same time: to help the bourgeoisie deceive the peasantry and thus isolate the workers. The agrarian revolution could have been accomplished only against the bourgeoisie, and therefore only through the masses of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no third, intermediate regime.

From the standpoint of theory, the most astonishing thing about Stalin’s Spanish policy is the utter disregard for the ABC of Leninism. After a delay of several decades – and what decades! – the Comintern has fully rehabilitated the doctrine of Menshevism.

More than that, the Comintern has contrived to render this doctrine more “consistent” and by that token more absurd. In czarist Russia, on the threshold of 1905, the formula of “purely democratic revolution” had behind it, in any case, immeasurably more arguments than in 1937 in Spain. It is hardly astonishing that in modern Spain “the liberal labor policy” of Menshevism has been converted into the reactionary anti-labor policy of Stalinism. At the same time the doctrine of the Mensheviks, this caricature of Marxism, has been converted into a caricature of itself.

### “Theory” of the Popular Front

It would be naive, however, to think that the politics of the Comintern in Spain stem from a theoretical “mistake”. Stalinism is not guided by Marxist Theory, or for that matter any theory at all, but by the empirical interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. In their intimate circles, the Soviet cynics mock Dimitrov’s “philosophy” of the Popular Front. But they have at their disposal for deceiving the masses large cadres of propagators of this holy formula, sincere ones and cheats, simpletons and charlatans. Louis Fischer, with his ignorance and smugness, with his provincial rationalism and congenital deafness to revolution, is the most repulsive representative of this unattractive brotherhood. “The union of progressive forces!” “The Triumph of the idea of the Popular Front!” “The assault of the Trotskyists on the unity of the anti-fascist ranks!” ... Who will believe that the **Communist Manifesto** was written ninety years ago?

The theoreticians of the Popular Front do not essentially go beyond the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: “Communists” plus Socialists plus Anarchists plus liberals add up to a total which is greater than their respective isolated numbers. Such is all their wisdom. However, arithmetic alone does not suffice here. One needs as well at least mechanics. The law of the parallelogram of forces applies to politics as well. In such a parallelogram, we know that the resultant is shorter, the more component forces diverge from each other. When political allies tend to pull in opposite directions, the resultant prove equal to zero.

A bloc of divergent political groups of the working class is sometimes completely indispensable for the solution of common practical problems. In certain historical circumstances, such a bloc is capable of attracting the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The

joint force of such a bloc can prove far stronger than the sum of the forces of each of its component parts. On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralyzing the revolutionary force of the proletariat.

Civil war, in which the force of naked coercion is hardly effective, demands of its participants the spirit of supreme self-abnegation. The workers and peasants can assure victory only if they wage a struggle for their own emancipation. Under these conditions, to subordinate the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie means beforehand to assure defeat in the civil war.

These simple truths are least of all the products of pure theoretical analysis. On the contrary, they represent the unassailable deduction from the entire experience of history, beginning at least with 1848. The modern history of bourgeois society is filled with all sorts of Popular Fronts, i.e. the most diverse political combinations for the deception of the toilers. The Spanish experience is only a new and tragic link in this chain of crimes and betrayals.

### **Alliance with the Bourgeoisie's Shadow**

Politically most striking is the fact that the Spanish Popular Front lacked in reality even a parallelogram of forces. The bourgeoisie's place was occupied by its shadow. Through the medium of the Stalinists, Socialists, and Anarchists, the Spanish bourgeoisie subordinated the proletariat to itself without even bothering to participate in the Popular Front. The overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades openly went over to the camp of Franco. Without any theory of "permanent revolution," the Spanish bourgeoisie understood from the outset that the revolutionary mass movement, no matter how it starts, is directed against private ownership of land and the means of production, and that it is utterly impossible to cope with this movement by democratic measures.

That is why only insignificant debris from the possessing classes remained in the republican camp: Messrs. Azaña, Companys, and the like – political attorneys of the bourgeoisie but not the bourgeoisie itself. Having staked everything on a military dictatorship, the possessing classes were able, at the same time, to

make use of the political representatives of yesterday in order to paralyze, disorganize, and afterward strangle the socialist movement of the masses in “republican” territory.

Without in the slightest degree representing the Spanish bourgeoisie, the left republicans still less represented the workers and peasants. They represented no one but themselves. Thanks, however, to their allies – the Socialists, Stalinists, and Anarchists – these political phantoms played decisive role in the revolution. How? Very simply. By incarnating the principles of the “democratic revolution,” that is, the inviolability of private property.

### **The Stalinists in the Popular Front**

The reasons of the rise of the Spanish Popular Front and its inner mechanics are perfectly clear. The task of the retired leaders of the left bourgeoisie consisted in checking the revolution of the masses and the regaining for themselves the lost confidence of the exploiters: “Why do you need Franco if we, the republicans, can do the same thing?” The interests of Azaña and Companys fully coincided at this central point with the interests of Stalin, who needed gain the confidence of the French and British bourgeoisie by proving to them in action his ability to preserve “order” against “anarchy.” Stalin needed Azaña and Companys as a cover before the workers: Stalin himself, of course, is for socialism, but one must take care not to repel the republican bourgeoisie! Azaña and Companys needed Stalin as an experienced executioner, with the authority of a revolts time not at all thanks to high and mighty foreign patrons who supplied “this time not at all thanks to be dared to attack the workers.

The classic reformists of the Second International, long ago derailed by the course of the class struggle, began to feel a new tide of confidence, thanks to the support of Moscow. This support, incidentally, was not given to all reformists but only to those most reactionary. Caballero represented that face of the Socialist Party that was turned toward the workers’ aristocracy. Negrin and Prieto always looked towards the bourgeoisie. Negrin won over Caballero with the help of Moscow. The left Socialists and Anarchists, the captives of the Popular Front, tried, it is true, to save whatever could be saved of democracy. But inasmuch as they did not dare to mobilize the masses against the gendarmes of the Popular Front, their efforts at the end were reduced to complaints and wails. The Stalinists were thus in alliance with the extreme right, avowedly

bourgeois wing of the Socialist Party. They directed their repressions against the left – the POUM, the Anarchists, the “left” Socialists – in other words, against the centrist groupings who reflected, even in a most remote degree, the pressure of the revolutionary masses,

This political fact, very significant in itself, provides at the same time the measure of the degeneration of the Comintern in the last few years. I once defined Stalinism as bureaucratic centrism, and events brought a series of corroborations of the correctness of this definition. But it is obviously obsolete today. The interests of the Bonapartist bureaucracy can no longer be reconciled with centrist hesitation and vacillation. In search of reconciliation with the bourgeoisie, the Stalinist clique is capable of entering into alliances only with the most conservative groupings among the international labor aristocracy. This has acted to fix definitively the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism on the international arena.

### **Counter-Revolutionary Superiorities of Stalinism**

This brings us right up to the solution of the enigma of how and why the Communist Party of Spain, so insignificant numerically and with a leadership so poor in caliber, proved capable of gathering into its hands all reins of power, in the face of the incomparably more powerful organizations of the Socialists and Anarchists. The usual explanation that the Stalinists simply bartered Soviet weapons for power is far too superficial. In return for munitions, Moscow received Spanish gold. According to the laws of the capitalist market, this covers everything. How then did Stalin contrive to get power in the bargain?

The customary answer is that the Soviet government, having raised its authority in the eyes of the masses by furnishing military supplies, demanded as a condition of its “collaboration” drastic measures against revolutionists and thus removed dangerous opponents from its path. All this is quite indisputable but it is only one aspect of the matter, and the least important at that.

Despite the “authority” created by Soviet shipments, the Spanish Communist Party remained a small minority and met with ever-growing hatred on the part of the workers. On the other hand, it was not enough for Moscow to set conditions; Valencia had to accede to them. This is the heart of the matter. Not only Zamora,

Companys, and Negrin, but also Caballero, during his incumbency as premier, were all more or less ready to accede to the demands of Moscow. Why? Because these gentlemen themselves wished to keep the revolution within bourgeois limits. They were deathly afraid of every revolutionary onslaught of the workers.

Stalin with his munitions and with his counterrevolutionary ultimatum was a savior for all these groups. He guaranteed them, so they hoped, military victory over Franco, and at the same time, he freed them from all responsibility for the course of the revolution. They hastened to put their Socialist and Anarchist masks into the closet in the hope of making use of them again after Moscow reestablished bourgeois democracy for them. As the finishing touch to their comfort, these gentlemen could henceforth, justify their betrayal to the workers by the necessity of a military agreement with Stalin. Stalin on his part justifies his counterrevolutionary politics by the necessity of maintaining an alliance with the republican bourgeoisie.

Only from this broader point of view can we get a clear picture of the angelic toleration which such champions of justice and freedom as Azaña, Negrin, Companys, Caballero, Garcia Oliver, and others showed towards the crimes of the GPU. If they had no other choice, as they affirm, it was not at all because they had no means of paying for airplanes and tanks other than with the heads of the revolutionists and the rights of the workers, but because their own “purely democratic”, that is, anti-socialist, program could be realized by no other measures save terror. When the workers and peasants enter on the path of their revolution – when they seize factories and estates, drive out old owners, conquer power in the provinces – then the bourgeois counterrevolution – democratic, Stalinist, or fascist alike – has no other means of checking this movement except through bloody coercion, supplemented by lies and deceit. The superiority of the Stalinist clique on this road consisted in its ability to apply instantly measures that were beyond the capacity of Azaña, Companys, Negrin, and their left allies.

### **Stalin Confirms in His Own Way the Correctness of the Theory of Permanent Revolution**

Two irreconcilable programs thus confronted each other on the territory of republican Spain. On the one hand, the program of saving at any cost private property from the proletariat, and saving

as far as possible democracy from Franco; on the other hand, the program of abolishing private property through the conquest of power by the proletariat. The first program expressed the interest of capitalism through the medium of the labor aristocracy, the top petty-bourgeois circles, and especially the Soviet bureaucracy. The second program translated into the language of Marxism the tendencies of the revolutionary mass movement, not fully conscious but powerful. Unfortunately for the revolution, between the handful of Bolsheviks and the revolutionary proletariat stood counter-revolutionary wall of the Popular Front.

The policy of the Popular Front was, in its turn, not at all determined by the blackmail of Stalin as supplier of arms. There was, of course, no lack of blackmail. But the reason for the success of this blackmail was inherent in the inner conditions of the revolution itself. For six years, its social setting was the growing onslaught of the masses against the regime of semi-feudal and bourgeois property. The need of defending this property by the most extreme measures threw the bourgeoisie into Franco's arms. The republican government had promised the bourgeoisie to defend property by "democratic" measures, but revealed, especially in July 1936, its complete bankruptcy. When the situation on the property front became even more threatening than on the military front, the democrats of all colors, including the Anarchists, bowed before Stalin; and he found no other methods, in his own arsenal than the methods of Franco.

The hounding of "Trotskyists", POUMists, revolutionary Anarchists and left Socialists; the filthy slander; the false documents; the tortures in Stalinist prisons; the murders from ambush – without all this the bourgeois regime under the republican flag could not have lasted even two months. The GPU proved to be the master of the situation only because it defended the interests of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat more consistently than the others, i.e., with the greatest baseness and bloodthirstiness.

In the struggle against the socialist revolution, the "democratic" Kerensky at first sought support in the military dictatorship of Kornilov and later tried to enter Petrograd in the baggage train of the monarchist general Krasnov. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks were compelled, in order to carry the democratic revolution through to the end, to overthrow the government of "democratic" charlatans and babblers. In the process they put an end thereby to every kind of attempt at military (or "fascist") dictatorship.



The Spanish revolution once again demonstrates that it is impossible to defend democracy against the methods of fascist reaction. And conversely, it is impossible to conduct a genuine struggle against fascism otherwise than through the methods of the proletarian revolution. Stalin waged war against "Trotskyism" (proletarian revolution), destroying democracy by the Bonapartist measures of the GPU. This refutes once again and once and for all the old Menshevik theory, adopted by the Comintern, in accordance with which the democratic and socialist revolutions are transformed into two independent historic chapters, separated from each other in point of time. The work of the Moscow executioners confirms in its own way the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution.

### **Role of the Anarchists**

The Anarchists had no independent position of any kind in the Spanish revolution. All they did was waver between Bolshevism and Menshevism. More precisely, the Anarchist workers instinctively yearned to enter the Bolshevik road (July 19, 1936, and May days of 1937) while their leaders, on the contrary, with all their might drove the masses into the camp of the Popular Front, i.e., of the bourgeois regime.

The Anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its tasks by seeking to limit themselves to their own trade unions, that is, to organizations permeated with the routine of peaceful times, and by ignoring what went on outside the framework of the trade unions, among the masses, among the political parties, and in the government apparatus. Had the Anarchists been revolutionists, they would first of all have called for the creation of soviets, which unite the representatives of all the toilers of city and country, including the most oppressed strata, who never joined the trade unions. The revolutionary workers would have naturally occupied the dominant position in these soviets. The Stalinists would have remained an insignificant minority. The proletariat would have convinced itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would have hung suspended in the air. One strong blow would have sufficed to pulverize this apparatus. The socialist revolution would have received a powerful impetus. The French proletariat would not for long permitted Leon Blum to blockade the proletariat revolution beyond the Pyrenees. Neither could the Moscow

bureaucracy have permitted itself such a luxury. The most difficult questions would have been solved as they arose.

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Instead of this, the anarcho-syndicalists, seeking to hide from “politics” in the trade unions, turned out to be, to the great surprise of the whole world and themselves, a fifth wheel in the cart of bourgeois democracy. But not for long; a fifth wheel is superfluous. After Garcia Oliver and his cohorts helped Stalin and his henchmen to take power away from the workers, the anarchists themselves were driven out of the government of the Popular Front. Even then they found nothing better to do than jump on the victor’s bandwagon and assure him of their devotion. The fear of the petty bourgeois before the big bourgeois, of the petty bureaucrat before the big bureaucrat, they covered up with lachrymose speeches about the sanctity of the united front (between a victim and the executioners) and about the inadmissibility of every kind of dictatorship, including their own. “After all, we could have taken power in July 1936 ...” “After all, we could have taken power in May 1937...” The Anarchists begged Stalin-Negrin to recognize and reward their treachery to the revolution. A revolting picture!

In and of itself, this self-justification that “we did not seize power not because we were unable but because we did not wish to, because we were against every kind of dictatorship,” and the like, contains an irrevocable condemnation of anarchism as an utterly anti-revolutionary doctrine. To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting a new class in power, thus enabling it to realize its own program in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest power.

No one could have prevented the Anarchists after the conquest of power from establishing the sort of regime they deem necessary, assuming, of course, that their program is realizable. But the Anarchist leaders themselves lost faith in it. They hid from power not because they are against “every kind of dictatorship” – in actuality, grumbling and whining, they supported and still support the dictatorship of Stalin-Negrin – but because they completely lost their principles and courage, if they ever had any. They were

afraid of everything: “isolation,” “involvement,” “fascism.” They were afraid of France and England. More than anything these phrasemongers feared the revolutionary masses.

The renunciation of the conquest of power inevitably throws every workers’ organization into the swamp of reformism and turns it into a toy of the bourgeoisie; it cannot be otherwise in view of the class structure of society. In opposing the goal, the conquest of power, the Anarchists could not in the end fail to oppose the means, the revolution. The leaders of the CNT and FAI not only helped the bourgeoisie hold on to the shadow of power in July 1936; they also helped it to reestablish bit by bit what it had lost at one stroke. In May 1937, they sabotaged the uprising of the workers and thereby saved the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Thus anarchism, which wished merely to be anti-political, proved in reality to be anti-revolutionary and in the more critical moments – counter-revolutionary.

The Anarchist theoreticians, who after the great test of 1931-37 continue to repeat the old reactionary nonsense about Kronstadt, and who affirm that “Stalinism is the inevitable result of Marxism and Bolshevism,” simply demonstrate by this they are forever dead for the revolution.

You say that Marxism is in itself depraved and Stalinism is its legitimate progeny? But why are we revolutionary Marxists engaged in mortal combat with Stalinism throughout the world? Why does the Stalinist gang see in Trotskyism its chief enemy? Why does every approach to our views or our methods of action (Durruti, Andres, Nin, Landau, and others) compel the Stalinist gangsters to resort to bloody reprisals. Why, on the other hand, did the leaders of Spanish anarchism serve, during the time of the Moscow and Madrid crimes of the GPU, as ministers under Caballero-Negrin, that is as servants of the bourgeoisie and Stalin? Why even now, under the pretext of fighting fascism, do the Anarchists remain voluntary captives of Stalin-Negrin, the executioners of the revolution, who have demonstrated their incapacity to fight fascism?

By hiding behind Kronstadt and Makhno, the attorneys of anarchism will deceive nobody. In the Kronstadt episode and the struggle with Makhno, we defended the proletariat from the peasant counterrevolution. The Spanish Anarchists defended and continue to defend bourgeois counterrevolution from the proletariat revolution. No sophistry will delete from the annals of

history the fact that anarchism and Stalinism in the Spanish revolution were on one side of the barricades while the working masses with the revolutionary Marxists were on the other. Such is the truth which will forever remain in the consciousness of the proletariat!

### **Role of the POUM**

The record of the POUM is not much better. In the point of theory, it tried, to be sure, to base itself on the formula of permanent revolution (that is why the Stalinists called the POUMists Trotskyists). But the revolution is not satisfied with theoretical avowals. Instead of mobilizing the masses against the reformist leaders, including the Anarchists, the POUM tried to convince these gentlemen of the superiorities of socialism over capitalism. This tuning fork gave the pitch to all the articles and speeches of the POUM leaders. In order not to quarrel with the Anarchist leaders, they did not form their own nuclei inside the CNT, and in general did not conduct any kind of work there. To avoid sharp conflicts, they did not carry on revolutionary work in the republican army. They built instead “their own” trade unions and “their own” militia, which guarded “their own” institutions or occupied “their own” section of the front.

By isolating the revolutionary vanguard from the class, the POUM rendered the vanguard impotent and left the class without leadership. Politically the POUM remained throughout far closer to the Popular Front, for whose left wing it provided the cover, than to Bolshevism. That the POUM nevertheless fell victim to bloody and base repressions was due to the failure of the Popular Front to fulfill its mission, namely to stifle the socialist revolution – except by cutting off, piece by piece, its own left flank.

Contrary to its own intentions, the POUM proved to be, in the final analysis, the chief obstacle on the road to the creation of a revolutionary party. The platonic or diplomatic partisans of the Fourth International like Sneevliet, the leader of the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party, who demonstratively supported the POUM in its halfway measures, its indecisiveness and evasiveness, in short, in its centrism, took upon themselves the greatest responsibility. Revolution abhors centrism. Revolution exposes and annihilates centrism. In passing, the revolution discredits the friends and attorneys of centrism. That is one of the

most important lessons of the Spanish revolution.

### **The Problem of Arming**

The Socialists and Anarchists who seek to justify their capitulation to Stalin by the necessity of paying for Moscow's weapons with principles and conscience simply lie unskillfully. Of course, many of them would have preferred to disentangle themselves without murders and frame-ups. But every goal demands corresponding means. Beginning with April 1931, that is, long before the military intervention of Moscow, the Socialists and Anarchists did everything in their power to check the proletarian revolution. Stalin taught them how to carry this work to its conclusion. They became Stalin's criminal accomplices only because they were his political cothinkers.

Had the Anarchist leaders in the least resembled revolutionists, they would have answered the first piece of blackmail from Moscow not only by continuing the socialist offensive but also by exposing Stalin's counterrevolutionary conditions before the world working class. They would have thus forced the Moscow bureaucracy to choose openly between the socialist revolution and the Franco dictatorship. The Thermidorean bureaucracy fears and hates revolution. But it also fears being strangled in a fascist ring. Besides, it depends on the workers. All indications are that Moscow would have been forced to supply arms, and possibly at more reasonable prices.

But the world does not revolve around Stalinist Moscow. During a year and a half of civil war, the Spanish war industry could and should have been strengthened and developed by converting a number of civilian plants to war production. This work was not carried out only because Stalin and his Spanish allies equally feared the initiative of the workers' organizations. A strong war industry would have become a powerful instrument in the hands of the workers. The leaders of the Popular Front preferred to depend on Moscow.

It is precisely on this question that the perfidious role of the Popular Front was very strikingly revealed. It thrust upon the workers' organizations the responsibility for the treacherous deals of the bourgeoisie of Stalin. Insofar as the Anarchists remained a minority, they could not, of course, immediately hinder the ruling bloc from assuming whatever obligations they pleased toward

Moscow and the masters of Moscow: London and Paris. But without ceasing to be the best fighters on the front, they could have and should have openly dissociated themselves from the betrayals and betrayers; they could and should have explained the real situation to the masses, mobilized them against the bourgeois government, and augmented their own forces from day to day in order in the end to conquer power and with it the Moscow arms.

And what if Moscow, in the absence of a Popular Front, should have refused to give arms altogether? And what, we answer to this, if the Soviet Union did not exist altogether? Revolutions have been victorious up to this time not at all thanks to high and mighty foreign patrons who supplied them with arms. As a rule, counterrevolution enjoyed foreign patronage. Must we recall the experiences of the intervention of French, English, American, Japanese, and other armies against the Soviets? The proletariat of Russia conquered domestic reaction and foreign interventionists without military support from the outside. Revolutions succeed, in the first place, with the help of a bold social program, which gives the masses the possibility of seizing weapons that are on the territory and disorganizing the army of the enemy. The Red Army seized French, English, and American military supplies and drove the foreign expeditionary corps into the sea. Has this really been forgotten?

If at the head of the armed workers and peasants, that is, at the head of so-called republican Spain, were revolutionists and not cowardly agents of the bourgeoisie, the problem of arming would never have been paramount. The army of Franco, including the colonial Riffians and the soldiers of Mussolini, was not at all immune to revolutionary contagion. Surrounded by the conflagration of the socialist uprising, the soldiers of fascism would have proved to be an insignificant quantity. Arms and military “geniuses” were not lacking in Madrid and Barcelona; what was lacking was a revolutionary party!

### **Conditions for Victory**

The conditions for victory of the masses in the civil war against the army exploiters are very simple in their essence.

1. The fighters of a revolutionary army must be clearly aware of the fact that they are fighting for their full social liberation

- and not for the reestablishment of the old (“democratic”) forms of exploitation.
2. The workers and peasants in the rear of the revolutionary army as well as in the rear of the enemy must know and understand the same thing.
  3. The propaganda on their own front as well as on the enemy front and in both rears must be completely permeated with the spirit of social revolution. The slogan “First victory, then reforms,” is the slogan of all oppressors and exploiters from the Biblical kings down to Stalin.
  4. Politics are determined by those classes and strata that participate in the struggle. The revolutionary masses must have a state apparatus that directly and immediately expresses their will. Only the soviets of workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ deputies can act as such an apparatus.
  5. The revolutionary army must not only proclaim but also immediately realize in life the more pressing measures of social revolution in the provinces won by them: the expropriation of provisions, manufactured articles, and other stores on hand and the transfer of these to the needy; the redivision of shelter and housing in the interests of the toilers and especially of the families of the fighters; the expropriation of the land and agricultural inventory in the interests of the peasants; the establishment of workers’ control and soviet power in the place of the former bureaucracy.
  6. Enemies of the socialist revolution, that is, exploiting elements and their agents, even if masquerading as “democrats,” “republicans,” “Socialists,” and “Anarchists,” must be mercilessly driven out of the army.
  7. At the head of each military unit must be placed commissars possessing irreproachable authority as revolutionists and soldiers.
  8. In every military unit there must be a firmly welded nucleus of the most self-sacrificing fighters, recommended by the workers’ organizations. The members of this nucleus have but one privilege: to be first under fire.
  9. The commanding corps necessarily includes at first many alien and unreliable elements among the personnel. Their testing, retesting, and sifting must be carried through on the basis of combat experience, recommendations of commissars, and testimonials of rank-and-file fighters. Coincident with this must proceed an intense training of commanders drawn from the ranks of revolutionary workers.

10. The strategy of civil war must combine the rules of military art with the tasks of the social revolution. Not only in propaganda but also in military operations it is necessary to take into account the social composition of the various military units of the enemy (bourgeois volunteers, mobilized peasants, or as in Franco's case, colonial slaves); and in choosing lines of operation, it is necessary to rigorously take into consideration the social structure of the corresponding territories (industrial regions, peasant regions, revolutionary or reactionary, regions of oppressed nationalities, etc.). In brief, revolutionary policy dominates strategy.
11. Both the revolutionary government and the executive committee of the workers and peasants must know how to win the complete confidence of the army and of the toiling population.
12. Foreign policy must have as its main objective the awakening of the revolutionary consciousness of the workers, the exploited peasants, and oppressed nationalities of the whole world.

### **Stalin Guaranteed the Conditions of Defeat**

The conditions for victory, as we see, are perfectly plain. In their aggregate they bear the name of the socialist revolution. Not a single one of these conditions existed in Spain. The basic reason is – the absence of a revolutionary party. Stalin tried, it is true, to transfer to the soil of Spain, the outward practices of Bolshevism: the Politburo, commissars, cells, the GPU, etc. But he emptied these forms of their social content. He renounced the Bolshevik program and with it the soviets as the necessary form for the revolutionary initiative of the masses. He placed the technique of Bolshevism at the service of bourgeois property. In his bureaucratic narrow-mindedness, he imagined that “commissars” by themselves could guarantee victory. But the commissars of private property proved capable only of guaranteeing defeat.

The Spanish proletariat displayed first-rate military qualities. In its specific gravity in the country's economic life, in its political and cultural level, the Spanish proletariat stood on the first day of the revolution not below but above the Russian proletariat at the beginning of 1917. On the road to victory, its own organizations stood as the chief obstacles. The commanding clique of Stalinists, in accordance with their counterrevolutionary function, consisted of hirelings, careerists, declassed elements, and in general, all types



of social refuse. The representatives of other labor organizations – incurable reformists, Anarchists phrasemongers, helpless centrists of the POUM – grumbled, groaned, wavered, maneuvered, but in the end adapted themselves to the Stalinists. As a result of their joint activity, the camp of social revolution – workers and peasants – proved to be subordinated to the bourgeoisie, or more correctly, to its shadow. It was bled white and its character destroyed.

There was no lack of heroism on the part of the masses or courage on the part of individual revolutionists. But the masses were left to their own resources while the revolutionists remained disunited, without a program, without a plan of action. The “republican” military commanders were more concerned with crushing the social revolution than with scoring military victories. The soldiers lost confidence in their commanders, the masses in the government; the peasants stepped aside; the workers became exhausted; defeat followed defeat; demoralization grew apace. All this was not difficult to foresee from the beginning of the civil war. By setting itself the task of rescuing the capitalist regime, the Popular Front doomed itself to military defeat. By turning Bolshevism on its head, Stalin succeeded completely in fulfilling the role of gravedigger of the revolution.

It ought to be added that the Spanish experience once again demonstrates that Stalin failed completely to understand either the October Revolution or the Russian civil war. His slow moving provincial mind lagged hopelessly behind the tempestuous march of events in 1917-21. In those of his speeches and articles in 1917 where he expressed his own ideas, his later Thermidorean “doctrine” is fully implanted. In this sense, Stalin in Spain in 1937 is the continuator of Stalin of the March 1917 conference of the Bolsheviks. But in 1917 he merely feared the revolutionary workers; in 1937 he strangled them. The opportunist had become the executioner.

### **“Civil War in the Rear”**

But, after all, victory over the governments of Caballero and Negrin would have necessitated a civil war in the rear of the republican army! – the democratic philistine exclaims with horror. As if apart from this, in republican Spain no civil war has ever existed, and at that the basest and most perfidious one – the war of the proprietors and exploiters against the workers and peasants. This uninterrupted war finds expression in the arrests and murders of

revolutionists, the crushing of the mass movement, the disarming of the workers, the arming of the bourgeois police, the abandoning of workers' detachments without arms and without help on the front, and finally, the artificial restriction of the development of war industry.

Each of these acts as a cruel blow to the front, direct military treason, dictated by the class interests of the bourgeoisie. But "democratic" philistines – including Stalinists, Socialists, and Anarchists – regard the civil war of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, even in areas most closely adjoining the front, as a natural and inescapable war, having as its tasks the safeguarding of the "unity of the Popular Front." On the other hand, the civil war of the proletariat against the "republican" counterrevolution is, in the eyes of the same philistines, a criminal, "fascists," Trotskyist war, disrupting ... "the unity of the anti-fascist forces." Scores of Norman Thomases, Major Atlees, Otto Bauers, Zyromskys, Malrauxes, and such petty peddlers of lies as Duranty and Louis Fischer spread this slavish wisdom throughout our planet. Meanwhile the government of the Popular Front moves from Madrid to Valencia, from Valencia to Barcelona.

If, as the facts attest, only the socialist revolution is capable of crushing fascism, then on the other hand a successful uprising of the proletariat is conceivable only when the ruling classes are caught in the vise of the greatest difficulties. However, the democratic philistines invoke precisely these difficulties as proof of the impressibility of the proletarian uprising. Were the proletariat to wait for the democratic philistines to tell them the hour of their liberation, they would remain slaves forever. To teach workers to recognize reactionary philistines under all their masks and to despise them regardless of the mask is the first and paramount duty of a revolutionist!

### **The Denouement**

The dictatorship of the Stalinists over the republican camp is not long-lived in its essence. Should the defeats stemming from the politics of the Popular Front once more impel the Spanish proletariat to a revolutionary assault, this time successfully, the Stalinist clique will be swept away with an iron broom. But should Stalin – as is unfortunately the likelihood – succeed in bringing the work of gravedigger of the revolution to its conclusion, he will not even in this case earn thanks. The Spanish bourgeoisie needed him

as executioner, but it has no need for him at all as patron or tutor. London and Paris on the one hand, and Berlin and Rome on the other, are in its eyes considerably more solvent firms than Moscow. It is possible that Stalin himself wants to cover his traces in Spain before the final catastrophe; he thus hopes to unload the responsibility for the defeat on his closest allies. After this Litvinov will solicit Franco for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. All this we have seen more than once.

Even a complete military victory of the so-called republican army over General Franco, however, would not signify the triumph of “democracy.” The workers and peasants have twice placed bourgeois republicans and their left agents in power: in April 1931 and in February 1936. Both times the heroes of the Popular Front surrendered the victory of the people to the most reactionary and the most serious representatives of the bourgeoisie. A third victory, gained by the generals of the Popular Front, would signify their inevitable agreement with the fascist bourgeoisie on the backs of the workers and peasants. Such a regime will be nothing but a different form of military dictatorship, perhaps without a monarchy and without the open domination of the Catholic Church.

Finally, it is possible that the partial victories of the republicans will be utilized by the “disinterested” Anglo-French intermediaries in order to reconcile the fighting camps. It is not difficult to understand that in the event of such a variant the final remnants of the “democracy” will be stifled in the fraternal embrace of the generals Miaja (communist!) and Franco (fascists!). Let me repeat once again: victory will go either to the socialist revolution or to fascism.

It is not excluded, by the way, that the tragedy might at the last moment make way to farce. When the heroes of the Popular Front have to flee their last capital, they might, before embarking on steamers and airplanes, perhaps proclaim a series of “socialist” reforms in order to leave a “good memory” with the people. But nothing will avail. The workers of the world will remember with hatred and contempt the parties that ruined the heroic revolution.

The tragic experience of Spain is a terrible – perhaps final – warning before still greater events, a warning addressed to all the advanced workers of the world. “Revolutions,” Marx said, “are the locomotives of history.” They move faster than the thought of semi-revolutionary or quarter-revolutionary parties. Whoever lags

behind falls under the wheels of the locomotive, and consequently – and this is the chief danger – the locomotive itself is also not infrequently wrecked.

It is necessary to think out the problem of the revolution to the end, to its ultimate concrete conclusions. It is necessary to adjust policy to the basic laws of the revolution, i.e., to the movement of the embattled classes and not the prejudices or fears of the superficial petty-bourgeois groups who call themselves “Popular” Fronts and every other kind of front. During revolution the line of least resistance is the line of greatest disaster. To fear “isolation” from the bourgeoisie is to incur isolation from the masses. Adaptation to the conservative prejudices of the labor aristocracy is betrayal of the workers and the revolution. An excess “caution” is the most baneful lack of caution. This is the chief lesson of the destruction of the most honest political organization in Spain, namely, the centrist POUM. The parties and groups of the London Bureau obviously either do not wish to draw the necessary conclusions from the last warning of history or are unable to do so. By this token they doom themselves.

By way of compensation, a new generation of revolutionists is now being educated by the lessons of the defeats. This generation has verified in action the ignominious reputation of the Second International. It has plumbed the depths of the Third International’s downfall. It has learned how to judge the Anarchists not by their words but by their deeds. It is a great inestimable school, paid for with the blood of countless fighters! The revolutionary cadres are now gathering only under the banner of the Fourth International. Born amid the roar of defeats, the Fourth International will lead the toilers to victory.

*December 17, 1937*