

Leon Trotsky

# The Spanish Revolution

## And the Dangers Threatening it

The Leadership of the Comintern in Face of the Spanish  
Events

(May 1931)

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The Spanish revolution is growing. In the process of struggle its internal forces are growing. But together with them, also grow the dangers. We do not speak of the dangers which proceed from the ruling classes and their political servants republican and socialist. Here it is a matter of open enemies and the tasks in relation to them are entirely clear. But there are also internal dangers.

The Spanish workers look confidently upon the Soviet Union, the child of the October revolution. This mood represents a valuable capital for Communism. The defense of the Soviet Union is the duty of every revolutionary worker. But we must not permit the workers' faith in the October revolution to be abused for the purpose of foisting upon

them a policy that runs counter to all the lessons and the heritage of the October.

It must be said clearly. It must be said so that the vanguard of the Spanish and the international proletariat shall hear: *The present leadership of the Comintern threatens the proletarian revolution in Spain with an immediate danger.* Any revolution can be ruined, even the most promising one: this was proved by the experience of the German revolution of 1923 and still more lucidly by the experience of the Chinese revolution of 1925–1927. In both instances, the immediate reason for the defeat was the wrong leadership. Spain is next in order. The leaders of the Comintern have learned nothing from their own mistakes. Worse yet. In order to cover up their past mistakes, they are compelled to defend them and to develop them. To the extent that it depends upon them, they are preparing for the Spanish revolution the fate of the Chinese.

For two years, the advanced workers were misled by the luckless theory of the “third period”, which weakened and demoralized the Comintern. The leadership finally sounded the retreat. But when? Precisely at a moment when the world crisis created a break in the circumstances and laid down the first pre-requisite for a revolutionary offensive. The internal processes in Spain, in the meantime, were passing by unnoticed by the Comintern. Manuilsky kept declaring – and Manuilsky at the present time acts in the function of a Comintern leader! – that the events in Spain are in general not deserving of attention.

In our sketch of the Spanish revolution, written prior to the April overturn, we expressed ourselves in the sense that the bourgeoisie, playing with different shadings of republicanism, will, with all its strength and up to the very last moment, retain its alliance with the monarchy. “A combination of circumstances is possible, to be sure,” we wrote, “in which the possessing classes are compelled to sacrifice the monarchy in order to save themselves (example: Germany!).” These lines gave the Stalinists an excuse – after the event, of course – to speak about an incorrect prognosis. [1] People who themselves have foreseen nothing, demand of others not a Marxian prognosis but theosophic forecasts about the day and the form in which the events will take place: this is the manner in which the ignorant and superstitious sick demand miracles of medicine. The task of a Marxian prognosis is to help in orienting in the general direction of developments and to be forearmed against “surprises”. The fact that

The Spanish bourgeoisie decided to part with the monarchy is to be explained by two equally important reasons. The stormy deluge of the resentment of the masses imposed upon the bourgeoisie the attempt to convert the generally despised Alfonso into a scapegoat. But such a manoeuvre, which has a serious risk connected with it, was available to the Spanish bourgeoisie only because the masses had confidence in the republicans and the socialists and because in the overturn, the Communist danger could be ignored. The historic variant which has taken place in Spain is consequently a result of the force of the mass pressure on the one hand, and the weakness of the Comintern on the other. One must begin by establishing these facts. It is a basic rule of tactics: if you want to get stronger, do not begin with an exaggeration of your forces. But this rule is not for the epigone bureaucracy. If on the eve of events, Manuisky foretold that in general nothing serious would happen, then a day after the overturn, the irreplaceable Péri [2], the purveyor of false information from the Latin countries, began sending telegram after telegram to Moscow about how the Spanish proletariat was almost undividedly supporting the Communist party, and how the Spanish peasants were building Soviets. **Pravda** printed this nonsense, supplementing it with the nonsense about the “Trotskyists” being at the tail of the Zamora government, at a time when Zamora was putting and continues to put Left Communists in jail ... Finally, on May 14, **Pravda** printed a programmatic editorial, *Spain in Flames*, which constitutes a distillation of the ramblings and mistakes of the epigones, translated into the language of the Spanish revolution. What about the *Cortes* [the Spanish national assembly]? **Pravda** attempts to use as its point of departure the irrefutable truth that bare propaganda is insufficient “The Communist party must tell the masses what they should do today.” What does **Pravda** itself propose in this connection? To weld together the workers “for the disarming of reaction, for the arming of the proletariat, for the election of factory committees, for the realization of the seven-hour working day, etc.” Etc. – that is just how it puts it. The slogans enumerated are incontestable, even though they are presented without any internal cohesion and without that sequence which should flow from the logic of the development of the masses. But what is shocking is that the leading article in **Pravda** does not by as much as a single word mention the *elections to the Cortes*, as though this political event did not even exist in the life of the Spanish nation, or as if the workers had nothing to do with it. How is this silence to be understood?

From external appearances, the republican overturn took place, as is known, through the medium of the municipal elections. It is understood that underlying the overturn were deeper reasons and we spoke about them long before the collapse of the Berenguer ministry. But the “parliamentary” form of the liquidation of the monarchy fell entirely to the benefit of the bourgeois republicans and the petty bourgeois democrats. A great many workers in Spain imagine now that the basic questions of social life can be decided with the aid of the ballot. This illusion can be shattered only by experience. But one must know how to assist this experience. How? By turning one’s back on the *Cortes* or, on the contrary, by participating in the elections? This question demands an answer.

Besides the editorial mentioned above, the same paper carries a “theoretical” article (in the issues dated from May 7 to May 10) which pretends to a Marxian analysis of the internal forces of the Spanish revolution and a Bolshevik determination of its strategy. This article too fails to mention the *Cortes* by as much as a single word: boycott the elections or participate in them? In general, **Pravda** is completely silent about the signs and the tasks of political democracy, even though it calls the revolution democratic. What does this silence signify? The elections can be participated in, they can be *boycotted*. But can they be *ignored*?

With regard to the Berenguer *Cortes*, the tactic of boycott was perfectly correct. It was clear beforehand that Alfonso would either succeed for a certain period in turning once more to the road of a military dictatorship or else the movement would roll over the head of Berenguer with his *Cortes*. Under these conditions, the Communists had to take upon themselves the initiative in the struggle for the boycott of the *Cortes*. *This is precisely what we insisted upon with the aid of those meager means which we had at our disposal.* [3] Had the Spanish Communists come out in time and resolutely for a boycott, even if only by the distribution of the biggest proclamation on the subject, their authority would have grown considerably at the moment when the Berenguer ministry was overthrown. The advanced workers would have said to themselves: “These people are capable of foreseeing something.” Unfortunately, the Spanish Communists, thrown off the track by the leadership of the Comintern, did not understand the circumstances of the situation and made preparations for participating in the elections, but again without any confidence. The events rolled over their heads, and the first victory of the revolution brought the Communists almost no increase in influence.

Now the Zamora government has undertaken to convene a Constituent *Cortes*. Is there a basis for thinking that the convocation of this *Cortes* will be interrupted by the second revolution? There is no basis whatever. Powerful movements of the masses are quite possible, but without a program, without a party, without a leadership, these movements cannot bring about a second revolution. The slogan of boycott would now be the slogan of self-isolation. The most active participation in the election must take place.

### **The Parliamentary Cretinism of the Reformists and the Anti-Parliamentary Cretinism of the Anarchists**

Parliamentary cretinism is a revolting sickness, but anti-parliamentary cretinism is not much better. We see this most clearly in the fate of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists. The revolution poses political questions directly and *at the present stage* gives them a parliamentary form. The attention of the working class cannot but be concentrated on the *Cortes*, and the anarcho-syndicalists will secretly vote for the socialists or perhaps the republicans. To fight against parliamentary illusions without fighting simultaneously against the anti-parliamentary metaphysics of the anarchists, is less possible in Spain than anywhere else.

In a series of articles, and letters, we proved the tremendous importance of the slogans of democracy for the further development of the Spanish revolution. Unemployment relief, the seven-hour working day, the agrarian revolution, national autonomy all these vital, basic questions are in one way or another connected in the consciousness of the great majority of the Spanish workers – the anarcho-syndicalists included – with the future *Cortes*. In the period of Berenguer, the *Cortes* by grace of Alfonso, had to be boycotted – in the name of *revolutionary Constituent Corteses*. From the very beginning, the question of suffrage had to be advanced to the very foreground of the agitation. Yes: the prosaic question of suffrage! Soviet democracy, needless to say, is incomparably higher than bourgeois democracy. But Soviets do not fall from the sky. One must grow up to them.

There exist – by your leave – Marxists who have a lofty contempt for such a slogan, for example, as universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage for all men and women from the age of 18. Nevertheless, had the Spanish Communists advanced this slogan in time and defended it in speeches, articles, leaflets and scatter-bills, they would have

acquired tremendous popularity. Precisely because the Spanish people are inclined to exaggerate the creative power of the *Cortes*, every awakened worker, every revolutionary peasant woman, wants to participate in the elections. We do not solidarize ourselves for a moment with the illusions of the masses; but whatever is *progressive* under these illusions must be utilized by us to the utmost otherwise we are not revolutionists. but contemptible pedants. The mere lowering of the voting age grips the heart of many hundreds of thousands of working men and working women, peasants and peasant women. And which ones? The young and active ones, those who are called upon to create the second revolution. To set this young generation against the socialists, who seek the support of the older workers, is quite an elementary and incontestable task of the Communist vanguard.

Further. The Zamora government wants to put through the *Cortes* a constitution providing for two houses. The revolutionary masses who have just overthrown the monarchy and who are imbued with an impassioned, even if very vague striving towards equality and justice, will respond warmly to the agitation of the Communists against the plan of the bourgeoisie to foist a “house of lords” upon the backs of the people. This *partial* question can play a tremendous rôle in the agitation, create heavy difficulties for the socialists and drive a wedge between the socialists and the republicans, that is, divide even for a time the enemies of the proletariat and – what is a thousand times more important – drive a wedge between the working masses and the socialists.

The demand for a seven-hour working day, advanced by **Pravda**, is quite correct, extremely important and unpostponable. But can this bare demand be advanced, ignoring the political surroundings and the revolutionary tasks of democracy? By speaking only of the seven-hour working day, of factory committees and the arming of the workers, by ignoring “politics”, by not having a single word to say in all its articles about the elections to the *Cortes*, **Pravda** goes all the way to meet anarcho-syndicalism, fosters it, covers it up. In time meantime, the young worker whom the republicans and the socialists deprive of suffrage – in spite of the fact that bourgeois legislation considers him sufficiently mature for capitalist exploitation or upon whom they want to impose a second house – will tomorrow, in the struggle against this abomination, want to turn his back upon anarchism and stretch out his hand for a rifle. To oppose the slogan of the *arming of the workers* to the realistic political processes which grip the masses at their vitals, means to isolate oneself from the masses and the masses – from arms.

The slogan of *national self-determination* has acquired exceptional significance in Spain today. However, this slogan too stands today upon a democratic plane. What we are concerned with, it is understood, is not to call upon the Catalonians and the Basques to separate from Spain, but to fight for granting them such a possibility should they themselves want it. But, how is it to be determined whether or not they want it? Very simply: through universal, equal, direct and secret vote of the districts concerned. There is no other method at present. In the future, national questions, as well as all others, will be decided by Soviets as the organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But we cannot enforce Soviets upon the workers at any desired moment. We can only lead the workers towards Soviets. Still less can we force upon the people the Soviets which the proletariat will create only in the future. In the meantime, it is necessary to answer today's question. In the month of May, the organs of self-government of Catalonia found themselves called upon to elect their deputies to elaborate a temporary constitution for the province, that is, to determine its relation to Spain as a whole. Can the Catalonian workers have an indifferent attitude to the fact that the petty bourgeois democracy, subordinating itself as always to big capital, attempts with the aid of anti-democratic elections to decide the fate of the Catalan people? The slogan of national self-government without the slogans of political democracy supplementing it and concretizing it, is a naked formula, or still worse: the throwing of dust in the eyes.

For a certain time, all the questions of the Spanish revolution will in one way or another be refracted through the prism of parliamentarism. The peasants will wait with the greatest anxiety for what the *Cortes* will say about the *agrarian question*. Is it hard to understand what significance a Communist agrarian program unfolded from the tribune of the *Cortes* might have under present conditions? For this, two conditions are required: One must have an agrarian program and one must gain access to the parliamentary tribune. The *Cortes* will not solve the land question, this we know. The fighting initiative of the peasant mass itself is required. But for such an initiative the masses need a program and a leadership. The tribune of the *Cortes* is needed by the Communists as a bond with the masses. And from this bond will develop actions which will flow over the head of the *Cortes*. Here lies the essence of the revolutionary-dialectical relationship towards parliament.

Nevertheless, how is it to be explained that the leadership of the Comintern is silent upon this question? Only by the fact that it is a

captive of its own yesterday. Too loudly have the Stalinists rejected the Constituent Assembly for China. The Sixth Congress officially condemned the slogans of political democracy for colonial countries as “opportunism”. In the example of Spain, a country incomparably more advanced than China and India, all the inconsistency of the decisions of the Sixth Congress is revealed. But the Stalinists are bound hand and foot. Not daring to call for a boycott of parliamentarism, they simply pass over it in silence. Let the revolution perish, but long live the leaders’ reputation for infailibility! [4]

### What Kind of a Revolution Is Ahead in Spain?

In the theoretical article quoted above, which is as if especially written for clogging up the brain, after the attempt to determine the class character of the Spanish revolution, the following is said literally: “Taking all this into consideration [!] it would, however, [!] be incorrect to characterize the Spanish revolution already *at the present stage* as a socialist revolution.” (**Pravda**, May 10, 1931.) This phrase alone is sufficient for an appreciation of the analysis. Are there people in the world, the reader must ask himself, capable of thinking that the Spanish revolution “at the present stage” can be characterized as socialist, without taking the risk of landing in an insane asylum? Where in general did **Pravda** get the idea of the need for this sort of “demarcation” and, moreover, in such a mild and reserved form: “Taking all this into consideration, it would, however, be incorrect” ... This is explained by the fact that the epigones, to their misfortune, read in Lenin the phrase about the “*growing over*” of the bourgeois democratic into a socialist revolution. Not understanding Lenin, forgetting or distorting the experiences of the Russian revolution, they made the conception of “growing over” a basis for the grossest opportunist meanderings. It is not – let us say it outright – a question of academic delicacies, but of the life and death of the proletarian revolution. Only very recently, the epigones expected that the dictatorship of the Kuo Min Tang [1\*] would “grow over” into the workers’ and peasants’ dictatorship, and the latter – into a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat. They had in mind, in this connection, Stalin developed this theme with particular profundity – that on the one flank of the revolution, the “Right elements” would gradually split away, while on the other flank the “Left elements” would grow stronger: this is what the organic process of “growing over” was supposed to consist of. Unfortunately, the magnificent theory of Stalin-Martinov is based entirely upon the trampling under foot of the class



theory of Marx. The character of the social régime, and consequently also the character of every revolution is determined by the character of the class which holds the power in its hands. The power can pass from the hands of one class into the hands of another only through a revolutionary overturn, and by no means through an organic “growing over”. This basic truth the epigones have trampled under foot – first for China and now for Spain. And we see the learned wizards of **Pravda** who cover their heads with skull caps, put the thermometer under Zamora’s tongue, and debate: Can we or can we not acknowledge that the process of “growing over” has brought the Spanish revolution over into the socialist stage? And the wizards – let us give their wisdom its due – come to the conclusion: No, so far we cannot.

Having presented such a valuable sociological survey, **Pravda** enters into the sphere of prognosis and directives. “In Spain,” it says, “the socialist revolution cannot be an *immediate task of the day*. The most immediate task [!] is the workers’ and peasants’ revolution against the landowners and the bourgeoisie.” (**Pravda**, May 10, 1931.) That the socialist revolution is not an “immediate task of the day” in Spain is indisputable. Yet it would have been much better and more accurate to say that the *armed uprising with the aim of the seizure of power by the proletariat is not an “immediate task of the day” in Spain*. Why? Be cause the dispersed vanguard of the proletariat does not as yet lead the class behind it, and the class does not lead behind it the oppressed masses of the village. Under such conditions, a struggle for power would be adventurism. But under these circumstances, what is the meaning of the additional phrase: “the most immediate task is the workers’ and peasants’ revolution against the landowners and the bourgeoisie”? Does it mean that in between the present bourgeois-republican régime and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there looms before us a *distinct* “workers’ and peasant’ revolution”? And furthermore, does it mean that this distinct intermediary “workers’ and peasants’” revolution, in contradistinction to the socialist revolution, is an “immediate task” in Spain? Does it mean that on today’s agenda stands a new overturn? By means of an armed uprising or by some other means? In precisely what way will the workers’ and peasants’ revolution “against the landowners and the bourgeoisie” be distinguished from the proletarian revolution? What combination of class forces will lie at its foundation? What party will lead the first revolution in contrast to second? Wherein lies the differences in the programs and methods of these two revolutions? We would seek in vain for an answer to these questions. The blurring and confusion of

thought is covered up by the word “growing over”; in spite of all the contradictory reservations, these people dream of a process of evolutionary transition from a bourgeois into a socialist revolution, through a series of organic stages, figuring under different pseudonyms: Kuo Min Tang, “democratic dictatorship”, “workers’ and peasants’ revolution”, “people’s revolution” – and what is more, the decisive moment in this process, when one class wrests the power from another, is unnoticeably dissolved.

### **The Problem of the Permanent Revolution**

It is understood that the proletarian revolution is at the same time also a peasant revolution; but under contemporary circumstances, a peasant revolution *without* a proletarian revolution is impossible. We can say to the peasant with full right that our aim is to create a workers’ and peasants’ republic just as, after the October revolution, we called the government of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia a “workers’ and peasants’ government”. But we do not counterpose the workers’ and peasants’ revolution to the proletarian; on the contrary, we identify them. This is the only correct way of putting the question.

Here we once more touch the very heart of the problem of the so-called “permanent revolution”. In the struggle against this theory, the epigones have slipped down to a complete break with the class point of view. After the experience of the “bloc of the four classes” in China, it is true, they became more careful. But because of this they were only still more confused and they now strain all their strength to confuse others.

Fortunately, however, events have now lifted the question out of the sphere of Red professorial philosophizing over old texts. It is not a matter of historical reminiscences, nor of picking out quotations, but of a new, magnificent historical experience unfolding before the eyes of all. Here two viewpoints have been brought face to face on the field of revolutionary struggle. Events will speak the last word. To slip out from under their control is impossible. The Spanish Communist who does not give timely consideration to the essence of the questions connected with the struggle against “Trotskyism” will stand theoretically disarmed before the fundamental questions of the Spanish revolution.

### **What is the “Growing-Over” of the Revolution?**

Yes, Lenin in 1905 advanced the hypothetical formula: “bourgeois democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”. If there at all existed a country where an *independent* agrarian democratic-revolution *preceding* the seizure of power by the proletariat might have been expected, this country was Russia, where the agrarian problem dominated the whole of national life, where revolutionary peasant movements existed for decades, where an independent agrarian-revolutionary party existed with a great tradition and a widespread influence among the masses. However, even in Russia there proved to be no place for the intermediary revolution between the bourgeois and the proletarian. In April 1917, Lenin repealed and repeated to the address of Stalin, Kamenev and others, who were clinging to the old Bolshevik formula of 1905: There is not and there cannot be a “democratic dictatorship” other than the dictatorship of Miliukov-Tseretelli-Chernov; the *democratic dictatorship* because of its very essence a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat*; only the dictatorship of the proletariat can take the place of such a “democratic dictatorship”. Whoever invents intermediary, middle-of-the-road formula is either a wretched illusionist or a charlatan. This is the conclusion Lenin drew from the living experience of the February and October revolutions. We stand entirely on the ground of these experiences and these conclusions.

Nevertheless, what does Lenin’s “growing-over” of the democratic into a socialist revolution signify under such conditions? Nothing of the kind dreamed of by the epigones and the wind bags of the Red professor type. The fact is that the dictatorship of the proletariat does not at all coincide mechanically with the conception of the socialist revolution. The seizure of power by the working class occurs in definite national surroundings, in a definite period, for the solution of definite tasks. In backward nations, such *immediate* tasks are of a democratic character: the national liberation from imperialist subjugation and the agrarian revolution, as in China; the agrarian revolution and the liberation of the oppressed nationalities, as in Russia. We see the same thing at present in Spain, even though in a different combination. Lenin even said that the proletariat in Russia came to power in October 1917 primarily as an *agent of the bourgeois-democratic revolution*. The victorious proletariat began with the solution of the democratic tasks and only gradually by the logic of its rule, did it take up the socialist tasks: it took up seriously the collectivization of agriculture only in the twelfth year of its power. This is precisely why Lenin called the growing-over of the democratic revolution into the socialist. It is

not the bourgeois power that grows over into a workers' and peasants' and then into a proletarian power: no, the power of one class does not into the power of another class, but is torn from it with rifle in hand. But after the working class has seized power, the democratic tasks of the proletarian régime inevitably grow over into socialist tasks. An evolutionary, organic transition from democracy to socialism is conceivable only under the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. This is Lenin's central idea. The epigones have disfigured all this, have confused and distorted it, and now they poison the consciousness of the international proletariat with their falsifications.

### **Two Variants: Opportunist and Adventurist**

What is at issue – let us repeat – is not academic delicacies but vital problems of the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat. It is not true that the “workers' and peasants' revolution” stands on the order of the day in Spain. It is not true that on the order of the day in Spain in general there stands *at present* a new revolution, that is, an immediate struggle for power. No, on the order of the day is the struggle for the masses, for their liberation from republican illusions and from faith in the socialists, for their revolutionary consolidation. This second revolution will come, but it will be the revolution of the proletariat leading behind it the peasant poor. Between a bourgeois regime and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there will be no room for any sort of distinct “workers' and peasants' revolution”. To calculate upon this and to adapt one's policy to it, to *Kuo Min Tangize* the proletariat, is to ruin the revolution.

The confusionist formulations of **Pravda** open two roads, which have also been tried out to the end in China: the opportunist and the adventurist. If **Pravda** today does not yet dare to “characterize” the Spanish revolution as a workers' and peasants' revolution, then – who knows? – if we will not be confronted with it tomorrow, when in place of Zamora – a Chiang Kai-Shek will come forward, or a “true Wang Chin Wei”, let us say a Left Lerroux. [2\*] Will not then the wise diagnosticians – Martinov, Kuusinen and company – decide that this is the workers' and peasants' republic, which should be “supported in so far as” (the formula of Stalin in March 1917), or supported completely (the formula of the same Stalin towards the Kuo Min Tang in 1925-1927)?

But there is also an adventurist possibility which is perhaps more suited to the Centrist moods today. The **Pravda** editorial speaks about the fact that the Spanish masses “are also beginning to direct their blows against the government”. But can the Spanish Communist Party advance the slogan of the overthrow of this government as a *task of the day*? In the learned investigations of **Pravda** – it says, as we are already aware, that the immediate task is the workers’ and peasants’ revolution. If we are to understand this “stage” not in the sense of “growing over” but in the sense of the abolition of the power, then the adventurist variant is left wide open. The weak Communist party may say to itself in Madrid as it said to itself (or as it was commanded to say) in December 1927 in Canton: “We have not yet, of course, matured for the proletarian dictatorship; but as it is an intermediary stage which is involved today, a workers’ and peasants’ dictatorships then let us attempt even with our weak forces to stage an uprising – perhaps something will come out of it.” It is really not difficult to foresee that after the criminal neglect of the first year of the Spanish revolution will have been revealed, the ones guilty for the loss of time will start to whip up the “executors” with a cat-o’-nine-tails and may lead them into a tragic adventure on the style of Canton.

### **The Perspectives of “July Days”**

How real is this danger? It is quite real. It is rooted in the inner conditions of the revolution itself, which add an ominous character to the omissions and confusion of the leaders. A new mass explosion is contained in the present Spanish situation, which corresponds more or less to the battles of 1917 in Petrograd, which have passed into history as the “July days”, and which did not result in the crushing of the revolution only thanks to the correctness of the Bolshevik policy. On this burning question for Spain, it is necessary to pause.

We come across a type of the “July days” in all the old revolutions, too, beginning with the great French revolution, with varying, but as a general rule, unfavorable and often catastrophic endings. Such a stage is inherent in the mechanics of a bourgeois revolution in so far as the class which sacrifices more than any other for its success and places most hopes in it, receives from it least of all. The regularity of the process is quite clear. The possessing class, having come to power through the revolution, is inclined to think that the revolution has by that itself exhausted its mission, and is concerned more than anything else with proving its reliability to the forces of reaction. The

“revolutionary” bourgeoisie provokes the dissatisfaction of the masses by the very measures with which it strives to gain the good graces of the overthrown classes. The disillusionment of the masses proceeds very quickly, even before its vanguard has had a chance to cool off from the heat of the revolutionary battles. It appears to the advanced section that by a new blow it can finish or correct what it previously did not carry out with sufficient resolution. From this comes the impulse for the new revolution, without preparations, without a program, without looking back at the reserves, without a thought for the consequences. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie which has come to power, acts as though it had waited for a stormy impulsion from below in order to attempt a conclusive chastisement of the people. Such is the social and the psychological basis for that supplementary semi-revolution which more than once in history became the point of departure for the victorious counter-revolution.

In 1848, the “July days” in France fell in June and assumed an immeasurably more magnificent and tragic character than in Petrograd in 1917. The so-called “June days” of the Parisian proletariat grew out of the February revolution with irresistible force. The Parisian workers, with the February rifles in their hands, could not but react to the contradiction between the pompous program and the sorry reality, to the unbearable contrast which struck at their stomach and conscience every day. Without a plan, without a program, without a leadership, the June days of 1848 were like a powerful and ungovernable reflex of the proletariat. The insurgent workers were mercilessly crushed. Thus, the democrats paved the way for Bonapartism. The gigantic conflagration of the Commune stood in the same relation to the September revolution of 1870 as the June days – to the February revolution of 1848. The March uprising of the Parisian proletariat was least of all a matter of strategic calculation. It rose out of a tragic combination of circumstances, supplemented by one of those provocations for which the French bourgeoisie is so inventive, when fear spurs on its malice. In the Paris Commune, the reflected protest of the proletariat against the deceit of the bourgeois, revolution rose to the level of a proletarian revolution for the first time, but it rose only to fall again.

At present, the bloodless, peaceful, glorious revolution in Spain (the list of these adjectives is always the same) is preparing its own “June days” before our very eyes, if we take the calendar of France, or “July days”, according to the Russian calendar. The Madrid government, soaked with phrases which often appear to be translations from the Russian language, promises broad measures against unemployment

and the congestion on the land, but it does not dare to touch a single one of the social ulcers. The coalition socialists help the republicans to sabotage the tasks of the revolution. The head of Catalonia, the most industrial and revolutionary part of Spain, preaches a millennial kingdom without oppressed nations and oppressed classes, but at the same time he does not dare to lift a finger in order really to help the people cast off even part of the most hated of the old chains. Macia hides behind the Madrid government, which hides behind the Constituent Assembly, as if life had stopped in expectation of it! As if it is not clear in advance that the coming Cortes will only be an enlarged reproduction of the republican-socialist bloc, which is primarily concerned with everything remaining as of old. Is it hard to foresee the feverish growth of the revolt of the workers and the peasants? The discordance between the progress of the mass revolution and the policy of the new ruling classes – that is the source of that irreconcilable conflict which, in its future development, will either bury the first, April revolution or produce a second one.

If the Bolshevik party had been obstinate in evaluating the July movement in Petrograd as “untimely” and had turned its back upon the masses, the semi-uprising would inevitably have fallen under the dispersed and discordant leadership of anarchists, adventurists, chance expositors of the revolt of the masses, and would have bled to death in fruitless convulsions. But also on the contrary, if the party, having stood at the head of the movement, had given up its evaluation of the situation as a whole and had slipped off to the road of decisive battles, the uprising would undoubtedly have assumed an audacious scope, the workers and soldiers under the leadership of the Bolsheviks would have conquered power temporarily in Petrograd in July, only in order to prepare the crushing of the revolution afterwards. Only the correct leadership of the Bolshevik party eliminated both variants of fatal danger: the spirit of the June days of 1818 and the spirit of the Paris Commune of 1871. The blow dealt to the masses and the party in July 1917 was very heavy. But it was not a decisive blow. The victims were counted by the tens but not by the tens of thousands. The working class emerged from this trial neither beheaded nor debilitated. It preserved its fighting cadres intact. These cadres learned a great deal and led the proletariat to victory in October.

Precisely from the viewpoint of the “July days”, the fiction of the “intermediary”, middle-of-the-road revolution which is supposed to be next in order in Spain, constitutes a terrific danger.

## The Struggle for the Masses and the Workers' Juntas

It is the duty of the Left Opposition to uncover and reveal mercilessly, and once and for all, to discredit in the minds of the proletarian vanguard the formula of a separate “workers’ and peasants’ revolution” distinct from the bourgeois and the proletarian. Do not believe in it, Communists of Spain! It is an illusion and deceit. It is a diabolical snare which will be transformed tomorrow into a noose around your neck. Do not believe in it, advanced workers of Spain! Study the lessons of the Russian revolution and the lessons of the defeats of the epigones. A perspective of struggle for the *dictatorship of the proletariat* is opening up before you. In the name of this task, you must consolidate around you the working class and arouse to the aid of the workers the millions of village poor. This is a gigantic task. Upon you, Spanish Communists, lies a vast revolutionary responsibility. Do not close your eyes to your weakness, do not inflate yourselves by illusions. The revolution does not believe in words. It tests everything and what is more, it tests, it in blood. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat can overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie. There is not, there will not be, and there cannot be any intermediary revolution more “simple”, more “economical”, more adapted to your forces. History will not invent for you any transitional dictatorship, a dictatorship of a second order, a dictatorship at a discount. Whoever speaks to you about it, is deceiving you. Make your preparations for the dictatorship of the proletariat, prepare seriously, stubbornly, tirelessly!

Immediately, however, the Spanish Communists are confronted with the task *not of struggle for power, but of the struggle for the masses*, and furthermore, this struggle will develop in the next period on the basis of the bourgeois republic and to a great degree under the slogans of democracy. The creation of workers’ *Juntas* [3\*] is undoubtedly an immediate task of the day. But it is absurd to counterpose the slogans of the *Junta* to those of democracy. The struggle against the privileges of the church, the abuses of the monastic orders and monasteries – a purely democratic struggle – produced a mass explosion in May which created favorable, unfortunately unutilized, conditions for the election of workers’ deputies. At the given stage, *Juntas* are the organizational forms for the united proletarian front – for strikes, for the expulsion of the Jesuits, for participation in the elections to the Cones, for contact with the soldiers., as well as for the support of the peasant movement. Only through *Juntas*, embracing the basic core of the proletariat, can the Communists assure their hegemony in the proletariat, which also means in the revolution. Only. to the extent that the influence of the



Communists grows among the working class., will the *Juntas* be transformed into organs of struggle for power. At one of the later stages – we do not yet know when – the *Juntas*, as organs of the power of the proletariat, will find themselves opposed to the democratic institutions of the bourgeoisie. Only then will the last hour of bourgeois democracy have struck.

Every time the masses are involved into straggle, they invariably feel – cannot but feel – an acute need for an authoritative organization rising above the parties, factions, sects, and capable of uniting all the workers for joint action. One must know how to put forward this slogan to the masses at a suitable occasion – and such occasions are now met at every step. But to counterpose the slogan of Soviets as organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the realistic struggle of today, means to convert the slogan of Soviets, into a super-historical divinity, into a super-revolutionary icon, to which only individual saints may kneel but which the masses will never follow.

## **The Problems of the Tempos of the Spanish Revolution**

But is there still time left to apply correct tactics? Isn't it too late? Haven't all the opportunities been missed?

A correct determination of the tempo of development of the revolution is of tremendous significance – if not for the determination of the basic strategic line then for the determination of the tactics. And without correct tactics, the best strategic line may lead to ruin. It is understood that to guess the tempos in advance for a prolonged period is impossible. The tempo has to be examined in the course of the struggle, making use of the most varied indicators. Moreover, in the course of events the tempo may change very abruptly. But we must nevertheless keep before our eyes a definite perspective in order to introduce the necessary correctives into it in the process of experience.

The great French revolution spent over three years before it reached its highest point, the dictatorship of the Jacobins. The Russian revolution, within eight months, produced the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks. Here we see a tremendous difference in tempos. If in France events had developed faster, the Jacobin would not have had the time to take shape, because they did not exist as a party on the eve of the revolution. On the other hand, had the Jacobins represented a power on the eve of the revolution, events would probably have

proceeded faster. Such is one of the factors determining the tempo. But there are also others, perhaps more decisive ones.

The Russian revolution of 1917 was preceded by the revolution in 1905, which Lenin called a general rehearsal. All the elements of the second and the third revolution were prepared beforehand, so that the forces participating in the struggle moved as if according to a marked-out path. This hastened extraordinarily the period of the revolution's rise to its culmination.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the decisive factor in relation to the tempo in 1917 was the war. The question of land might have been postponed for months, perhaps for a year or two, but the question of death in the dugouts could bear no postponement. The soldiers were saying: "What good is the land to me if I am not alive?" The pressure of the twelve million soldier mass was a factor in the extraordinary acceleration of the revolution. Had there not been the war, in spite of the "general rehearsal" of 1905 and the presence of the Bolshevik party, the inaugural pre-Bolshevik period of the revolution might have lasted not eight months, but perhaps a year or two or more.

These general considerations have an unmistakable significance for the determination of the possible tempo of development of the events in Spain. The present generation of Spaniards has known no revolution, has gone through no "general rehearsal" in the past. The Communist party went into the events in an extremely weak condition. Spain is not carrying on any war the Spanish peasants are not concentrated in millions in the barracks and trenches, and are not subject to the immediate danger of extermination. All these circumstances compel one to expect a slower development of events and consequently permit one to hope for a lengthier period in which to prepare the party for the seizure of power.

But there are factors which pull in the opposite direction and which may provoke inopportune attempts at a decisive battle that are equivalent to a defeat of the revolution: the absence of a strong party heightens the significance of the spontaneous element in the movement; the anarcho-syndicalist traditions act in the same direction; finally, the false orientation of the Comintern open the gates to explosions of adventurism.

The conclusion from these historical analogies is clear: the situation in Spain (the absence of fresh revolutionary traditions; the absence of a

strong party; the absence of a war) leads to a condition in which the normal gestation of the dictatorship of the proletariat will, from all indications, prove to be removed for a considerably longer period than in Russia and therefore there are circumstances which strengthen to an extraordinary degree the danger of a *miscarriage of the revolution*.

The weakness of Spanish Communism, which is the result of a wrong official policy, makes it in turn greatly subject to the most dangerous conclusions from the wrong directives. A weakling does not like to look his weakness in the eye, he is afraid of being late, he is nervous and runs ahead. The Spanish Communists may be particularly afraid of the *Cortes*.

In Russia, the Constituent Assembly, which was dragged out by the bourgeoisie, was convened only after the decisive encounter and was liquidated without any difficulties. The Spanish constituent Cortes is being convened at an earlier stage in the development of the revolution. The Communists in the Cortes will be a negligible minority, assuming that they get into it at all. From here it is not far to the thought: to attempt to overthrow the Cortes as quickly as possible, utilizing some kind of a spontaneous attack of the masses. Such an adventure will not only not decide the problem of power, but on the contrary, will throw back the revolution for a long time, and in all probability with a broken backbone. The proletariat will be able to snatch the power out of the hands of the bourgeoisie only on the condition that the majority of the workers strive passionately towards it and that the oppressed majority of the people have confidence in the proletariat.

Precisely in the question of the parliamentary institutions of the revolution, the Spanish comrades should refer not so much to the Russian experience as to the experience of the Great French revolution. The dictatorship of the Jacobins was preceded by three parliaments. Upon these three steps, the masses mounted to the dictatorship of the Jacobins. It is ridiculous to think – together with the Madrid republicans and socialists – that the *Cortes* will really put a period to the revolution. No, it can only give a new impetus to the development of the revolution, assuring at the same time its greater planfulness. Such a perspective is extremely important for an orientation in the course of events, for a counter-agent to nervousness and adventurism.

It is understood that this does not mean that the Communists act as a brake upon the revolution. It means still less that the Communists

separate themselves from the movement and from the upsurges of the masses of town and village. Such a policy would ruin the party which is still confronted with gaining the confidence of the revolutionary masses. Only because the Bolsheviks led all the battles of the workers and soldiers did they have the possibility of holding back the masses from a catastrophe in July.

If the objective conditions and the malevolence of the bourgeoisie were to force upon the proletariat a decisive battle under unfavorable conditions, the Communists, it is understood, would find their place in the front ranks of the fighters. A revolutionary party will always prefer to subject itself to a defeat together with its masses, rather than to stand aside, occupying itself with moralizing, and leaving the workers without leadership under the bayonets of the bourgeoisie. A party beaten in battle will root itself deeply in the hearts of the masses and will sooner or later take revenge. But the party which has cut loose from the class at the moment of danger will never come to life again. However, the Spanish Communists are not at all confronted with such a tragic alternative. On the contrary, there is every reason to calculate that the disgraceful policy of socialism standing at the helm, and the sorry bewilderment of anarcho-syndicalism will push the workers all the further towards Communism. and that the party – providing there is a correct policy – will have sufficient time to prepare itself and to lead the proletariat to victory.

### **For the Unity of the Communist Ranks**

One of the most malicious crimes of the Stalinist bureaucracy is the systematic splitting of the weak Communist ranks in Spain, a split which did not flow from the events of the Spanish revolution but was injected in advance in the form of directives, flowing from the struggle for existence of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The revolution always creates in the proletariat a powerful attraction to the Left wing. In 1917, all the currents and groups that were near in spirit to Bolshevism, fused with it, even though they had fought against it in the past. Not only did the party grow rapidly but it also lived an extremely stormy internal life. From April to October, and later in the years of the civil war, the struggle of tendencies and groupings in the Bolshevik party attained an extraordinary acuteness at certain moments. But we do not see any splits. We do not even see individual expulsions.

The mighty pressure of the masses welds the party together. The internal struggle trains it up, makes clear to it its own roads. In this struggle, all the members of the party gain a deep confidence in the correctness of the policy of the party and in the revolutionary reliability of the leadership. Only such a conviction of the rank and file Bolshevik, won through experience and ideological struggle, gives the leadership the possibility at the necessary moment to lead the whole party into the battle. And only a deep confidence of the party itself in the correctness of its policy inspires the working class masses with confidence in the party. Artificial groupings forced from the outside; the absence of a free and honest ideological struggle; the renaming of friends into enemies; the creation of legends serving to split the Communist ranks – this is what now paralyzes the Spanish Communist Party. It must wrench itself out of the bureaucratic tongs which condemn it to impotence. The Communist ranks must be assembled on the basis of open, honest discussion. A unity conference of the Spanish Communist Party must be prepared.

The situation is complicated by the fact that not only the official Stalinist bureaucracy in Spain, small in numbers and weak, but also the Opposition organizations formally outside of the Comintern – the Catalanian Federation, the Madrid autonomous group [5] have no clear program of action and what is worse yet, are to a considerable extent contaminated with the prejudices which the epigones of Bolshevism have sowed so generously for the last eight years. On the question of the “workers’ and peasants’” revolution and the “democratic dictatorship” and even the “workers’ and peasants’ party”, the Catalanian oppositionists do not possess the necessary clarity. This doubles the danger. The struggle for the restoration of the unity of the Communist ranks must be combined with the struggle against the ideological decay and falsehood of Stalinism.

This is the task of the Left Opposition. But here too the truth must be said: It has barely approached the solution of these tasks. The fact that the Spanish comrades adhering to the Left Opposition have not as yet created their own organ is an inexcusable loss of time and the revolution will not leave it unpunished. [6] We know under what difficult conditions our co-thinkers find themselves: unremitting police persecution under Primo de Rivera, under Berenguer, and under Zamora. Comrade Lacroix, for instance, comes out of prison only to return there again. The apparatus of the Comintern, impotent in the matter of revolutionary leadership, develops great activity in the domain of persecution and slander. All this makes the work extremely

difficult. Nevertheless, it has to be done. We must assemble the forces of the Left Opposition throughout the country, establish a journal and a bulletin, group together the working class youth, organize circles, and fight the unity of the Communist ranks on the basis of a correct Marxian policy.

*KADIKOY, May 2, 1931*

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## Endnotes

[1.](#) The American Stalinists excel all the others. It is difficult to imagine the Herculean pillars of vulgarity and stupidity which officials, who get paid for it and whom nobody controls, are capable of talking themselves into. – *L. Trotsky*

[2.](#) The foreign editor of the central organ of the French Communist Party who was recently sent to report the events in Spain. His correspondence caused considerable resentment among the Spanish readers of the paper because of its falsehoods and misrepresentations – *Editor*

[3.](#) The Left Opposition has no daily press. We are compelled to develop thoughts in private letters which should form the contents of daily articles. In the supplement to this work, we give extracts from such letter-articles in chronological order. – *L. Trotsky*

[4.](#) The Italian group “Prometeo” (the Bordigists) reject revolutionary democratic slogans in general, for all countries and all peoples. This sectarian doctrinarism, which coincides in practise with the position of the Stalinists has nothing in common with the position of the Bolshevik-Leninists. The International Left must reject any shadow of responsibility for such ultra-Leftist infantilism. It is precisely the fresh experiences in Spain which bear witness that in the process of crushing the régime of the Fascist dictatorship in Italy, the slogans of political democracy will undoubtedly play an extremely important rôle. To enter the Spanish or the Italian revolution with the program of “Prometeo” – is tantamount to plunging into water with hands tied behind the back. Such a swimmer almost runs the risk of drowning. – *L. Trotsky*

[5.](#) The Catalanian-Balearic Federation is an influential group centered in Barcelona and led by such former party leaders as Maurin and Arlandis. While it agrees generally with the theories and practises of the present leadership of the Communist International it diverges from it essentially on questions of organizational and tactical significances in Spain. It defends many confused and false conceptions, but at the present moment it is the most powerful of the Communist groups in Catalonia, and probably in Spain. The independent Communist group of Madrid (“Agrupacion Comunista do Madrid”) represents a relatively strong organization which was expelled from the party for opposition to the bureaucratic methods of the empty shell called the “Executive Committee” of the Communist Party of Spain, and particularly for

refusing to follow the directives to split the National Confederation of Labor. While it does not support the platform of the left Opposition, the Madrid group does permit discussion and participation in its ranks of the local adherents to the Opposition. – *Editor*

6. Since these lines were written, the first issue of the theoretical organ of the Spanish Section of the International Left Opposition, “Comunismo” has appeared in Oviedo, containing a draft of its political platform, its trade union thesis, etc., etc. – *Editor*

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## Footnotes

1\*. Kuomintang or KMT (Nationalist Party).

2\*. Radical minister in the Zamora cabinet.

3\*. Councils.