

**The Defence of Madrid: The Spanish  
Communist Party in the Spanish Civil  
War (1936-39), Vol. I**

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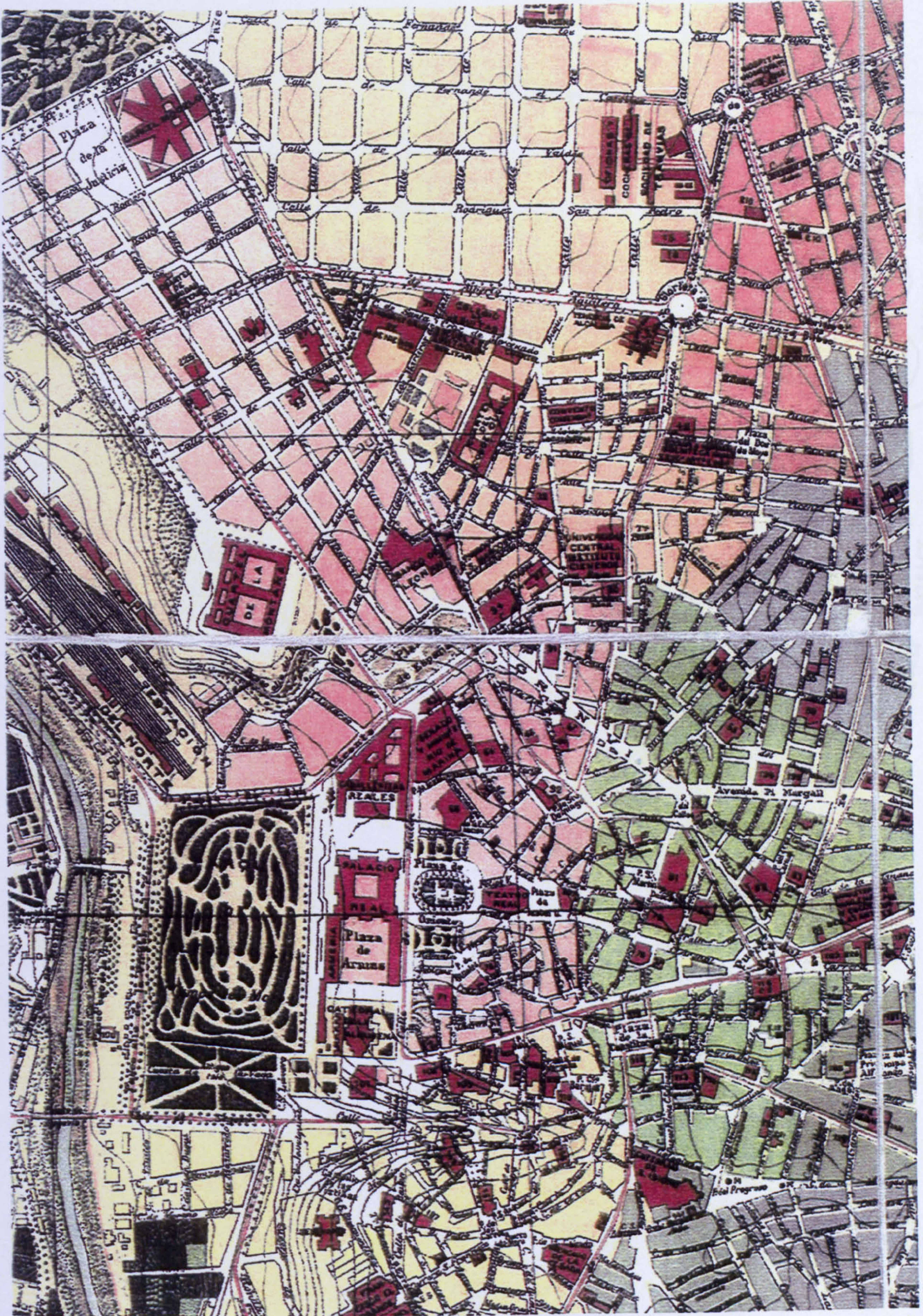
## **Summary**

The role played by the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE) during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 remains controversial to this day. Yet despite the wealth of work which exists on the PCE during the war, none has examined party activity in any detail. Furthermore, while events in the city of Madrid during the war provided the framework for both the rise and demise of the PCE, many studies have tended to focus instead on Barcelona and Cataluña. In contrast to the lack of secondary material on Madrid and the PCE, a wealth of Spanish archival material exists on communist activity within the city and province.

The origins of communist dominance during the Spanish Civil War lie with the particular national and international conjuncture which enabled the PCE to fulfil a particular role when other organisations could not. Thus chapter one examines the origins of the PCE within the context of Spain's Second Republic and chapter two discusses the party's behaviour prior to and after the coup and the outbreak of civil war. Chapter three explores the party's role in the defence of Madrid and the effect of this on both the prosecution of the war, and the growth of the party. Chapter four examines the PCE's role in mobilising different groups in order to meet the needs of the war, while chapter five examines the fragility of the PCE's support base, further undermined as material privation worsened. Finally, in chapter six the party's demise is charted within the context of the Republic's poor military and material situation, and an unfavourable

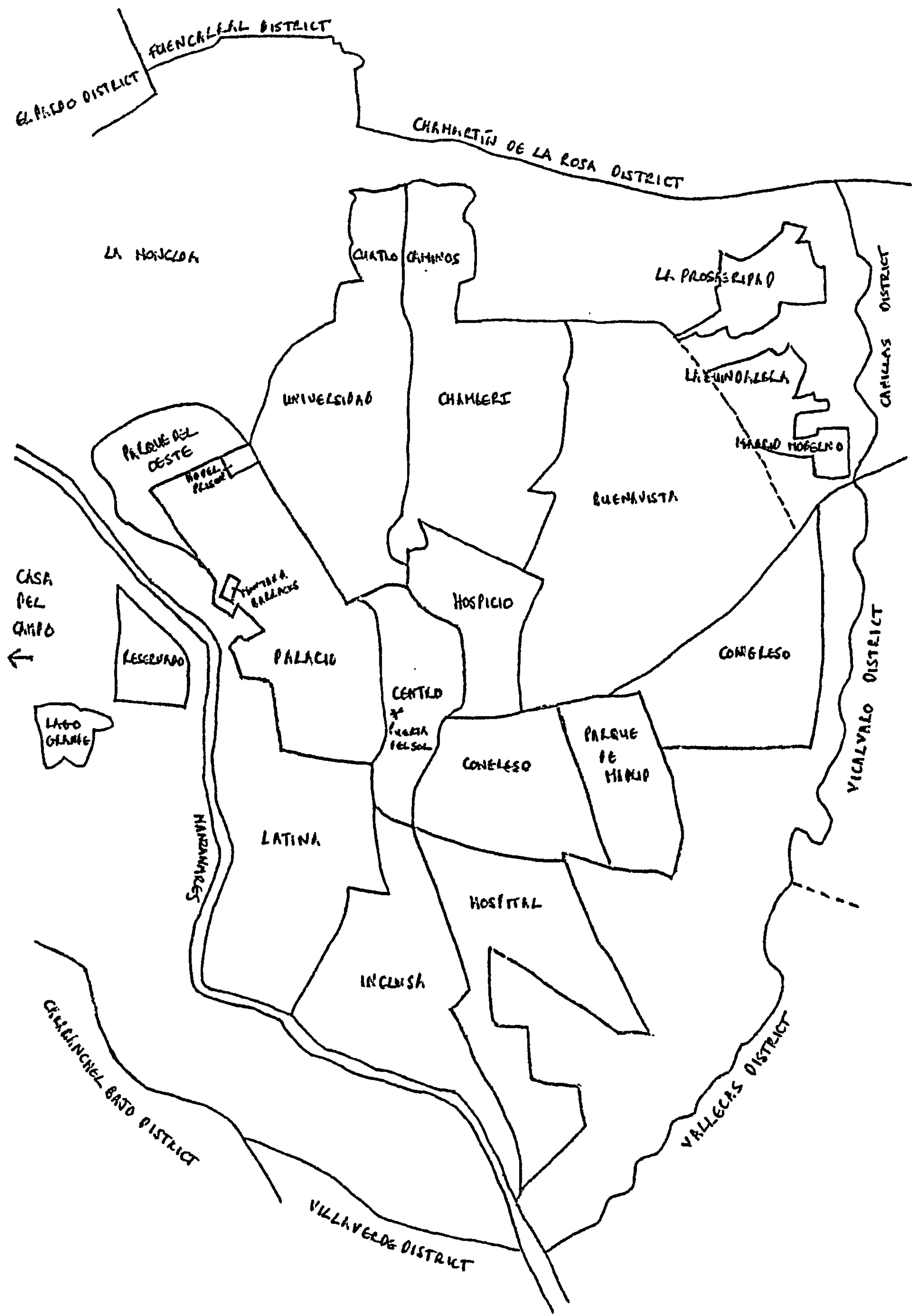
international political arena. Much more than a Soviet puppet, the PCE absorbed and channelled all the hopes and aspirations of the Spanish Republic, binding itself in the process to a cause which was increasingly doomed.

Parque del Oeste



1 Central Madrid in 1931

Source: Plano de Madrid, 1931 (Martín, Barcelona, 1931)

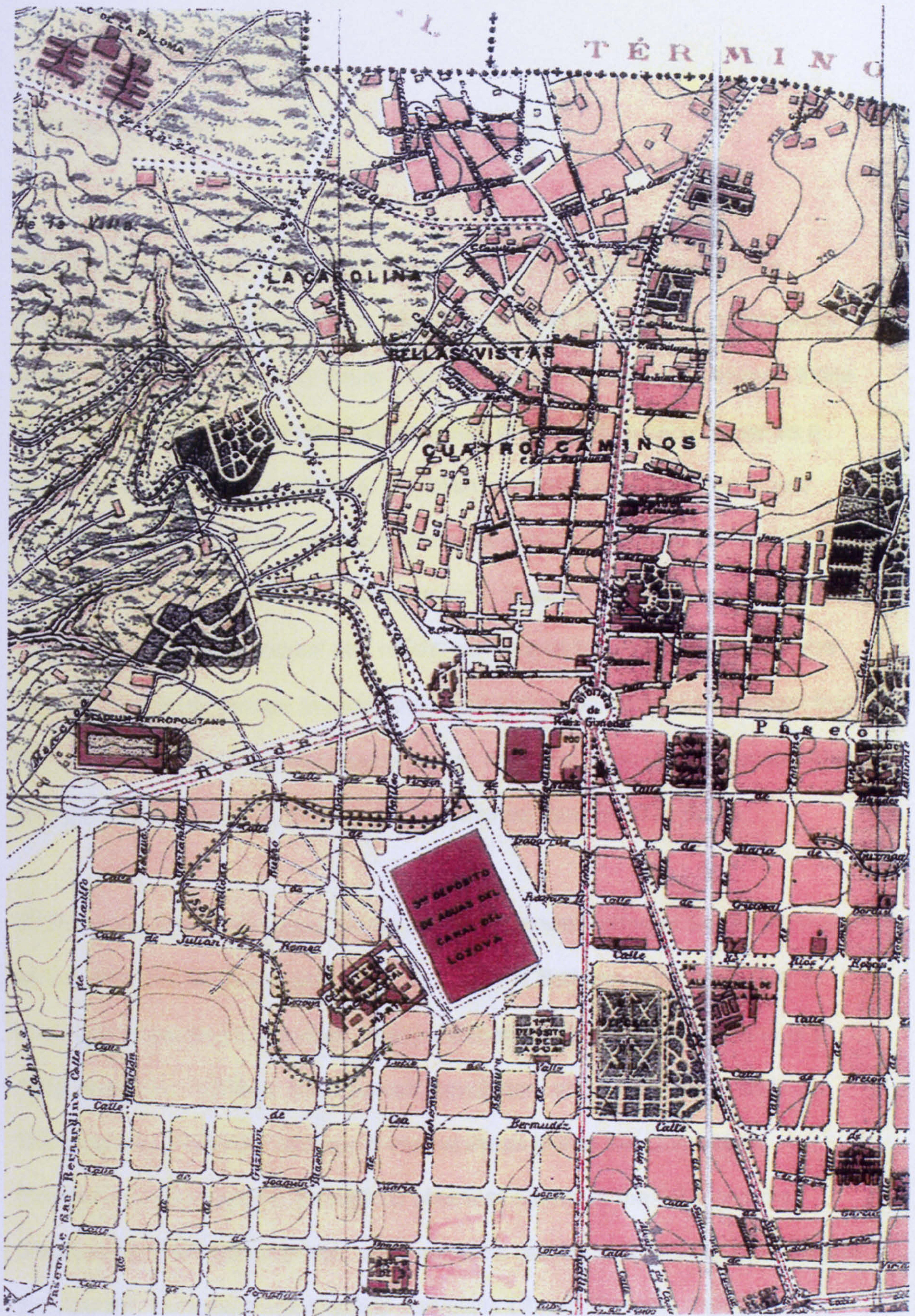


2 Districts of Madrid in 1931





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## **Introduction**

The role played by the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE) during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, remains controversial to this day. Over the past 60 years a heated debate has ensued between those who seek to explain the political ascendancy of the PCE during the war as a direct result of Soviet intentions to establish a satellite regime in Spain, and those who have sought to explain communist dominance within the framework of the pre-existing political and social order in Spain. The debate was further obfuscated by both Francoist and official communist histories produced in the 1960s. The former served to justify the military coup of 1936 on the pretext that the communists were about to seize power, while the latter also overstated the strength and influence of the pre-war communist movement in Spain.

Of those studies which argue for the attempted sovietisation of Spain, the most well-known and thorough-going is that of Burnett Bolloten, who dedicated a large part of his life to this work. First published as *The Grand Camouflage* in 1958, revised in 1979 as *The Spanish Revolution*, and expanded in 1991 as *The Spanish Civil War*,<sup>1</sup> Bolloten's central thesis is that the Communist International (Comintern), through its obedient agents in the PCE and their unwitting Spanish accomplices, the bourgeois republicans and the right wing of the Spanish Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE)

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<sup>1</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand Camouflage. The Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936-39*, (Pall Mall Press, London, 1968); *The Spanish Revolution. The left and the struggle for power during the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1979); *The Spanish Civil War. Revolution and Counterrevolution*, (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

dismantled the revolution unleashed by anarchist and left-wing socialist groups in the wake of the military rebellion in 1936.<sup>2</sup> The communists achieved this by rebuilding the bourgeois state apparatus, incorporating the workers' militias into the regular army and bringing collectivised industry and agriculture under centralised control, while intimidating, persecuting and even purging their leftist opponents through the establishment of a regime of terror akin to that of Stalinist Russia. The objective was firstly to facilitate the Russian quest for an alliance with the western democracies and ultimately to establish a Soviet-dominated regime in Spain.<sup>3</sup> In the course of his work Bolloten amassed an enormous volume of extremely valuable material which is housed today at Stanford University. His thorough examination of the subject means that on many issues his work is an accurate and invaluable source. He is correct in his claim that the communists collaborated with moderate socialists and republicans to reassert the authority of the central state, and that this occurred at the expense of more thorough-going social reform and political reform. It is also true that the PCE advocated the creation of a Popular Army to replace the militias, and was involved in the persecution of political opponents, most notably the dissident Marxist party, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM). Nevertheless, Bolloten's main argument is deeply flawed as his interpretative framework was constructed purely in the context of post-1945 Europe. In his assessment of the Spanish Republic, Bolloten ignored the pre-1936 divisions of the Spanish left, and assigns these groups an entirely passive role in the events

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I have used 'republican' to denote members of specifically republican parties and groups, and 'Republican' to denote all those who supported the Republic during the civil war of 1936-39. This also applies to derivative terms: republican-socialist government, 1931-33, Republican zone, Republican institutions, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Preston's critical review of Bolloten's work which appeared in The English Historical Review, October 1993, pp. 990-92

of 1936-39. Moreover, his argument overlooks the underlying reason why the Republic, so badly disadvantaged militarily against the Nationalists, would need to centralise its resources and subordinate everything to the war effort. He also fails to explore the reasons behind the PCE's overwhelming popular appeal in the Republican zone, particularly during the first two years of the conflict, and finally, in the absence of concrete evidence, his case rests on assumptions concerning Stalin's intentions, which are still unknown.

Bolton's erroneous assessment remains worthy of discussion, however, despite its obvious flaws, because it invites more thorough studies of the Spanish Civil War in order that a greater understanding of the communists' role during the conflict can be reached. For my own part, I was undoubtedly drawn to the Spanish Civil War because of a personal fascination with the Soviet role in the conflict. With the opening up of the Soviet archives in the post-Soviet era, it seemed that, at last, answers would be found to many of the questions asked about Soviet intervention. New material has indeed addressed some of the issues concerning the nature of and extent of the Soviet Union's activity in the Spanish Republic. Excellent work has been produced on diverse areas such as the extent of Soviet military assistance (by Gerald Howson), the impact of Soviet intervention including the role of Soviet personnel in Spain (by Daniel Kowalsky), and the nature of Comintern's relations with the Spanish communists, (by Tim Rees and by Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo) to name but a few.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, the question of Stalin's intentions

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Howson, Arms for Spain, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998); Daniel Kowalsky, La Unión Soviética y la guerra civil Española, 1936-39: Una revisión crítica, (Crítica, Barcelona, 2003); Tim Rees, 'The "Good Bolsheviks": The Spanish Communist Party and the Third Period' in In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period,

remains unanswered, but has also become less relevant as new work has challenged preconceptions about the extent of Moscow's control both at home and abroad in the mid-1930s.<sup>5</sup> In this context, much of the recent work using previously unseen archival sources has raised questions about the extent of Comintern influence and control over the PCE, serving to challenge the idea that the PCE was a carefully controlled organisation blindly following Moscow's instructions.

From a different perspective, pioneering work by Paul Preston on the origins of the Spanish Civil War, by Santos Juliá on the socio-economic changes occurring in Madrid, and by Helen Graham on the pre-war divisions of the PSOE, the largest pre-war workers' party in Spain, have provided a partial framework within which the PCE's lack of implantation before 1936 and its meteoric rise after 1936 can be explored. Furthermore, given that the PCE became a mass party during the civil war, for the first (and last) time in its history, this development raises questions not only about how the Party could become so successful, but also about its political and social identity. Hitherto, however, no work has addressed the subject of the wartime Communist Party in any detail. The vast majority of work has tended to focus, understandably, on the international dimensions of communism in Spain, without paying attention to the activities of grassroots militants or local and provincial organisations. It is

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(ed.) Worley, Matthew, (I.B. Tauris & Co., London and New York, 2004), pp. 174-202; Tim Rees, 'The Highpoint of Comintern Influence? The Communist Party and the Civil War in Spain' in International Communism and the Communist International: 1919-43, (eds.) Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999), pp. 143-67; Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas: La Internacional Comunista y España, 1919-39, (Planeta, Barcelona, 1999)

<sup>5</sup> See for example Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott, The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin, (Macmillan, Hampshire and London, 1996) as well as the works cited above.

these two contrasting approaches, of the international and national political conjuncture, which serve as a framework for my thesis.

Starting from the premise that the role of the PCE deserves more attention, it soon became apparent during the course of my research that although the city of Madrid, as the Spanish capital, was integral to both the evolution of the PCE as a political entity and to any study of the Spanish Civil War, many studies have tended to focus on Barcelona and Cataluña, and to extrapolate for the whole of Spain the experiences of this particular region. The lack of secondary material on Madrid, particularly on the provincial PCE, in both the Spanish and English languages, in contrast to the wealth of Spanish archival sources on the city, makes Madrid a viable area for study of the PCE during the Spanish Civil War. Madrid is also ideal for the study of the evolution of a political party such as the PCE because it was never captured in combat by the Nationalists and remained a Republican stronghold until the very end of the war. The city of Madrid was centre stage at both the beginning and end of the conflict: during the epic defence of the city against Nationalist troops in the winter of 1936, and again in the spring of 1939, where it was the scene of the anti-communist military coup led by Colonel Casado. This context, therefore, offers an opportunity to study the trajectory of the Party, its activities and aspirations during the whole conflict. However, this study is not solely concerned with the activities of communists within the city of Madrid, but also examines the evolution of the Party at a national level in relation to its achievements within the city. In this respect Madrid becomes an explanatory framework for both the rise and demise of the Party.

In many ways it was the PCE's ability to fulfil a specific role at a specific time when other political entities could not which helps to explain the Party's political ascendancy during the war. In order to understand the origins of communist dominance it is essential to begin with the origins of the PCE, and the reasons for the Party's lack of substantial political implantation before 1936. In Madrid, an important centre of communist activism, militants had a significant impact on both of these developments. The particular national political conjuncture which fostered the Party's growth after the international communist movement's adoption of the Popular Front policy in 1935, as well as the social and political milieu in Madrid, was also immensely significant in terms of the Party's growth in members and influence, on both a national and provincial level. These themes, are taken up in chapter one, while chapter two examines the Party's behaviour in the immediate pre-war period following the successful election of a Popular Front government in February 1936. For the first time, the PCE assumed a national political presence and began to work largely within the framework of parliamentary democracy, although there were inherent contradictions within communist ideology which Popular Frontism had failed to properly address, and which were largely unresolved by the outbreak of war in the summer of 1936. As both the capital city and the seat of the Communist movement's national leadership, as well as the home of a growing provincial communist party organisation, Madrid provides an ideal location within which to examine communist responses to the political instability in the spring and summer of 1936, as well as to the coup and the outbreak of civil war. Such responses, as will be demonstrated, were often improvised, suggesting both that Soviet



influence was more tenuous than is often assumed, and that at national and provincial levels communists responded to the particular set of circumstances in which they found themselves. However, the internal dynamic of democratic centralism which characterised the PCE by 1936 meant that national and provincial leaderships were able to respond rapidly to the demands of war, organising militants in the city and the province, and establishing an efficient fighting force in the Fifth Regiment. The Party's internal dynamic of democratic centralism was also usefully externalised for the purposes of Popular Front unity and the military policy Mando Único (a single unified military command).

Chapter three explores the Party's role in the defence of Madrid, its mobilisation of civilians, the impact of Soviet military aid, and the influence of communist concepts of unity and the imagery of the city's defence, on both the prosecution of the war, and the growth of the Party. The communists' role in the recuperation of the authority of the central government, and by association, bourgeois democracy, through its administration of public order in the city is also discussed. Much of the PCE's support came in the form of the mass non-party political organisations sponsored by the Party. These were useful to the Party for engaging with people outside the typical syndical or political arenas, but also a means to achieving a kind of hegemony for the communist movement in Spain. In fact it was the deployment of these local networks of social power that enabled the PCE to access these hitherto untapped resources during the battle of Madrid and thereafter. Chapter four examines the PCE's role in mobilising different groups within the Republican zone in order to meet the needs of the war, and to lay the foundations of the post-war Republican society.

Through its antifascist organisations such as the women's group, the Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA), and the solidarity organisation of the Comintern, Socorro Rojo Internacional (SRI), volunteers performed useful functions in the rearguard, and served to boost morale at the front. However, the impact of these bodies was limited, raising questions about the extent of communist influence: the work of the AMA to get women into the workplace, for example, was not taken as seriously as was needed to have been effective. Where the communists were influential, such as in the institutionalisation of the *milicianos de cultura*, which provided literacy classes to the soldiers of the Republic's new Popular Army, they built upon the educational initiatives undertaken by the republican-socialist coalition of 1931-33. The more generalised support gained for the PCE through these organisations was to provide a social and political power base for the PCE, but such support was transitory and began to decline as the population lost faith in the possibility of victory.

Chapter five takes up this theme, in addition to exploring the limitations of communist influence which began with the restitution of Republican authority from April 1937 onwards. This was especially pertinent in the province of Madrid, where the PCE's strength lay in these more informal power networks and within the military, but was less influential within official political circles. Within the recently created forces of law and order too, the PCE in Madrid also found itself in a position of relative weakness. Furthermore, the pace of change during the war had left the Party without sufficient numbers of politically competent cadres to maintain the Party's link with the masses and to exert the influence it desired

within government and administrative institutions, throughout Madrid and its province. The communists sent their best men to the army, and counted on huge numbers of affiliates to the Unified Youth organisation, the JSU, among the young men who made up its ranks. Additionally, the PCE counted on a number of military professionals, who, attracted to the communist emphasis on military discipline, had joined the organisation after the outbreak of war. Yet despite these factors, the Party's hegemony within the army was never assured.

Indeed, the Party's reliance on military professionals in the face of the Casado coup was to prove to be a terrible mistake. The close association of the PCE with a policy of steadfast resistance, first articulated during the defence of Madrid, meant that the Party was increasingly associated with the prolongation of the war. As material conditions within the Republican zone deteriorated, support grew for the illusory notion of a mediated or negotiated settlement with the Nationalists. However, the communists continued as the principal supporters of the socialist Prime Minister Negrín in his advocacy of a policy of maximum resistance. This was predicated on obtaining a peace with guarantees for the civilian population from Franco, given the brutality of Nationalist repression in the areas already conquered. In the rearguard, above all in the Centre-South zone, war-weariness, starvation and disease began to take its toll, while at the front, a lack of weaponry due to the international arms embargo imposed by the Non-Intervention agreement, and the capitulation of France and Great Britain to Hitler at Munich, seriously undermined morale, the Republic's capacity to resist, and faith in the policy of resistance itself. It was in such a context that demise of the PCE occurred. In Madrid the communist

movement became increasingly isolated, divisions within the JSU became acute, and the Party organisation suffered as men were drafted into the Republican army and neophyte militants drifted away. In such a situation increasingly women took on organisational and leadership roles. These themes, as well as the overthrow of both the PCE and Negrin's government by Casado's military coup in Madrid in March 1939, will be explored in chapter six.

Additionally, running throughout this study are a number of general themes, which are thrown into relief by a study of the PCE in Madrid. The relationship of the PCE to the Comintern was fundamental, both in terms of the Party's evolution as an organisation, and in that the adoption of the Popular Front policy by the international communist movement created the framework within which the Party should work during the war. This created a number of problems for the internal dynamic of the Party, centred on the unresolved issue of whether it was to be mass or elite, reformist or revolutionary, in character. The issue of Popular Frontism also revealed the heterogeneity of ideas subsumed within both the Comintern and the PCE as individuals within these organisations embraced or struggled with the new policy. These issues engender discussion of what it meant to be a communist both before and during the Spanish Civil War. Madrid, as one of the largest centres of communist militancy, both before and during the civil war, as well as, at times, a breeding ground for internal Party dissidence, provides an ideal framework within which to explore these ideas. Also related to the Party's espousal of Popular Frontism was the communists' discourse and policy of unity which informed the behaviour of the Party during wartime, the nature of its relationships with other political and syndical organisations, and

ultimately the way in which the Republic prosecuted the war. The activities and behaviour of communist militants in the city and province of Madrid and their contact with other groups illustrate the way in which the unity policy was implemented on the ground, and also highlight the limitations of communist influence. This is highly significant in terms of evaluating the extent of communist dominance overall during the civil war. In contrast to earlier studies such as those by Bolloren, which have focussed on Barcelona and have produced rather skewed impressions of communism's implantation in the Republican zone, this study, through focussing on Madrid, demonstrates that communist hegemony was never as thoroughgoing as might be assumed.

Finally, a key element in the PCE's ascendancy was the symbolic and actual significance of the defence of Madrid. The Party used the imagery of Madrid's defence to good effect, earning it support from many quarters and reaffirming belief in victory. Significantly, the Party's ascendancy was encouraged because its political outlook coincided with that of republicans and moderate socialists. Ultimately all these groups withdrew their support when they realised the PCE could not deliver the victory it seemed to promise in the winter of 1936.

This study has evolved over the course of a number of years, the original concept arising from a number of discussions I had as an undergraduate, with my current supervisor, Dr. Mary Vincent. I would like therefore to express particular thanks to Mary for encouraging me both to pursue my ideas, and to resume my studies after a hiatus of several years. I would also like to express thanks for her guidance and support over the course of this study, and her

invaluable comments and constructive criticism of my thesis as it has evolved. I am grateful to those who have shared their knowledge and insight of Spanish history with me, in particular, Helen Graham, Tim Rees, and Julius Ruiz. Discussions with Hazel Nicholson have also informed my ideas on the internationalism of left-wing solidarity. I am also grateful to several Russian specialists – David Shepherd in the department of Russian and Slavonic studies and Miriam Dobson of the history department, both at the University of Sheffield. I would also like to express my gratitude to the archivists of the Civil War archive in Salamanca and especially to Victoria Ramos at the PCE archive in Madrid. Special thanks are reserved for my partner John Palmer, without whose support I doubt this study would ever have been possible, and to my family and friends, particularly Lisa and Alex Howlett and Jane Cunliffe among others, who have provided me with accommodation over the past few years. Finally I would like to thank the University of Sheffield's History department for financial assistance provided for the purposes of archival research in Spain.

## **Chapter One. The PCE during the Second Spanish Republic.**

### **The origins of the PCE**

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the communist Third International provoked debate in left-wing organisations across Europe. In Spain this resulted in the provisional affiliation of the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional de Trabajo (CNT) to the Comintern in 1919, and a series of discussions within the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), and its youth movement, the Federación de Juventudes Socialistas Españolas, (FJSE or FJS). The founding of the first communist party in Spain was led by the Socialist Youth, when in April 1920, heeding Lenin's call to create communist parties all over Europe, the national leadership of the FJS sent a circular letter to its sections calling on members to abandon the Socialist Youth and to proclaim the birth of the Partido Comunista Español (PC). Among those that left the PSOE to join the PC were the majority of affiliates of the socialist Agrupación de Somorrostro, including the as yet unknown Dolores Ibárruri, a future leader of the PCE. This youth initiative was soon followed by secessionists from the adult party (known as *terceristas*, because of their desire to affiliate to the Third International), who formed the PCOE (Partido Comunista Obrero Español), in April 1921. Since the statutes of the Comintern only allowed one national section per country, the international organisation forced a

unification of the two groups, and in November 1921 the PCE (Partido Comunista de España) was born.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist Party was still in its infancy when it was proscribed by Miguel Primo de Rivera, under his dictatorship of 1923-30. For a decade, Party life was punctuated by waves of arrests including the imprisonment of its leaders.<sup>2</sup> The PCE differed little from most of the other newly formed communist parties, which were typically weak organisations with small and fluctuating memberships, which hampered their ability to forge stable networks of cadres and activists.<sup>3</sup> Upon his arrival in Barcelona in December 1930, the Swiss Comintern envoy Jules Humbert-Droz exclaimed:

There is nothing, nothing, nothing! A handful of half-anarchist types who don't know what to do. Neither party, nor newspaper, nor syndicates. What there is, is divided, subdivided, impotent...<sup>4</sup>

The Party's lack of members, organisation and discipline contrasted starkly with the PSOE which had enjoyed the privilege afforded by collaboration with the dictatorship.<sup>5</sup> In fact some PCE members rejoined the PSOE, further

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<sup>1</sup> José Peirats, Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, (Freedom Press, London, 1998), pp. 37-38; Dolores Ibárruri, El único camino, (Editorial Bruguera, Barcelona, 1979), p. 97; Mayte Gómez, 'Early Communist Cultural Politics in Spain: The Case of the *Unión Cultural Proletaria*, 1922,' Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, 79,1, (2002), pp. 3-5

<sup>2</sup> Victor Alba, The Communist Party in Spain, Transl. Vincent G. Smith (Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1983) p. 86

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott, The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin, (Macmillan, Hampshire and London, 1996), p.20 and Victor Alba, The Communist Party, p. 113. Alba attributes to the party a significant turnover of members.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas: La Internacional Comunista y España, 1919-39, (Planeta, Barcelona, 1999), p. 141

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Preston, The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic, (Methuen, London, 1978), chapter one, and Paul Heywood, Marxism and



contributing to a decline in numbers. However, repression and clandestinity offer only a partial explanation for the lack of implantation of the Party in its first few years. Another key element in the PCE's early failure was its internal divisions and factional struggles, which were, at least in part, the result of deep-seated ideological differences. Such differences originated in the political impulse which had prompted the creation of the PC and the PCOE. The PC founded by the members of the Socialist Youth, was essentially anti-reformist, in that it argued that the piecemeal social reform advocated by the PSOE would kill the revolutionary spirit of the masses. Moreover, many of its founders came from the Madrid section of the FJS, young intellectuals such as Juan Andrade, José Antonio Balbontín and Gabriel León Trilla. This 'intellectual' faction would continue to develop more radical responses to the issues of the day, operating at the margins of the PCE in organisations such as the Grupo Comunista Español and the Unión Cultural Proletaria, in the early 1920s.

In contrast, the founders of the PCOE were older, and essentially reformist in outlook, products of the gradualist *Pablista* tradition of the PSOE. These very different outlooks were able to coexist within a single party throughout the 1920s, in part because of the ambiguity of the Comintern's position by 1921. At its Third Congress, the Comintern acknowledged the failure of European communist parties to bring about revolution and instead put forward a policy of United Front, calling on communist parties to seek alliances with other workers' organisations including socialist parties, in order to create conditions for revolution. However, it was not clear how this should be done, leaving

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the Failure of Organised Socialism Spain, 1876-1936. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), chapter four for a detailed analysis of this relationship.

communists in Spain to interpret the policy in two different ways. On the one hand, it could be seen as a temporary tactic to be used in order to overwhelm reformists through the radicalisation of the working class struggle, while waiting for a stronger spur of revolutionary impetus to take place. On the other hand, communists could also embrace it as part of a wider political strategy which meant admitting that parliamentarianism was a necessary step in the revolutionary process. The change in Comintern policy gave impetus to both wings of the Party, causing internal divisions throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s and beyond. It also highlights a problem which was never entirely resolved by the PCE: whether it was itself a revolutionary or a reformist party. These inherent contradictions would come to the fore especially during the civil war period.<sup>6</sup>

The Party was also divided over organisational issues, which originated with attempts by the Comintern to exercise greater control over its member parties, and which in Spain over time also fuelled further political differences within the PCE. The Leninist principles of party unity, discipline and democratic centralism were present in the Russian Bolshevik party from the outset. Indeed, it was Lenin's advocacy of the necessity of the 'vanguard party' of dedicated professional revolutionaries to lead the proletarian revolution which split the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1905 into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions.<sup>7</sup> However, the national sections which formed in the wake of the Russian Revolution and affiliated to the Third International initially did not necessarily share these 'Bolshevik' characteristics. Furthermore, during Lenin's

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<sup>6</sup> Mayte Gómez, 'Early Communist Cultural Politics in Spain,' pp. 6-10

<sup>7</sup> Robert Service, Lenin: A Political Life: Vol. I The Strengths of Contradiction, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985), pp. 40-44, pp. 88-93

lifetime the International which guided them embodied a degree of pluralism and open debate. But a number of developments during this period also foreshadowed the type of organisation it would become. The International was entwined with the Soviet Party from its inception, initially because of the prestige of the Bolsheviks as the only Marxist group to have actually carried out a successful revolution. The weakness of foreign communist parties and the great difficulties of travel to and from Moscow made it inevitable that the day-to-day running of the Comintern would be dominated by Soviet personnel.

Bolshevik prestige as the revolutionary vanguard party also influenced the establishment of conditions for admission to the Comintern, introduced at its Second World Congress in 1920, to exclude reformist tendencies, while the perceived inaction and failure of the loose federal structure of the Second International permitted the development of a highly centralised Third International. The Congress also sanctioned the primacy of the Russian Party in the day-to-day administration of the Comintern, and empowered the International's Executive Committee (ECCI) to expel whole parties as well as groups or individuals. The resolutions of the Third and Fourth Congresses reproduced the Bolshevik organisational model in the Comintern. The creation of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) Presidium, Secretariat, Organisational Bureau and International Control Committee paralleled the Russian Party structure and strengthened the tendency to concentrate power in smaller bodies which as a rule were headed by Bolshevik cadres.<sup>8</sup> This 'Bolshevisation', that is 'Russification', of the Comintern was

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<sup>8</sup> Agnew & McDermott, The Comintern, p.14, p. 17, pp. 23-25.

extended to its member sections and was reflected in attempts by the Comintern to 'Bolshevise' the Spanish party.

The appointment of José Bullejos as general secretary of the PCE by Moscow in 1925 was part of this process of Bolshevisation. He was charged with the reorganisation of the Spanish party, which included bringing the more autonomous federations of Cataluña, Asturias and Vizcaya under central authority. However, there was discontent among many party members, who refused to accept the leadership that had been imposed upon them by Moscow. In particular the two most significant dissident groups – the Federación Comunista Catalano-Balear (FCC-B), (formed from around 30 syndicalist communists who had joined the PCE in 1924), and the Agrupación Comunista de Madrid (ACM), – regarded the leadership as petty bureaucrats responsible for the ineffectiveness of the party. There was also widespread opposition in the Party to the policy of mass expulsion of those who disagreed with the policies implemented by the leadership. This was the first time arbitrary expulsions had been used to resolve political disputes, but hereafter it became a permanent characteristic of communist party culture.<sup>9</sup>

By 1930 the PCE was completely disorganised and could only count on a few hundred affiliates. The syndicalist-revolutionary origin of the FCC-B had always distinguished it from the rest of the PCE, but now the opposition of the FCC-B to the bureaucratic methods of the leadership had deepened to acquire a more

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<sup>9</sup> Elorza and Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, p. 53; Tim Rees, 'The "Good Bolsheviks": The Spanish Communist Party and the Third Period' in In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period, (ed.) Matthew Worley (I.B. Tauris & Co., London & New York, 2004), p. 179; Andrew Charles Durgan, B.O.C. 1930-36: El bloque obrero y campesino, (Laertes, Barcelona, 1996), p. 37, pp. 83-84; Alba, The Communist Party, p. 99

political character, and the organisation was expelled from the PCE. Meanwhile, disagreements between the ACM and the PCE leadership came to a head in the summer of 1930 when three members of the local committee were expelled after a financial dispute with the leadership. The one hundred or so militants of the ACM expressed their immediate support for the local committee and the Executive Committee responded by expelling almost all of them. For the next seventeen months the ACM maintained itself as an independent organisation outside of the PCE and rapidly aligned itself with the FCC-B. Both organisations made repeated calls for the reestablishment of internal party democracy. Attempts at mediation by Humbert-Droz failed and in 1931 the FCC-B joined with the Partit Comunista Català (PCC). The product of this union would be the dissident Marxist group the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (BOC), forerunner of the POUM. The five or six years after the appointment of Bullejos were therefore characterised by crises and internal disputes which absorbed the main part of the activity of the PCE. In 1931 the entire national Party numbered only around 800 militants. However, the political orientation of the Party also demonstrated its increasing lack of contact with the reality of the country, a situation aggravated by erroneous instructions from the Comintern, and which also contributed to its lack of implantation in Spain.<sup>10</sup>

In 1930 the Primo dictatorship collapsed, undermined by the end of the economic boom that had supported the regime.<sup>11</sup> Agrarian and industrial elites

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<sup>10</sup> Durgan, B.O.C. 1930-36, p. 37; Cruz, El Partido Comunista de España en la II República, (Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1987), p. 59

<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami, The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain, (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 167, pp. 238-49

optimistically believed that there could be a return to the traditional order of the restoration monarchy. However, their hopes were dashed when a republican-socialist coalition emerged victorious from the municipal elections held across Spain on 12 April 1931. The polls signalled a clear rejection of the monarchy, and a Republic was declared to popular acclaim, in the capital and throughout the country.<sup>12</sup> The PCE responded by railing against this jubilation: 'Down with the Monarchy, yes, but also the Bourgeois Republic!' read the headline of the Communist daily *Mundo Obrero*,<sup>13</sup> while a small group of militants held the red flag aloft as their truck drove past the Royal Palace on Plaza de Oriente in Madrid, much to the disgust of the jeering multitude.<sup>14</sup> This episode revealed that the PCE was fundamentally out of step with the desires of ordinary people largely because its policy was formulated on the basis of abstract Marxist theories rather than the social and economic reality of Spain. In many respects, such behaviour reflected the perennial dichotomy of the PCE. It aspired to be a national party but was part of an international communist movement, which by the early 1930s was dictating, in the main, the policy it should follow and the type of internal party culture it should maintain. The influence of the Comintern would become even greater over the next few years, a symptom of its growing organisational and ideological rigidity. Thus, paradoxically, the PCE was ideologically more flexible at a time when its enforced clandestinity and factional disputes ensured the Party's limited reach, but when the Republic brought greater freedom of association and also a period of economic austerity

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<sup>12</sup>Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 126 and Santos Juliá Díaz, De La Fiesta Popular a la Lucha de las Clases: Madrid, 1931-34, (Siglo Veintiuno, Madrid, 1984), p. 9 Both argue that this support was truly popular, rather than narrowly political, in the sense that a wide cross-section of Madrid society supported it.

<sup>13</sup> Mundo Obrero, 18 April 1931.

<sup>14</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 126

(witnessing more frequent manifestations of labour mobilisation and social unrest), no dramatic breakthrough occurred. During the republican period therefore, any discussion of the PCE must locate the party within the wider context of an international communist movement.

### **Communism under the Second Spanish Republic**

At the advent of the Republic in Spain, the dispute between the ACM and the PCE remained unresolved. As a result the ACM presented its own list, separate from the PCE, in the June 1931 Parliamentary elections. But despite a high attendance at electoral meetings, the Madrid dissident list only obtained around 700 votes, while the PCE obtained 2,500, in the capital, increasing the ACM's isolation. Furthermore, despite their common ground with the FCC-B, the majority in the ACM were not disposed to breaking completely with the PCE. In particular Julián Gorkín and Luis Portela had reservations about joining the BOC because of its strong inclination towards Catalan nationalism. In the end the ACM maintained its position until 1932, when finally the majority of its members returned to the ranks of the PCE. A small number including Gorkín and Portela broke with the PCE completely creating the Madrid section of the Federación Comunista Ibérica in October 1932.

Meanwhile relations between Bullejos and his Comintern mentors entered a difficult phase. The advent of the Republic was interpreted by the Comintern leaders as evidence that a revolutionary juncture was near, and the Comintern leadership was critical of the PCE's responses to events, but it was not entirely

clear as to what it should have done instead.<sup>15</sup> Over the next eighteen months, the Comintern was increasingly critical of the PCE's inability to create a clear organisational structure, and consequently to organise the masses. In an attempt to redeem the party with the Comintern during the first year of the Republic, Bullejos, and those around him, had organised violent May Day demonstrations in Sevilla. But the Comintern leaders, particularly Manuilskii, head of the Roman Secretariat, were more inclined to take such incidents as evidence that the masses possessed a revolutionary propensity which the leadership did not know how to direct.

The party's response to the abortive Sanjurjo coup in August 1932 - when it called for the defence of the Republic - provided the Comintern with the pretext for the removal of Bullejos and his closest collaborators, Manuel Adame, Gabriel León Trilla, and Etelvino Vega. They were expelled on 29 October 1932 in a closed session in Moscow. Thus, ironically the expulsion of Bullejos from the Party in 1932 was further symptomatic of the 'bolshevisation' of the PCE. Although the Comintern argued that the leadership should have used the slogan 'long live the Soviets!' this long-running dispute should be understood in primarily organisational rather than ideological terms: the Comintern removed the leadership because of its inability to organise the Party effectively, not because there was any significant divergence in policy. This episode is particularly interesting in that it offers a telling insight into the operational activities of the Comintern, and how it dealt with errant members. The Bullejos group survived for so long, despite its ineptitude, because of the practical

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<sup>15</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p.127



difficulty the Comintern had in establishing the nature of the PCE organisation from afar.<sup>16</sup>

This lack of control by Moscow was rectified by the Comintern delegate-tutor in Spain, the Argentine Vittorio Codovilla, who had been sent to Spain to resolve the Bullejos issue, and who now set about reorganising the PCE. He appointed a new leadership, based in Madrid, and entirely sympathetic to the International. The Sevillian former anarchist and baker, José Díaz, was appointed general secretary, the painter Jesús Hernández assumed the role of agitation and propaganda secretary, and Dolores Ibárruri took responsibility for the women's section. From the expulsion of Bullejos until the outbreak of war in 1936, the Comintern, through Codovilla was able to maintain strict control over the PCE leadership, and to direct its policy. However, the Bullejos chapter was a foretaste of the difficulties the Party would experience in wartime in terms of its communications with Moscow. Communications between the two bodies even were more erratic under of the conditions of war, as events sometimes moved at such a pace that it was impossible for the PCE to await instructions from the Comintern before the party took action. In such a way during the civil war the PCE experienced a greater degree of autonomy in decision-making from the Comintern.<sup>17</sup>

Under this new leadership and in line with the democratic centralism which characterised both the Russian Communist Party and the Comintern, the PCE's

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<sup>16</sup> See Elorza and Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas*, pp. 141-169 for details of this period.

<sup>17</sup> On the relationship between the Comintern and the PCE during the Civil War see Tim Rees 'The Highpoint of Comintern Influence? The Communist Party and the Civil War in Spain' in *International Communism and the Communist International: 1919-43*, (eds.) Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999), pp. 149-150

party structures were tightened. At the top resided a small secretariat, which met on a fortnightly basis, effectively subsuming the directive functions of the Political Bureau and the even larger Executive Committee. There was also an inner group, composed of the secretaries for political, organisational and syndical activity. This met twice weekly, with Codovilla exercising decisive control over it.<sup>18</sup> The National Congress was in theory the main party body, supposed to meet to examine and approve or reject the report of the Central Committee of the PCE on the activity of the party between congresses. In the intervals between congresses, the executive body of the party was the Central Committee, elected at each congress. This theoretically directed all party policy, but in practice only did so when convoked. In the interval between sessions the Political Bureau (Politburo) was responsible for the elaboration of policy. In Spain there was only one National Congress and seven meetings of the Central Committee in the entire republican period. Thus the true leadership of the party, besides that, of course of the ECCI was the Politburo, elected by the Central Committee from its members, and the secretariat, formed by leaders responsible for the different departments of the organisation. Both were bodies with less than ten members which effectively assumed control of running the Party.<sup>19</sup> This national leadership was based in Madrid, but as it was largely separate from the provincial party organisation in the capital, this had little significance except in the symbolic sense of reinforcing centralism. Directives and pronouncements were handed down from this unit to the party base, thus dispensing with debate or discussion of any kind. This culture set the PCE apart from other workers' organisations and left-wing political groups in Spain, and

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<sup>18</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks,' p. 191

<sup>19</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 40-42

would hold the communist movement together during wartime, when both the CNT and PSOE would be riven by factionalism.<sup>20</sup> However, this elite would also find itself under intense pressure during the conflict due to a sheer lack of competent cadres to direct and implement policy in the expanded party.

At the base of the party, too, reorganisation was attempted, with emphasis on strengthening the district committees (*radios*) and creating party cells in factories. Each *radio* had to have a committee and celebrate conferences with delegates from the cells of the locality. The pinnacle of communist organisation was the cell, intended to group together members of the party who worked together in a given place. Each cell was led by a committee responsible for the organisation of agitation and propaganda, the unions and finance. The political secretary was responsible for the whole cell and its links with the *radio* committee.<sup>21</sup>

In Madrid both the PCE and the youth organisation the UJC (Unión de Juventudes Comunistas) were composed of four central *radios* – North, South, East and West, as well as two other *radios* in the working class areas of the South of the city that went by their own names – Legazpi and Vallecas.<sup>22</sup> During the Civil War when the party expanded enormously Madrid was divided into Sectors, again those of North, South, East and West, and within these areas many more *radios* sprang up, for example, in the outlying and predominantly working-class districts of Carabanchel and Cuatro Caminos. Each *radio* sent

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<sup>20</sup> Santos Juliá, Orígenes del Frente Popular en España (1934-36), (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Madrid, 1979) p. 75

<sup>21</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 51

<sup>22</sup> Leonor Estévez Varela, La vida es lucha, (A-Z Ediciones y Publicaciones, Madrid, 1993), p. 42

delegates to the Madrid Provincial Committee of the Party, which was by virtue of its relative numerical strength, one of the most active of the local communist organisations. In spite of the geographical proximity of the local cells and radios to the National leadership of the Party, there appears to have been little in the way of fraternisation between the lowest and highest levels of the Party, reinforcing the democratic centralist structure of the Party, whereby directives and instructions were cascaded down to the lower levels of the Party via the Provincial Committee and the *radios*.<sup>23</sup>

The PCE and the UJC as a whole were characterised by the youth of their members and Madrid was no exception. In fact the age profile of the communists in Madrid reflected the changing demographic and socio-economic structure of the city, fuelled by the construction boom of the 1920s. In 1930 almost thirty-nine percent of all men and (a little more) of all women in the capital were aged between 15 and 34 years old. The relative youth of the population was the result of a massive influx of outsiders in the previous thirty years, but above all in the 1920s, when Madrid and its surrounding areas received almost 240,000 immigrants from other parts of Spain. This population had to look for work primarily in the unskilled service sector, the men particularly in the construction industry, and the women in domestic service or industry. Of a population of 952,842 in 1930 in Madrid, around 80,000 were employed in construction.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See for example, Estévez, La vida es lucha, pp. 37-132

<sup>24</sup> Santos Juliá, De La Fiesta Popular, pp. 59-64

These young members of the urban working class were the very constituents that the PCE preferred to recruit: Isidoro Diéguez and Luis Giorla of the Madrid PCE Provincial Committee both worked in the construction industry in the city, although Giorla found himself more often out of work than employed.<sup>25</sup> The PCE's preference for the urban working class originated in the Party's self-perception as the vanguard of the proletariat. This self-image was in turn, influenced by the Comintern directives, themselves the embodiment of Lenin's emphasis on the role of the 'vanguard party.'<sup>26</sup> The Party sought to recruit the most politically conscious members of this class, in order to lead it. PCE documents throughout the 1930s reveal a certain disposition towards achieving a party of genuine workers, as if there were a suspicion of those who were not, although officially the party always had their doors open to other sectors.<sup>27</sup> This continued to be true in wartime. An internal bulletin of the Madrid PCE Provincial Committee in October 1936 concerned with the recruitment for the defence of Madrid outlined the need

...to recruit the most conscientious and resolute workers from construction, metallurgy, railways, from workers who have the most developed class consciousness and who can therefore offer the best guarantees for security when mobilised.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, p. 98

<sup>26</sup> Robert Service, *Lenin: A Political Life: Vol II Worlds in Collision*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 82-86

<sup>27</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 63 The delegation at the Fourth Party Congress in 1932 can offer some insight into the actual social composition of the party: 77.5% were workers, 11.7% were employees and 8.2% were intellectuals. The category 'workers' included agricultural as well as industrial workers, and among the latter numbered employees of large and small firms, artisans and independent workers, as well as women.

<sup>28</sup> Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España (henceforth AHPCE), microfilm xv, apartado 189, 'Nuestras Tareas: Boletín Interior del Comité Provincial de Madrid, 6 October 1936'.

Comintern directives were driven by Lenin's insistence on the universal applicability of the Bolshevik model.<sup>29</sup> Because of this, the Comintern allowed pre-determined theoretical formulations to impede its analysis of the Spanish Republic. It was assumed that Spain was going through the bourgeois-democratic preliminary stage to the socialist, proletarian revolution.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Marxist communists had made the same mistake as their socialist counterparts, who had assumed that the new republican leaders of the Second Republic represented the progressive bourgeoisie, who would lead the first stage of the revolution, while the landed oligarchy, most powerful during the restoration monarchy of 1875-1931, was a mere remnant of feudalism. But they were mistaken on both counts: firstly the republican elements in government were mainly individuals rather than representative of a group or group of interests, furthermore, not all were progressive or liberal. Secondly, Spain was no longer a feudal society, but an agrarian capitalist one. In the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie had been virtually bought off by the disentailment of church lands and the release of common lands onto the open market. This process saw much urban mercantile capital invested on the land and the consolidation of large latifundia estates. The 'progressive bourgeoisie' were in fact already tied to the old oligarchy, and henceforth the latifundios were part of the capitalist system, not feudal vestiges.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Agnew & McDermott, The Comintern, p. 8

<sup>30</sup> Heywood, Marxism, p. 134

<sup>31</sup> See Preston, Coming, p. 25 and Heywood, Marxism, pp. 114-15 for a discussion of this misapprehension by Spanish Marxists; for the Comintern position see Elorza and Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, pp. 141-51

Such heavy emphasis on a theoretical blueprint for society meant that the communist movement in Spain targeted the wrong audience. Or rather, it targeted the same audience as the socialists and the anarcho-syndicalists (the latter was especially true of Cataluña, where the CNT had a strong urban foothold). Yet across Europe - and Spain was no different in this respect - the socialist parties were the main representatives of organised workers, and thus the communist parties were encouraged by the Comintern to compete with the socialists to capture this militancy for their own organisations. To this end Comintern practice between 1921-28, the United Front, or *frente único*, had centred on attacking and discrediting the essentially reformist socialist leaderships, whilst at the same time forging links with rank-and-file members from other political and syndical organisations with the aim of pursuing joint objectives.<sup>32</sup> This often presupposed not only communist propaganda activities but also the creation of clandestine 'cells' in reformist political and trade union organisations.<sup>33</sup> In Spain, unsurprisingly these tactics served to foster both socialist and anarchist mistrust of the communist movement, which was only partially overcome with the subsequent unity initiatives, although *frente único* did enjoy a certain degree of success in Asturias where communists supported the anarcho-syndicalists Sindicato Único Minero (SU), against the socialist-led Sindicato de los Obreros Mineros de Asturias (SOMA).<sup>34</sup> However, the development of the United Front into the more sectarian policies of the 'Third Period' (including the concept of 'class against class') from around 1928, intended as a means of promoting the independent identity of the Communist

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<sup>32</sup> Agnew & McDermott, The Comintern, p. 27

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 32

<sup>34</sup> Adrian Shubert, 'The Epic Failure: The Asturian Revolution of October 1934' in Revolution and War in Spain 1931-39, (ed.) Paul Preston (Methuen, London, 1984), p.117

Party, saw the formation of a separate national union federation, the CGTU (Confederación General del Trabajo Unitario, General Unitarian Confederation of Labour) in the summer of 1933.<sup>35</sup> The resultant splitting of the SU in August 1931 undermined previous achievements and led to the collapse of anarcho-syndicalist and communist support among the miners during 1932 and 1933.<sup>36</sup> These were key elements in explaining the limited implantation of the PCE. As a political entity it had to compete with anarcho-syndicalism and socialism for political space. Those that seek to explain communist gains particularly in Spain and particularly during the Spanish Civil War as primarily the work of external Soviet machinations would do well consider the national political context.<sup>37</sup>

During the republican period the PCE in Madrid initially struggled to make inroads among its target audience. Although the beginning of a socially differentiated working class existed in 1930, Madrid was effectively a proto-industrial city with a strong artisan culture, and its skilled tradesmen were largely organised and represented by the socialist UGT.<sup>38</sup> By way of illustration, in the capital, all manner of people from a wide variety of social sectors had voted for the republican-socialist coalition. Even the employers' organisation of cafes and bars had claimed for themselves the title of 'working class' in contrast to the 'opulent capitalists' or 'great landowners'. These were the real enemies, while employers and proletarians were members of the same class, defined by their labour. Although the PCE maintained the language of class, which it

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<sup>35</sup> Elorza and Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, p. 178

<sup>36</sup> Shubert, 'The Epic Failure,' p.122

<sup>37</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 14 Certainly for the pre-war Republican period Cruz asserts that the trajectory of the PCE must always be understood in constant reference to the existence of anarcho-syndicalist, anarchists and socialists in Spain, and this is equally relevant during the war.

<sup>38</sup> Santos Juliá, De la Fiesta Popular, p. 22



continued to do until 1935, aspiring to represent the working class, it struggled to make headway in such an environment.<sup>39</sup>

The PCE, with its limited financial resources and lack of infrastructure, found it hard to compete with the UGT for members. The UGT, supported by the socialists in government, had its own premises in the Casas del Pueblo, well-developed cultural and educational networks and established methods for the settlement of labour disputes. However, the UGT in Madrid tended only to represent skilled workers, leaving opportunities for other groups to recruit from the unskilled and increasingly unemployed sectors, left in poverty after the collapse of the construction boom. The CNT, with its preference for direct action gained most from these constituents, partly among construction workers, but the PCE also began to make small inroads.<sup>40</sup>

Between March 1932 and March 1933 membership figures indicate a rise in members both in Madrid and nationally: the party grew from 11,756 to 19,489, giving way to a period of stagnation in 1934, and reaching a peak of just less than 20,000 between March and May 1934, which represented only a 2.65% increase on April 1933. Although the PCE could be unwelcoming to those it regarded as non-genuine working class (that is, non-industrial or unskilled labour), the party's growth actually came in areas and occupations where working class organisations were at their weakest: for example among the unorganised trades in Andalusian cities such as Sevilla or Córdoba, rather than the industrial heartlands of Asturias and Cataluña. Many were engaged in

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<sup>39</sup> Rafael Cruz, 'Del Partido Recién Llegado al Partido de Todos: El PCE, 1920-1939,' Paper given at the I Congress on the History of the PCE, 1920-77, Oviedo 6, 7 & 8 May 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Santos Juliá, De la Fiesta Popular, pp. 9-10, p. 36, p. 56, p.67, p. 173, pp. 188-90

insecure occupations or were unemployed, the latter being targeted by the party's recruitment drive during 1933. In this respect the PCE was similar to the German KPD, who as the second largest in the Comintern was also the party of the unemployed 'par excellence,' and the British CPGB, which had firm links with the unemployed.<sup>41</sup> However, the PCE's recruitment figures should be treated with a little caution. The political and social marginality of the unemployed could make them a volatile constituency. Tim Rees has identified a core of committed militants surrounded by shifting numbers of essentially temporary members who dropped in and out of the Party, which could skew membership figures. Cruz has also identified fluctuation as a constant problem of the PCE and other communist parties, which the Spanish leadership blamed on the lack of political education and the absence of control in the cells. Members might cancel their membership on realising that they had dues arrears. Furthermore, these cancellations were not always registered by the local organisations causing further ambiguity in membership figures. Local organisations often lacked an enthusiastic, disciplined militancy, but such patterns help us to understand that the PCE in this period must have had more sympathisers than the figures show.<sup>42</sup> Such a trend is borne out by Ibárruri's personal experiences in Madrid of numerous non-partisan working people offering to assist her in small but valuable ways.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dick Geary, 'Unemployment and Working-Class Solidarity: The German Experience 1929-33', in The German Unemployed. Experiences and Consequences of Mass Unemployment from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich, (eds.) Richard J. Evans and Dick Geary (Croom Helm, London & Sydney, 1987), pp. 261-62, p. 267; Paul Corthorn, 'Labour, the Left, and the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s,' The Historical Journal, 48, 1 (2005), p. 190

<sup>42</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks' p. 194; Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 61-62

<sup>43</sup> Ibárruri, El único camino, pp. 143-44, pp. 210-212

Party figures for Madrid reflect this fluctuating membership: although the Party in the capital grew from 700 in 1932, reached a peak of 1,400, and then decreased to around 1000 militants in mid-1933, no fewer than 4,000 members had actually passed through the Party in the two previous years. But in contrast to the national Party, where new recruits often came from outside the urban working-class, in Madrid Party membership tended to reflect the PCE's preference for industrial workers, although there was a prominent intellectual element in the Party in the capital. A party membership report from 1932 reported that

Less than 1 per cent are not workers in the main areas of party strength.

Madrid has a higher figure of intellectuals but the non-workers are still

less than 5 per cent.<sup>44</sup>

The greater intellectualism of the communist movement in Madrid was in turn reflected in the Party's youth movement which university students such as Manuel Tagüena Lacorte and Fernando Claudín had joined in 1932. Furthermore, although the communist movement did attract some members of the PSOE/UGT or the CNT, prior to 1936 when the party began to expand massively, for the majority of new members, like Tagüena Lacorte and Claudín, communism was their first choice. Among young people communism appeared to have had a greater appeal than the other more established organisations, accounting for the relatively greater growth of the UJC compared to the adult party. The UJC increased from 4,050 in March 1932, to 8,846 in November

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<sup>44</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks,' p. 195

1932, reaching 11,275 in June 1933. With some fluctuation over the next 14 months, in September 1932 it also claimed 11,275 members.<sup>45</sup>

The communist movement's preference for industrial workers was also reflected in the types of activities its militants were involved in. Leonor Estévez, a young female member of the UJC began her militancy working for the Legazpi *radio*, in 1932, in the modest area where she lived. As she gained experience and became a competent and trusted militant she was moved, in 1933, to *Radio Sur* where she worked as part of their committee as head of the Women's Secretariat. *Radio Sur* at that time was the most important of the communists' district committees as this area had the greatest industrial implantation with many large factories and workshops. In this district the communists counted on many female employees at the city's tobacco factory as well as numerous construction workers. According to Estévez, at the end of 1933 and into early 1934, the *Radio Sur* had achieved some success with the creation of organised cells in all the factories and firms within the district, and had created many more district cells.<sup>46</sup>

However, although the PCE and the UJC did make some gains in the early republican period, the organisations were still plagued by sectarianism, and were restricted in both policy and organisational terms by the Comintern. The PCE, like many groups on the Left, failed to respond adequately to the reality of Spain as a predominantly rural country. Patterns of land ownership and agricultural exploitation differed vastly depending on the geographical area. In

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94, Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 56

<sup>46</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, pp. 49-50

the north and on the tableland of Castilla-La Vieja (the Meseta), the agrarian norm was the peasant smallholder or tenant farmer, who tended to be conservative in politics and frequently religious, while in the centre-south (Castilla-La Nueva downwards) the dominant form of landholding was the latifundio, vast estates run mainly by bailiffs in the absence of their aristocratic owners and farmed by virtual armies of landless day labourers. In contrast with the peasant smallholders or tenant farmers, these landless workers were often fiercely anti-clerical. As protest tended to occur at the isolated level of the village, organised trade unions and workers organisations had made only limited inroads before the arrival of the Republic. Given this, and coupled with the prevalent anticlericalism of the labourers, anarchist ideas and direct action as a means to settle local grievances were popular. With promises of land reform under the republican-socialist coalition elected in 1931, many in the south flocked to the socialist land workers union (FNTT), founded in 1930,<sup>47</sup> limiting the political space open to the PCE.

Paradoxically, through presenting itself as a serious revolutionary alternative to both socialism and anarchism, the PCE was able to make some membership gains in 1932 and 1933. The experience of the PSOE in government and its failure to implement radical social and economic reform had discredited the socialist movement to a certain extent in the eyes of its adherents.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the anarchists, disorganised attempts at revolution resulting in failed

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<sup>47</sup> Helen Graham, The Spanish Republic at War 1936-1939, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002) p. 42

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion see especially Preston, Coming, chapter three, and Graham, The Spanish Republic, chapter one.

insurrection attempts in 1932 and 1933,<sup>49</sup> had a similar effect on some of its traditional constituents.

On the whole, however, the Party made only limited gains. Some workers were attracted by the Soviet vision, but few understood the ideological basis of this in reference to Spain. In communist strategy the bourgeois-democratic revolution (which the PCE should lead) would begin with the installation of a workers' and peasants' government, the class character of which was fairly ambiguous. Once this was installed the socialist revolution – the dictatorship of the proletariat – could begin. Even among militants, the difference between these two stages was insufficiently clear. Furthermore, the means by which the workers' and peasants' government would be brought about, through the election of delegates at places of work through specially created channels known as soviets, (which would naturally be under communist direction) caused much confusion and misunderstanding, not least because to most militants, these were a strange and foreign phenomenon. Soviets could only come about after factory committees were created and the committees presupposed the formation of factory 'cells'. Yet many in the Party did not fully grasp the necessity or role of such 'cells' in bringing about the revolution. In general communist factory cells had insufficient implantation in the large factories and little influence.<sup>50</sup> In reality, the PCE's factory cells comprised about one third of militants, while the other two thirds were district cells, relating to places of

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<sup>49</sup> Such as the uprising in January 1933, which provoked the massacre of peasants by Civil and Assault Guards at the small town of Casas Viejas: Jerome R. Mintz, The Anarchists of Casas Viejas, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1994), pp. 177-226

<sup>50</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 280-82; Fernando Claudín, The Communist Movement. From Comintern to Cominform, trans. Brian Pearce and Francis MacDonagh, (Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1975), pp. 212-13

residence rather than work. The communist union, the CGTU was also relatively weak vis-à-vis the UGT and CNT. Concrete membership statistics are problematic, and although contemporary communist sources put affiliates to the CGTU at around 144,000 in March 1934, such claims are certainly exaggerated.<sup>51</sup>

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The policy of *frente único* from below also alienated some workers from the party and caused much confusion in the Party. The communist press contains numerous references to 'errors' committed in the application of the policy, usually because *frente único* had been achieved 'from above' rather than 'from below'. Local organisations were often confused by the leadership's praise for pacts concluded in localities such as the *frente único* agreed in Zamora between the UGT, PSOE, FJS, PCE and UJC on 30 January 1934.<sup>52</sup> The Party even went so far as to expel José Antonio Balbontín from the Central Committee in spring 1934, for his disapproval of the term 'social fascism', and his advocacy of unity with socialists and anarchists from above and below to fight fascism.<sup>53</sup> His expulsion did cause disquiet among some in the Party leadership such as Ibárruri, who wondered at the prudence of the continual confrontation with other forces on the left advocated by the Comintern, hinting at dissent in what was otherwise a strictly controlled organisation.

As a small relatively well-controlled organisation during the Second Republic the party was able to highlight and move to correct such deviations from official

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<sup>51</sup> Santos Juliá, La Izquierda del PSOE, 1935-36, (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Madrid, 1977) pp. 175-76

<sup>52</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 192

<sup>53</sup> José Antonio Balbontín, La España de mi experiencia, (Colección Aquelarre, Mexico, 1952), p. 280

policy relatively quickly and easily, but this would prove to be less straightforward under conditions of war. During the conflict the expansion of the Party, with new members drawn largely from the politically inexperienced, caused anxiety amongst the party leadership who largely lacked the resources to rectify the situation, and affected the extent of party control over those it claimed as members. The reintegration of previously expelled militants, such as Balbontín, after the outbreak of war, would also cause problems for the leadership. Although he was welcomed back to the Party, Codovilla continued to regard him as a 'Trotskyist'.<sup>54</sup>

The Party's strict organisational structure and ideology could also be unappealing to many outside the movement, and became unpalatable even to some inside it. Stricter control by the Comintern and the transference of practices developed in the Russian Party meant that by the 1930s a distinctive internal party culture had evolved which set communist parties apart from other political groups. One aspect of this was the practice of self-criticism. This was the means by which a member of the party recognised his or her error, either verbally or in written form, before party superiors, rather than the peer group. This act invalidated previous political positions and confirmed the pre-eminence of the party organisation over the militant. It also performed the essential functions of freeing the militant from blame, through his acceptance of Party norms, of consolidating the Party hierarchy, and of highlighting errors in the body of the organisation in order that these could be uncovered and corrected. The authority invested in the Comintern since the early 1920s to remove non-

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<sup>54</sup> Balbontín, La España de mi experiencia, pp. 361-63



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<sup>54</sup> Balbontín, La España de mi experiencia, pp. 361-63

conformist members of national sections had reached fruition with the expulsion of the Bullejos group. But it did not stop there. A further consequence of the 'Bolshevisation' of the Party by the Comintern saw supporters of the expelled leadership (or anyone accused of dissent) forced either to rectify their positions or face expulsion themselves. Dolores Ibárruri, now a rising star in the PCE, had been mentored by Bullejos and by association fell under suspicion.<sup>55</sup> Imprisoned since October 1931, shortly after her move to Madrid to take up an editorial role at *Mundo Obrero*, she made a successful self-criticism from gaol.<sup>56</sup>

The practice of self-criticism, far from being a requirement only at times of internal crisis, was a constant feature of Party life. At the base of the Party, self-criticisms were constant, above all for the non-fulfilment of tasks entrusted by the committee of the party cell. Sometimes, a self-criticism was not sufficient to compensate for the errors committed, and the leadership proposed the expulsion of the militant. Reasons for expulsion included indiscipline, fractional work, attempts to undermine the leadership, contacts with Trotskyists, cowardliness, or attacks on the morale of the Party. The most common of these was that of fractional work, by which is meant the assumption of a position by a militant on a given subject which was different from that held by the leadership. Once a militant was expelled he could expect no further contact with the Party, nor was his name mentioned, except to insult.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 83, p. 191

<sup>56</sup> Dolores Ibárruri, *El único camino*, pp. 135-144. She had been imprisoned for having given refuge at her house in Somorrostro to a Communist implicated in confrontations with socialists in Bilbao.

<sup>57</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, pp. 83-85 He describes self-criticism as 'one of the most significant ritual phenomena' of the organisation.

The communist movement also demanded a certain moral rectitude, an irreproachable conduct. A good militant should neither drink, nor gamble, nor dance. The militant who acquired vices might turn into an agent provocateur.<sup>58</sup> Such self-discipline was difficult, especially for the youth members. Manuel Tagüena Lacorte, complained that as a communist delegate to a student conference in 1933, he slept little because by day he and his comrades went to the official assemblies and at night they held meetings as members of the revolutionary opposition. They were under a lot of pressure and were expected to adopt austerity in their pastimes and in their dress which he considered completely inappropriate given that most of them had not reached twenty.<sup>59</sup>

Militants were expected to sacrifice themselves for the Party: indeed sacrifice was essential to achieve the revolution. They were expected to give money to support the 'funds of struggle', and to forsake friends or family if their beliefs were at odds with party ideology. There were cases where the Party asked its militants to make difficult choices: For example, one engineer was asked to work at the Mundo Obrero press, leaving a well-paid position and breaking contact with his family.<sup>60</sup> In fact the best reference for a communist consisted in having passed some sort of test of sacrifice for the Party. The most powerful of these resided in the experience of torture and prison, provided one did not break one's silence and denounce one's comrades.<sup>61</sup> The greater social liberty afforded to the Party in the early republican period meant that the party was free

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88

<sup>59</sup> Manuel Tagüena Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras*, (Planeta, Barcelona, 1978) pp. 36-37

<sup>60</sup> Letter to party leadership, Madrid, 22 Jan 1934, reproduced in Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 85

<sup>61</sup> Rafael Cruz, 'Como Cristo sobre las aguas. La cultura política bolchevique en España' in *Ideologías y movimientos políticos*, (ed.) Antonio Morales Moya (Sociedad Estatal España Nuevo Milenio, Madrid, 2001) p. 193

to campaign openly and recruit new members, which undoubtedly boosted its membership. However, it was at times, still dangerous to be a communist, as Leonor Estévez testifies in her memoir. In organising demonstrations communists often fell foul of the Republic's law and order legislation. In 1935 she spent several months in Ventas prison as a political prisoner. This culture however, was not unique to the Republican period, nor indeed to Spain. It was an important feature of communist practice under Franco and of the resistance movements of the Second World War, and beyond.<sup>62</sup>

During the civil war Dolores Ibárruri would popularise this discourse of communist sacrifice.<sup>63</sup> Her broadcasts to the people of Republican Spain were punctuated by the language of combat and the concomitant sacrifice that it would require: the same night she learned of the uprising in Morocco of the army of Africa she launched the combat slogan of the Republic '*No Pasarán*'. Later she would declare '*¡El pueblo español prefiere morir de pie a vivir de rodillas!* (Better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees).<sup>64</sup>

This austerity of internal Party culture did not attract many Spaniards, though for some it was this culture which set the party apart from other working-class groups. The concept of 'united front from below' was on the whole very popular among Spanish communists. The 'unmasking' of anarchist and socialist leaders

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<sup>62</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, p. 42; For details of the Republic's law and order legislation see Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 39; Jorge Semprun, *Communism in Spain in the Franco era. The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez*. Trans. Helen R. Lane, (Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980) pp. 44-49 Semprun, who survived both the Nazi camps and later became a clandestine Communist activist in Spain under Franco, has written several books which reflect his experiences, as well as his growing disillusionment with communism.

<sup>63</sup> In many respects throughout her life Ibárruri epitomised communist sacrifice. See Ibárruri, *El único camino*, p. 88 and Cruz, *Pasionaria*, p. 36, 54-57

<sup>64</sup> Rafael Cruz, *Pasionaria. Dolores Ibárruri. Historia y Símbolo*, (Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 1999), p. 99, p. 115.

as false prophets, as traitors to the cause and tools of the capitalist oppressors, not only made sense, but was also necessary in defining what communists themselves stood for. This policy emphasised that only Bolsheviks understood the real meaning of revolution and knew how to create one.<sup>65</sup> This rigidity also enabled the party to offer organisational stability and rapidly improvised responses to the chaos of civil war. However, while this internal culture formulated by the Comintern, was adhered to by the leadership and the best party cadres, in practice even during the Republic the PCE lacked the infrastructure to control its militants. The leadership complained of 'anarchic work', fluctuation in numbers of militants, lack of discipline, irresponsibility, 'café culture' and an absence of capacity and political discussion.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the lack of understanding of the party's political line among its affiliates was bemoaned by the leadership. Consequently, the militants had great difficulty trying to make workers, peasants and sympathisers understand the party line and the ideology it was based on. To remedy this, the leadership proposed a school for militants in 1932, but this project did not achieve fruition until during the war.<sup>67</sup>

The PCE did not become a Bolshevik party during the Second Republic (in the sense that they were the vanguard of the proletariat). On the one hand, it lacked members, and remained little more than a sect for the most part, making it difficult for the leadership to be in touch with or to truly represent the Spanish working class, on the other hand a Bolshevik party required the execution of tasks at the base as much as political participation, and the party's militants did

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<sup>65</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks', p. 183

<sup>66</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 89

<sup>67</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 75

not participate adequately in the life of the organisation.<sup>68</sup> Nor did they always possess a sufficiently developed political consciousness.

### **The origins of unity and the rise of the PCE**

In the elections of November 1933, the Spanish Left had gone to the polls divided. On the whole the PCE had adhered to its non-collaborationist stance of *frente único* while Largo Caballero and his supporters within the socialist movement, in response to the more radical elements of the FJS and the FNTT insisted on the PSOE entering the 1933 elections alone.<sup>69</sup> In an electoral system which favoured coalitions, the fragmentation of the Left, coupled with the abstentionism encouraged by the CNT, meant that no challenge was offered to an ascendant Right who emerged victorious from the elections.<sup>70</sup>

There had been, however, some instances of collaboration on the Left, which set a precedent for later cooperation. While Comintern directives did not allow for alliances or electoral pacts at this stage, *frente único* permitted candidates who wholly accepted the communist platform to be accepted within a communist candidature. In this way, an antifascist front was formed in Málaga by left-republicans, socialists and communists, after the communist candidate Doctor Cayetano Bolívar (who was in prison at the time) won the first round of the 1933 elections. In the second round the *Frente Único Antifascista*

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67

<sup>69</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, pp. 130-32; Preston, *Coming*, p. 89

<sup>70</sup> Preston, *Coming*, pp. 90-91

triumphed.<sup>71</sup> Retrospective official communist histories have tended to downplay their past subservience to the Comintern. In the Spanish case it was claimed that after the expulsion of Bullejos in 1932 the party developed policy in accordance with the particular needs of Spain instead of formulating theory through the prism of the Bolshevik model, culminating in the creation of an antifascist front in 1933.<sup>72</sup> Thus, Bolivar's election was presented as the first Popular Front initiative. In reality, however, it was little more than an example of the communist movement's sectarian *frente único* policy. The labelling of Largo Caballero as a socialist traitor during these elections serves as a reminder that this policy had not yet been abandoned.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Bolivar's election was an important lesson for those on the Left because it demonstrated the advantages of unity.

Once in government, the Right began to annul the republican-socialist legislative programme. During the November election campaign, Gil Robles, the leader of the CEDA, had confirmed the socialists' worst fears when he had declared his determination to establish a corporative state in Spain. In view of the triumph of the right and Gil Robles' known hostility to the Republic, the socialist movement needed to formulate a new strategy. Indalecio Prieto and Francisco Largo Caballero, representing moderate and revolutionary positions within the movement agreed on the need for 'a defensive action' should

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<sup>71</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 169-172 In the first round Bolivar obtained 18,519 or 36.44 per cent of the votes cast. The platform of the *frente único antifascista* included appropriation of land without indemnification, a total amnesty of political prisoners, the dissolution of the Civil and Assault Guards, the dissolution of fascist organisations, and measures against unemployment. The Comintern did allow exceptions to its rule of non-collaboration with social democratic leaders where it was applicable to local organisations. Thus Málaga fitted perfectly within the orthodoxy of class against class and did not signify a change in PCE tactic.

<sup>72</sup> Ibárruri, El único camino, pp. 170-173

<sup>73</sup> Santos Juliá, Orígenes, p.1, p. 4

reactionary elements go beyond the bounds of the constitution in their attempts to annul the work of the Republic.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, the veteran UGT leader Julián Besteiro counselled inaction, a position which was rejected by the other leaders and which seriously undermined his position as President of the UGT.

Consequently he resigned and from February 1934, a twin-pronged policy was adopted: on the one hand normal activity through the legal channels of the Republic; on the other, semi-clandestine preparations for a revolutionary movement against what was seen as the growing fascist menace in Spain.<sup>75</sup>

On the international stage the rise of Nazism in Germany had demanded a change in Comintern policy, although initially the Comintern had misread the situation. The elaboration of the doctrine of 'social fascism' by the Comintern in 1929, wherein social democratic parties were viewed as collaborators with the enemy forces of capitalism, and the rise of fascism was equated with the inevitable demise of capitalism, had precluded working class unity at the national level, and the defence of parliamentary democracy. As a consequence division on the Left in Germany had facilitated the rise of the Nazi party, although it was Hindenburg who actually appointed Hitler Chancellor.<sup>76</sup> By the end of 1933 the scale of the crisis was staggering. Of 72 parties represented at the Thirteenth Plenum of the ECCI, only 16 were legal, and 7 'semi-legal'. The French and Czechoslovak parties with barely 30,000 members had become, with the exception of the Bolsheviks and the disparate Chinese party, the

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100

<sup>75</sup> Heywood, *Marxism*, pp. 137-8

<sup>76</sup> For a full account of Hitler's rise to power see Henry Ashby Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933*, (Bloomsbury publishing, London, 1997).



largest sections of the Comintern, leading the French especially to have a significant impact on the reformulation of Comintern policy.

Although it has often been argued that the gradual change in Comintern policy from 1934 was a temporary tactical shift determined by the needs of Soviet foreign policy, in fact it came about through the interaction of three separate trends, of which one was Soviet diplomacy.<sup>77</sup> Rank and file French communists pioneered a new approach uniting with their socialist counterparts to call a general strike in February 1934 in response to a violent demonstration by fascists against the Daladier government.<sup>78</sup> Similarly in Austria social democratic workers organised resistance to the authoritarian Dolfuss regime, but this had ended in bloody defeat.<sup>79</sup> Both events made an impression on the Bulgarian communist Georgii Dimitrov, who since 1929 had been in charge of Comintern's West European Bureau, based in Berlin. He had witnessed first-hand Hitler's rise to power and consequently had a less dogmatic approach to social democracy.<sup>80</sup> Shortly after his appointment by Stalin to the post of general secretary of the Comintern, he resolved the problems within the PCF agreeing that 'the walls between communist and social democratic workers must be broken down'. The French communist daily *L'Humanité* on 31 May 1934 reproduced an article from *Pravda* on 23 May which stated that it was

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<sup>77</sup> Agnew & McDermott, *The Comintern*, pp. 120-21

<sup>78</sup> M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party, a Critical History, (1920-84)* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984), p. 70

<sup>79</sup> Jill Lewis, *Fascism and the Working Class in Austria, 1918-1934: The Failure of Labour in the First Republic*, (Berg, Oxford & New York, 1991), pp. 192-201

<sup>80</sup> Agnew & McDermott, *The Comintern*, p. 124 Dimitrov had actually been arrested and tried in March 1933 for setting fire to the Reichstag, and upon his release in February 1934 returned home to a hero's welcome in Moscow.

perfectly admissible to propose united action to the socialist leaders.<sup>81</sup> As a consequence in July 1934 the French communist and socialist parties signed the antifascist 'pact of unity of action.'<sup>82</sup> Initially this Comintern change was driven by the threats posed by fascism to its national parties, rather than the international threat of fascism. By the end of 1934 however, as Soviet foreign policy began to respond to the latter, so would the Comintern.<sup>83</sup>

In Spain the rise of fascism and particularly Hitler's accession to power signalled a widespread recognition within the Spanish Marxist Left that an effective alliance strategy was vital if Spain was to avoid the fate of Italy and Germany. The most significant development from this was the formation of the Alianza Obrera (workers' Alliance) in 1933 by Joaquín Maurín, leader of the Catalan-based BOC.

In February 1934, Largo Caballero led the PSOE into a series of regional agreements with the Alianza.<sup>84</sup> But the PSOE's insistence on leading any revolutionary movement and the CNT's refusal at a national level to participate in a 'political' initiative also deprived the alliance of crucial support. The one area where it enjoyed success as a unifying entity was in Asturias, and the key to its success here was the participation of the CNT.

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<sup>81</sup> Fernando Claudín, The Communist Movement. From Comintern to Cominform, (Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1975), p. 174

<sup>82</sup> Adereth, The French Communist Party, pp. 71-73

<sup>83</sup> Agnew & McDermott, The Comintern, p. 128 Soviet Foreign Policy focussed on a search for alliances which bore fruit with the Franco-soviet Pact of Mutual Assistance, signed in May 1935.

<sup>84</sup> Heywood, 'The Development of Marxist Theory and the Frente Popular' in The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative Perspectives, (ed.) Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 123-24

Within the PCE, the sectarian policies of the Third Period were still popular. However, while the Party had been able to capitalise on the failure of the socialists in government in the summer of 1933, PCE membership figures stabilised in 1934. This was, in good measure, due to the radicalisation of the PSOE and a search among working-class constituents for alternative solutions such as the Alianzas Obreras. These developments had been brought about by the realisation among many workers that things could be even worse for them with the socialists outside government. In comparison, an isolated and marginal PCE was a less attractive proposition.

These factors, coupled with the international threat of fascism, prompted the PCE leadership to seek to revise their policies. José Díaz travelled to Moscow to present his report to the Roman Secretariat of the ECCI on 31 July 1934. In it he asked for a change in *frente único* similar to that achieved by the PCF. Approved by the Comintern, the Central Committee of the PCE met on 11 September to sanction the new line which would allow the PCE to enter the *Alianzas Obreras*.

It is important to note, however, that while this development represented the Party's first, hesitant steps towards greater unity with other working-class organisations, the PCE was still operating on the basis of a modified version of *frente único*. The communists would adopt a conciliatory stance towards social democratic leaders but they did not relinquish the aspiration of a single party of the proletariat led by the PCE. Furthermore, unlike in France where the change of direction had been largely driven by the grassroots, in Spain the PCE,

particularly at the base of the Party, was slower to embrace change. The Party joined the Alianza Obrera in Asturias at the eleventh hour on 11 September 1935, and only secured entry to the revolutionary committee on 4 October. Elsewhere however, many local and provincial organisations of the PCE had not joined their respective alliances, reflecting a communist tradition in Spain that was more leftist and sectarian. The about-turn was particularly difficult for the Catalan Communists, who were most strongly opposed to the *Alianzas*, which had been developed by their 'trotskyists' rivals in the BOC. In Madrid, this appears to have been less of an issue as the Alianzas there were led by the socialists, and relations were a little better between the two groups.<sup>85</sup>

The PSOE and PCE leaderships reached an agreement to declare jointly a general strike should ministers from the CEDA enter the cabinet, which occurred at the beginning of October 1934, with the CEDA taking three sensitive portfolios: Agriculture, Labour and Justice. In light of general European developments, the Spanish Left interpreted this as fascism arriving by legal means.<sup>86</sup> The sources are sketchy on the actual events of October. In Madrid strikers brought the city to a standstill for a few days, but the socialists were badly organised and were unable to effectively distribute the arms they had acquired. Hundreds of members of the UJC waited for socialist arms and instructions which never arrived, and many communist and socialist

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<sup>85</sup> Elorza & Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, pp. 210-219, Santos Juliá, Orígenes, pp. 71-72, Bernhard Bayerlain, 'El significado de Octubre de 1934 en Asturias. La comuna asturiana y el Komintern', in Octubre 1934: Cincuenta años para la reflexión, (ed.) Germán Ojeda (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Madrid, 1985), p. 23, Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 285, Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks' pp. 196-98

<sup>86</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p.58

protagonists were quickly arrested.<sup>87</sup> In Sevilla, where the PCE was relatively influential, fear and demoralisation characterised the militants. The two hundred members who did assemble quickly dispersed after discovering there were no arms. Only in Asturias was there an armed rebellion, with the miners holding out for two weeks. Here communists assumed leadership of the unitary committees in the days following the strike.<sup>88</sup> For the most part local communist committees were improvised and disorganised, and many complained of the reluctance of the socialists to involve the PCE in any decision-making. In Asturias, isolated through a lack of solidarity in the rest of Spain, the uprising was doomed to fail. The right-wing government sent in troops from Africa under the authority of Generals Franco and Goded, both hostile to the Republic, to put down the rebellion. A fierce repression ensued whereby 1,335 people were killed, 2,951 injured<sup>89</sup> and up to 30,000 were imprisoned, many of them tortured. Martial law was declared throughout Spain. Working-class organisations were closed down, the Communist leadership at national and local levels were arrested, and the PCE press was suppressed. Many left-wing militants including the PSOE parliamentary leader, Indalecio Prieto went into exile. The socialists were heavily implicated in the rising, although the UGT's Madrid-based executive had played no part in the Asturian events, nor had they been directly involved in the planning decisions taken by the Asturian Alianza.

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<sup>87</sup> Tagüefia Lacorte, Testimonio de dos guerras, pp. 52-55, Estévez, La vida es lucha, p. 69

<sup>88</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 207-208

<sup>89</sup> Preston, Cominq, p. 129, Elorza & Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, p. 229

## **The lessons of Asturias**

The PSOE executive was called to account for the events and Largo Caballero was tried. Fearing the confiscation of PSOE/UGT assets, Largo denied involvement, enabling the PCE to assume responsibility for the events even though its role had been marginal.<sup>90</sup> For the PCE, Asturias had allowed them for the first time to participate in a broad political initiative with official backing. Although in itself a small step, it signified a turning point in Comintern policy which would facilitate a larger role for the PCE in Spanish politics. However, it would be quite misleading to suggest that the party broke with its past policy and strategy at this juncture. In many respects the party continued to maintain its pre-Asturias line. Although officially a policy of 'united front from above' was superimposed and unity of action with the PSOE was sought in the form of formal agreements, the concept of *frente único* persisted, and the PCE used Asturias to attack the PSOE and CNT arguing that they had betrayed the workers. The PSOE rejected unity calls for the same reason they had done in the past: because they called for working-class unity but under communist leadership.<sup>91</sup>

The Asturias episode was significant though, in that it presaged the PCE's later cross-party, largely non-party political unity initiatives, which would be particularly prominent during the civil war. After the October revolution the PCE

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<sup>90</sup>Preston, Coming, p. 132

<sup>91</sup> Santos Juliá, Orígenes, pp.76-77, Heywood, Marxism, p. 154 At the end of October 1934 the Political Bureau of the PCE issued instructions to the PCE provincial committees to work for unity of action with the PSOE, amounting to a United front from above; Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 287 tells us that an Antifascist Bloc was to be led by the working class through the Alianza Obreras, whose hegemony the party sought. To this end the Alianzas should be constituted in a workplaces, localities and provinces.

initiated a campaign against the repression. Its principal objectives were: struggle against the death penalty, help to those who were victims of reprisals, and appeals for the amnesty of prisoners, all of which needed the collaboration of workers' forces and their organisations. In the first instance, the PCE created commissions of assistance to the Asturian miners and the first liaison committee with the PSOE to deal with the question of prisoners, which later organised the collection of signatures and joint strikes to try to save those condemned to death. It also created the national committee for Help to Victims of the Repression of October, composed of three socialists and three communists for the distribution of the three million francs collected in the USSR.<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, the foundation of the Spanish branch of the International Women's Committee against War and Fascism (in Spain known as el Comité de Mujeres contra la Guerra y Fascismo), by Dolores Ibárruri, although not directly related to Asturias (it predated events by several months), brought the PCE, and Ibárruri especially, to the attention of the feminist circles within the republican parties. The formation of this organisation in Spain constituted a success for the PCE because until then it had been unable to create any broad organisms of wide-reaching political and social composition. This organisation was the forerunner of the Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA), the communist-inspired, but more broadly antifascist women's wartime organisation.<sup>93</sup> Prior to the October uprising this organisation was very active, particularly in Madrid, where women from the UJC and PCE had been the driving force behind the mobilisation of around 2,000 women from

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<sup>92</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, pp. 222-23

<sup>93</sup> See chapter three below.

factories and workshops against plans by the right-wing government to mobilise reservists for the war in Morocco. After October this organisation was proscribed, but its work continued under the cover of the Organización Pro-Infancia Obrera, created by Ibárruri to take care of children orphaned or temporarily without parental care through the death or imprisonment of their parents.<sup>94</sup> In Madrid, the premises of the Pro-Infancia organisation on Gran Vía provided the communists with a legal base from which they could mobilise women and organise the Party in clandestinity.

Other non-party political or overtly communist groups also made their entrance in Spanish society around this time. The foundation of the Spanish branch of the Friends of the Soviet Union organisation (la Asociación de Amigos de la Unión Soviética, AUS) in April 1933 was designed to educate politicians and citizens in general as to the numerous cultural and scientific advances achieved by the USSR and reflected the improvement in diplomatic relations between the USSR and Spain under the Republic. In its first three months it counted on 7,000 affiliates with 14 regional sections.<sup>95</sup> Arguably it was the Soviet Union which benefited more from the creation of the AUS than did those Spaniards who joined it in the hope of finding out more about the USSR. The organisation seems to have been intended as a means of diffusing Soviet propaganda, and of accumulating information concerning politics, society and culture in Spain on behalf of the Soviet Union. Daniel Kowalsky has taken such effects to more sinister conclusions: he claims that this proves that the Soviet presence in

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<sup>94</sup> Cruz, *Pasionaria*, p.125, Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, pp. 92-93

<sup>95</sup> Daniel Kowalsky, *La Unión Soviética y la guerra civil Española, 1936-39: Una revisión crítica*, (Crítica, Barcelona, 2003) p. 136 By September 1938 affiliates number 110,000 of which 50,000 were in Madrid.



Spain was far from negligible during the war, that the fruit of the propaganda of groups such as the AUS was the birth of a sudden and notable popular fascination with the USSR, and that by the time war broke out the Russians already had a wide network of informers, collaborators and diffusers of propaganda, as well as a list of potential enemies. Yet, this type of 'conspiracy' theory is not only undermined by his other arguments which highlight the inept, haphazard and at times downright half-hearted attempts to send propaganda to Spain during the war,<sup>96</sup> but also ultimately denies the Spanish Republic and its citizens a role in the shaping of events. Communism was weak in the pre-war period, not because Soviet attempts to infiltrate by stealth had been unsuccessful but because it was not embedded in the social fabric of the nation, it did not address the needs of ordinary people and it largely failed to find political space between anarchist revolutionism and essentially reformist socialism.

Kowalsky's analysis also misinterprets the Spanish interest in the Soviet Union. Membership of the AUS reflected a general interest and fascination with the USSR, common among many left-wing sympathisers and intellectuals all over Europe, rather than any widespread implantation of the PCE or communist ideology in Spain.<sup>97</sup> Often it was the symbolism of the Russian Revolution as a metaphor for the aspirations of the international proletariat rather than the reality

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137, pp. 150-1, pp. 153-63

<sup>97</sup> On the attitude of some intellectuals and politicians to the communist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, including sections of the CNT and the British Labour movement see Jason Garner, "Separated by an ideological chasm: The Spanish Labour confederation and Bolshevik Internationalism (1917-1922)," *Contemporary European History*, 15, 3 (2006); Arthur Marwick, Clifford Allen, *The Open Conspirator*, (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1964), pp. 58-59; On the conversion of the left-leaning writer Ramón J. Sender to communism after a trip to Russia in 1933 see Elorza & Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas*, pp. 205-6.

of the narrowly-defined Soviet model which had most influence. Whilst on the campaign trail in Asturias for the Popular Front electoral coalition, Ibárruri noted the enthusiasm of the villagers for stories about the lives of workers in Soviet Russia, which she had recently visited.<sup>98</sup>

Crucially, Spanish communism did not have exclusive representation of the Soviet Union within Spain, thus enabling individuals to reach their own conclusions about the nature of the Bolshevik state. In Spain, as elsewhere there existed a literature and journalism on Russia which broke the information monopoly of the PCE on Soviet events, and reflected an interest in the USSR which pre-dated the creation of the AUS and its supposed propaganda machine. The conservative and reactionary press habitually identified the strategies of all workers' and left-wing groups in Spain, and not just the PCE, with that which was occurring in the Soviet Union.<sup>99</sup> It is such a reading which has erroneously represented Spain as under a real threat of communist takeover in the Republican period, an argument wielded for many years in Francoist propaganda to justify the military uprising and war against the legitimately elected democratic government.<sup>100</sup>

Undoubtedly, the assistance organised by the agencies of the Comintern, such as the money supposedly raised by Soviet trade union organisations and channelled to Spain through Socorro Rojo Internacional (International Red Aid,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibárruri, El único camino, pp. 226-27 Of course as with all Communist memoirs there is an element of propaganda here, but we can assume that the curiosity of the crowd was real enough.

<sup>99</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, pp. 91-92, Cruz, 'Del partido recién llegado', Juan Aviles Farré, La fe que vino de Rusia: la revolución bolchevique y los españoles, 1917-31, (Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 1999), pp. 153-168, p. 280

<sup>100</sup> See for example Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 290-93

SRI), boosted the popularity of the movement and of the PCE within Spain. In a report to the Comintern in June 1935, Codovilla spoke of 276,000 francs received for the Comité de Ayuda and 700,000 for SRI, and claimed he was expecting a total of 3 million francs. Furthermore, Socorro Internacional de Trabajadores (SIT) was involved in the evacuation to the USSR of exiled politicians, irrespective of political affiliation after the Asturias revolution. This contrasted favourably with the distinct scarcity of external socialist help. In January 1935, Julio Alvarez del Vayo was entrusted with the task of finding assistance funds in Paris by the socialist leadership. He returned with only 10,000 pesetas. The revolutionary experiment of October had not impressed European social democracy and this translated into a paucity of material assistance. In September, the Belgian Schevenels informed the secretariat of the UGT that the solidarity fund for Spain of the International Syndical Federation was 230,000 francs, of which they could only send 100,000, compared with the 4 million collected for the German socialists and 7.5 million for the Austrians.<sup>101</sup>

Comintern and Soviet financial assistance, coupled with subsequent Soviet military intervention, would seem to suggest a desire for sovietisation, especially when viewed retrospectively in light of the Soviet satellite states established in Eastern Europe after 1945. But the Spanish Civil War, and much less the Second World War were not yet a tangible threat, and communist action in this context should thus be viewed as an attempt to strengthen the international proletariat in its antifascism, while working-class and left-wing responses

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<sup>101</sup> Elorza & Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, pp. 229-32

reflected a genuine desire for unity and for self-improvement. Naturally such developments served to strengthen the PCE and enhance its prestige, but it is important not to overstate the significance of this. The Socialist International had not yet been seen to abandon the Spanish Republic, as occurred during the civil war, with its acceptance of the non-Intervention policy.

Moreover, the PCE's marked suffering from the post-Asturias state repression, precluded its evolution into a powerful political entity. Party work continued in clandestinity, with visits to prisons, collections of funds for prisoners, the distribution of propaganda and the sale of Party and Youth press. All this work was illegal, however, and if caught, militants could expect to spend at least three months in gaol.<sup>102</sup>

The brutal repression following the Asturias revolt of October 1934 helped to foster a sense of both national and international working-class and left-wing unity, which the PCE and the Comintern tapped into, and nurtured, but did not create. In many respects the broad fascination with the Soviet project was bound up with this movement, for it was concerned with the emancipation of the working classes in a variety of senses. Within Spain, left-wing solidarity was demonstrated by a united action in favour of an amnesty for the prisoners of October, with all workers organisations and some republicans supporting the National Committee for help to the Prisoners of October.<sup>103</sup> A growing rapprochement between disparate left-wing political leaders was a consequence of their experience of prison, which both encouraged discussion

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<sup>102</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, p. 93

<sup>103</sup> Ricard Viñas, *La formación de las Juventudes socialistas unificadas, (1934-36)* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Madrid, 1978) p. 37

and debate and fostered a desire for unity of action which would help achieve the amnesty.

The about-turn in Comintern tactics made official at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (25 July – 21 August 1935) created an opportunity for the PCE to engage in unity initiatives with other political and syndical entities. Georgii Dimitrov delivered the main report which formally signalled the break with the sectarian rigidity of the Third Period and ratified for the whole movement the Popular Front policies pioneered by the French Party. The new line redefined the character of communist policies by encouraging the parties to address the daily lives of the workers, to seek anti-fascist alliances 'from above' as well as 'from below' and by doing so enter the mainstream of national political life.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, progress towards unity was slow and the PCE was reluctant to completely abandoned the Third Period and accept that other working-class parties were its equals. As late as May and June 1936, Dimitrov was admonishing the PCE for its failure to abandon sectarianism. The PCE remained a marginal political force until late in 1935, and it was actually the radicalisation of the Caballerista wing of the PSOE which finally brought the PCE into mainstream politics.<sup>105</sup>

The Asturias episode had cemented the growing gulf between the reformist and revolutionary wings of the socialist movement whose antecedents can be found

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<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, it allowed for a greater degree of local initiative. Although popular Frontism was limited by the requirements of Soviet diplomacy, it presaged the evolution of a greater degree of autonomy from Moscow in the pluralist democratic 'national roads to socialism' between 1944 and 1947 and the Eurocommunist movements of the 1970s. Fernando Claudín, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, trans. John Wakeman, (NLB, London, 1978), pp. 30-64

<sup>105</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks' pp. 197, Heywood, *Marxism*, p. 152

in the experience of government in 1931-33, and which had resulted in the socialist departure from government in 1933. Francisco Largo Caballero and Indalecio Prieto, who represented the two main poles of the socialist movement, drew radically opposing conclusions from the Asturian revolt.<sup>106</sup> Largo believed that failure in October 1934 had occurred because the PSOE had been insufficiently revolutionary and therefore that it should be 'bolshevised'; Prieto, having supported the PSOE's revolutionary line with some misgivings, was now more than ever convinced of the need to regain political power through coalition with the republicans. And while Prieto's assessment was to culminate in the Popular Front, Largo's was to lead to the wholesale loss of the FJS to the PCE.<sup>107</sup>

However, this internal division in the movement was provoked only in part by a clash of political principle and tactics, in reality the disputes had more to do with organisational rivalries within the movement and the battle to control the party apparatus, than with the espousal of different roads to socialism.<sup>108</sup> This becomes increasingly evident, especially from 1935 onwards. By way of example Helen Graham has pointed out that the extreme vociferousness of the radical, pro-left-socialist sector of the youth organisation, the stance of its leadership and the hostility displayed towards the reformists in the PSOE and particularly towards their leader, Indalecio Prieto, made the socialist youth into an instrument perfectly suited to the needs of the left socialists and of their leader,

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146

<sup>107</sup> Heywood, 'The Development of Marxist Theory,' p.121

<sup>108</sup> Helen Graham, 'The Socialist Youth in the JSU: the experience of organizational unity, 1936-8' in Spain in Conflict: democracy and its enemies, (ed.) Martin Blinkhorn (Sage, London, 1986), p.84

Largo Caballero, in what was a strategic battle against the Prietistas for control of the party organisation.

In response to the reformists' support for a reconstitution of the republican-socialist alliance of 1931-33 Largo advocated a 'united workers' front' which would extend as far as unity of action with the anarchists, and which envisaged the unity of the entire working class on which any strategy of taking power was predicated. Left socialism wanted to transplant what had occurred in Russia, to Spain, but in place of the Communist Party, the history and tradition of the Spanish workers movement meant that the function of the single party would be assumed by the PSOE. Furthermore, as the proletariat in Spain was organised by syndicates, the function of the soviets would be achieved by the UGT and the anarchists who would follow them. Before the attainment of the single party, working-class unity would be patiently constructed, with syndical unity as the first stage. Given the ideological similarities between the UGT and CGTU, unification here seemed much more easily achievable than that of the UGT and CNT. Agreement was reached by the CGTU and UGT towards the end of 1935 and was weighted heavily in favour of the latter. In fact unification was actually no more than the complete absorption of the CGTU into the UGT. The UGT would not tolerate the fusion of the two unions, although the communists had asked that where the CGTU was sizeable – in Sevilla, Pontevedra and Toledo – that fusion congresses take place. The UGT merely responded that the UGT was structured by national federations, and that if the communists had an industrial federation equal to or greater in size than the corresponding UGT one, then a fusion congress could take place. As a result the CGTU accepted the

form of entry imposed by the UGT, the CGTU was dissolved and its members entered the UGT.<sup>109</sup>

The historical conjuncture, that is, the adoption of the Popular Front strategy by the Comintern coupled with the radicalisation of the socialist left around Largo Caballero allowed the PCE for the first time to fully engage with the idea of left-wing unity. In fact the Communist Youth movement had already begun to move away from its sectarian past and attempted to engage with a wide spectrum of youth, in order to organise them against fascism. In Madrid this took the form of Sunday excursions to the Casa del Campo, where militants were encouraged to bring 1 or 2 friends or acquaintances. They played a lot of sport, but also held clandestine meetings and plenums under this guise. Of course this was still dangerous and many meetings were broken up and young cadres arrested and imprisoned: the girls in Ventas prison, and the boys in the Modelo. 1934 and 1935 also saw an increase in joint Communist and Socialist Youth initiatives. They organised popular mobilisations against right-wing acts of provocation, such as the rally at El Escorial of members from the JAP (Juventud de Acción Popular), the youth wing of the CEDA. The shared experience of gaol also fostered left-wing solidarity, and popular support for Youth unity.<sup>110</sup>

However, despite the changes in strategy by the Comintern and by the Spanish communist movement, Popular Frontism in Spain began as a purely electoral

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<sup>109</sup> Juliá, *La Izquierda*, p. 174, pp. 180-81

<sup>110</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, pp. 71-87; Fernando Claudín, *Santiago Carrillo: crónica de un secretario general* (Planeta, Barcelona, 1983), pp. 23-25



alliance devised by the republican politician Manuel Azaña.<sup>111</sup> Azaña, who had been jailed for his association with the Asturias rising, undertook a massive publicity campaign upon his release from prison, to convince Spaniards, particularly Spanish workers of the urgent need to rebuild an electoral agreement on the Left. Between May and October 1935 he toured major urban centres delivering his '*discursos en campo*' (open-air speeches), which were met with a tremendous popular response. Alongside Azaña's campaign, left-wing groups organised public meetings at which speakers from a variety of parties, including the communists, made speeches in favour of unity. At the large public events across Spain prominent national political and syndical leaders, including Ibárruri and Díaz from the PCE, made speeches. In Madrid, where the PCE was particularly active in the organisation of this campaign, speakers came from all levels of the party: women such as María Teresa León and the young activist, Leonor Estévez, or men like Isidoro Diéguez from the Madrid Provincial Committee. Venues included the Barbieri Theatre in the district of Lavapiés and the cinema in Carabanchel, both working-class areas of the city. The PCE was also involved in the organisation of public meetings in the province of Madrid, for example in Morata de Tajuña and Aranjuez. These experiences certainly helped to raise the profile of the Party, and contributed to an increase in affiliates in the capital and its province. Membership in Madrid rose from around 526 in 1934 to 955 in the late summer of 1935. By March 1936 with a membership of 3,450 the Madrid PCE maintained its position as one of the largest Communist Party organisations, second only to the organisations in Asturias and Málaga, which both counted on 3,500 militants.

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<sup>111</sup> Paul Preston, 'The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain', in The Popular Front in Europe (eds.) Helen Graham and Paul Preston, (Macmillan, Hampshire & London, 1987)

Nationally the Party was also growing: the PCE numbered around 13,000 nationally by August 1935, and the UJC numbered around 5,297 in May of the same year. By December 1935 the PCE counted on 17,342 members nationally, while by February 1936, the PCE had 22,497 members and the UJC 14,000.<sup>112</sup>

The enormous groundswell of popular support for unity encouraged all groups on the Left, including the PCE and the socialist left to support the idea of an electoral alliance with the republicans. Although Prieto and Azaña were not keen on communist participation, Largo Caballero insisted on it. His demands were driven partly by a desire to tie the PCE into political responsibility (albeit indirectly) for delivery of the electoral programme, and partly to strengthen his own position with the republicans and to prevent Prieto from assuming a predominant position within the PSOE. It was agreed that the PSOE/UGT would represent on the National Popular Front Committee all those forces to its left included in the electoral pact. The signatories to the electoral pact were PSOE, UGT, PCE, POUM, Izquierda Republicana, Union Republicana, the Catalan Esquerra and Partido Sindicalista, encompassing republicans, socialists, dissident and Moscow-oriented communists, Catalan nationalists and members of the libertarian movement. In terms of candidate allocation the Left's allocation was taken from the PSOE's share with the result that the PSOE were under represented and the republicans over-represented. Prieto had

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<sup>112</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, pp. 71-87, p. 93; Ibárruri, *El único camino*, p. 207-8; Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, appendix 6; AHPCE, microfilm xvi, apartado 197, 'Desarrollo numérico del Partido desde diciembre 1935 a diciembre 1937'; AHPCE, Carpeta 17, 'Militantes del Partido en marzo de 1936'.

accepted this because he believed that a purely workers' front would not be strong enough against the forces of the Right.<sup>113</sup>

The Popular Front coalition was carried to victory in the February 1936 elections, with the promised amnesty for political prisoners and the support of CNT playing a key role in its success. However, the government formed after the election victory was a purely republican one, deprived of socialist participation because of the organisational rivalry within the PSOE.<sup>114</sup>

For the PCE, although it was still a relatively small and insignificant party, the elections signified a break with the isolationism of the past, and marked the beginning of a transition towards a populist, reformist political agenda. The Party obtained 17 seats in parliament, signalling for the first time a truly national presence.<sup>115</sup> The Party's new role afforded it new opportunities for growth and for participation in national and local politics. In embracing Popular Frontism, the Party also began to champion the cause of broad left-wing unity, which would affect its relationships with political, syndical and cultural organisations. An influx of new members would affect its internal organisational dynamic, where democratic centralism was predicated on ideological unity and tight

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<sup>113</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, pp.63-65

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-73; See chapter two below for the implications and consequences of the PSOE internal power struggle.

<sup>115</sup> A full (and reliable) list is provided in the propagandist history of the PCE by the Francoist Eduardo Comín Colomer, Historia del Partido Comunista de España, Part One. (Editorial Nacional, Madrid, 1965), p. 732 The deputies elected were: José Díaz Ramos, Madrid; Juan José Manso de Abad, Oviedo; Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, Oviedo; Cayetano Bolívar Escribano, Málaga; Leandro Carro Hernáez, Vizcaya; Pedro Martínez Cartón, Badajoz; Bautista Garcés Granell, Córdoba; Jesús Hernández Tomás, Córdoba; Daniel Ortega Martínez, Cadiz; Eduardo Suárez Morales, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; Adriano Romero Cachinero, Pontevedra; Florencio Sosa Acevedo, Tenerife; Vicente Uribe Galdeano, Jaén; Antonio Mije García, Sevilla; Miguel Valdés Valdés, Barcelona (capital); Juan Antonio Urives Moreno, Valencia (province); and Antonio Pretel Fernández, Granada.

control by the leadership over its militants. Even in Madrid, where communism's traditional base was male, urban and working-class, demographic changes in membership were occurring. Nevertheless, the Party was essentially still bound by the same restrictions and limitations which had characterised it throughout almost the entire Republican period: the adherence to Marxist-Leninist doctrines and the Bolshevik model of revolution; the strict control by the Comintern, through Codovilla, over the party; the hierarchical chain of command, whereby decisions were taken by a small executive and handed down to the rank-and-file; a membership base which contained diverse elements: the dedicated and the politically uneducated/inactive, working-class constituents as well as other groups. This framework would continue to shape the PCE as a political entity in parliament and in civil war.

## **Chapter Two. In defence of the Republic.**

The rather dramatic policy change of the international communist movement in the summer of 1935, and the PCE's participation in the Popular Front, saw the Party evolve from marginal to mainstream in a matter of months. A focus on parliamentary politics signalled a change in the *modus operandi* of communism, and in particular Spanish communism, which was accustomed to clandestinity, entryism, and even the forms of direct action favoured by Spanish anarchists. The rapid nature of this about-turn meant that, inevitably, previous attitudes and behaviour persisted. In the period following the elections, Spanish communism was a mass of contradictions most of which remained largely unresolved by the time of the military uprising on 18 July.

### **Reformism vs. revolutionism**

There was an inherent paradox in the ideas emanating from the communist camp, particularly in the first few months of 1936. Despite entering parliament, the PCE did not immediately renounce its long-held objective of the overthrow of capitalist society by means of an armed insurrection and the implantation of a workers' and peasants' dictatorship.<sup>1</sup> This was in part because Comintern policy seemed still to be evolving: on 21 February 1936 a speech by the Comintern leader Georgii Dimitrov, which was reproduced in the communist daily *Mundo Obrero*, articulated his support for both the Popular Front and the possibility of revolution in Spain, after which a Soviet government would be formed based on

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<sup>1</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 275

the government bloc of the PCE and another party (or its left wing). This was a clear allusion to the left-wing of the PSOE gathered around Francisco Largo Caballero.<sup>2</sup>

The implementation of the recent Comintern resolutions were also hampered by the attitudes of the head of the Comintern's Roman Land Secretariat, Dimitri Manuilskii, who continued to compare Spain to Russia at the advent of its October revolution. Several sources concur on the ambivalence towards democracy displayed by both Codovilla and Manuilskii: Codovilla took government instability as a sign that the revolutionary conjuncture was nearing, while Manuilskii advocated extra-parliamentary action to advance the demands of the masses,<sup>3</sup> or as José Díaz summarised it: the activity of the organisation would develop between parliament and the street.<sup>4</sup>

Part of this extra-parliamentary activity involved the training of the MAOC (Milicias Antifascistas Obreras y Campesinas – Antifascist Workers' and Peasants' Militias), whose creation pre-dated communist Popular Frontism. These militias were originally conceived within the communist framework of armed struggle and insurrection.<sup>5</sup> In line with Comintern directives, the PCE, like all national communist parties in the early 1930s, had articulated an anti-militarist stance, aimed at the protection of the Soviet Union from its imperialist enemies. It also worked clandestinely within the armed forces and towards the creation of its own militias. Until the Seventh Congress, Comintern approaches

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<sup>2</sup> Mundo Obrero, 21 February 1936

<sup>3</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista p.269, p.279; Elorza & Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, p. 279

<sup>4</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista p. 258

<sup>5</sup> Juan A. Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento en la Política Militar del PCE en la Guerra Civil, (UNED, Madrid, 1993), p. 27

to armed struggle and insurrection against the state were grounded in classic Marxist and Leninist theories. For Lenin the militias would create in the masses a spirit of combat, of confrontation with the repressive forces of the state. Yet the army's support for the revolution at the moment of the insurrection, (or at least a part of it in order to neutralise the rest) would be crucial. Work in the army involved the creation of communist cells, which, in the moment of uprising, could neutralise the reactionary commanders and attract the majority of soldiers to execute revolutionary missions jointly with the proletariat. This work was carried out by the PCE through *Soldado Rojo*, a clandestine publication within the barracks.<sup>6</sup> To this end, Juan Modesto and Enrique Lister were appointed to carry out Party work in the areas of militia and army respectively. Both had spent time at the Lenin school in Moscow in 1933 and 1934, learning Marxist theory and military strategy.<sup>7</sup>

Following the adoption of Popular Frontism in the policy of the Seventh Congress, insurrection was barely mentioned. Instead, the militias were to be formed as self-defence groups in the face of assault from fascist groups.<sup>8</sup> This transformation of the purpose of the MAOC framed the wider transitional phase for Spanish communism at this time. However, given the persistence of earlier theory, it is unsurprising that the PCE continued to articulate an aspiration to revolution. On 24 February a speech by the PCE leader José Díaz was published in which he asserted that 'the desires of all the workers are to make Spain a country like the Soviet Union and for this it is essential that a great

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4

<sup>7</sup> Juan Modesto, *Soy del Quinto Regimiento*, (Colección Ebro, Paris, 1969), p.8 p. 14; Enrique Lister, *Memorias de un luchador*, (G. del Toro, Madrid, 1977), pp. 57-59

<sup>8</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, *El Quinto Regimiento*, p. 8

single revolutionary party of the proletariat exists. The workers are invited to join the ranks of the Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> In an open letter to the PSOE, the PCE called for the immediate implementation of the pact of the Popular Bloc and the struggle for the programme of a workers' and peasants' government.<sup>10</sup> In communist strategy the democratic revolution would begin with the installation of a workers' and peasants' government (or simply a soviet government), of indeterminate class composition. Once installed this government would begin the socialist revolution – the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup> A resolution was passed at the Party plenum held on 28-30 March 1936: 'to carry the workers and peasants towards the triumph of revolution, to terminate the democratic-bourgeois revolution and to rapidly transform it into a socialist revolution.'<sup>12</sup>

The dictatorial methods of the Comintern representative in Spain, Vittorio Codovilla, also hindered the adoption of other congress resolutions. Codovilla ran the Party virtually single-handedly, leaving to the home-grown leaders the tasks of implementing his directives. His stranglehold on the Party was later heavily criticised by the French communist leader Andre Marty.<sup>13</sup> Such a paternalistic and condescending attitude, he argued, ran contrary to the spirit and letter of resolutions of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, which reduced the intervention of Comintern representatives in the internal affairs of parties and which permitted national sections of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Mundo Obrero*, 24 February 1936.

<sup>10</sup> *Mundo Obrero*, 5 March 1936

<sup>11</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 281

<sup>12</sup> AHPCE, Microfilm xiv, apartado 187, 7 April 1936. 'A todos los comités y organizaciones del partido. Circular del Comité Central del PCE'.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck & Grigory Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001), pp. 38-39.



movement to elaborate tactics in tune with local conditions.<sup>14</sup> Indeed it had been intended that Codovilla would leave Spain once the elections were over and the National Congress of the PCE had been held, thus allowing the Party to work for itself without a special representative from the Comintern. The course of events would prevent this from occurring.<sup>15</sup>

It has been argued with some justification that the PCE's activity and language was significantly moderated after Hitler's denunciation of the Locarno Pact and occupation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. For the Comintern, fascism was no longer simply a threat to its national sections, but an ever more serious threat to the USSR itself and to other European states. The seriousness with which the Comintern took the developments was reflected in its directives to its Spanish section: in a telegram from Dimitrov and Manuilskii to Díaz and Codovilla on 9 April 1936, it was stated that in all activity of the Party, the creation of Soviet power was not the order of the day. Rather the object was to create a democratic regime and to strengthen the positions of the proletariat and its allies in order to prevent the rise of fascism and counterrevolution.<sup>16</sup> However, although the expectations incumbent on the PCE were made more explicit at this point by the Comintern, the PCE in practice had already resigned itself to the fact that revolution was no longer an immediate goal. Lofty aspirations to revolution were the preserve of rhetoric rather than reality and, despite the legacy of some entrenched habits and ideas, there is also plenty of evidence to support the view that the signing of the Popular Front electoral pact on 15 January was more than a symbolic gesture by the PCE. The struggle

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<sup>14</sup> McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 134

<sup>15</sup> Elorza & Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas*, p. 266

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280-833

against fascism took precedence over the goal of revolution for the first time, and the defence of the Spanish Republic was integral to this new strategy.<sup>17</sup>

This new emphasis was reflected in various Party communications. A Party circular concerning the MAOC stated that the fundamental objectives of the militias were the 'defence of democratic liberty and to help the government in the struggle against reaction and fascism,' and additionally to lend support to the struggle of the workers and peasants: to defend the land in their hands, help in the event of shutdowns/stoppages, act in defence against evictions, and as a 'defence for the unions, workers organisations and parties and those of a popular nature.' It was also stated that the militias must act legally and to this end the Central Committee had drawn up a series of regulations.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, after the formation of the government on 19 February the MAOC presented their statutes to the authorities. They sought the right to self-defence of workers and their organisations, of their press, meetings and premises, their demonstrations and public gatherings. Approved by the government, their first official and legal activity was their attendance as defenders and guarantors of the official parade of workers' organisations and Popular Front political groups in Madrid on 1 May 1936.<sup>19</sup> The joint IC and PCE manifesto of the same date also declared the PCE's intention to defend the Republic, 'against the danger of a bloody fascist domination imposed by the force of arms and through an enemy invasion.'<sup>20</sup> An article in *Mundo Obrero* on 11 June 1936 demanded that 'we must impose

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<sup>17</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p.289

<sup>18</sup> AHPCE, Microfilm xiv, apartado 183, 21 April 1936. 'A todos los comités del partido. Circular del responsable de las MAOC del PCE'.

<sup>19</sup> Modesto, *Soy del Quinto Regimiento*, p. 16

<sup>20</sup> AHPCE, Carpeta 17, *Manifiesto del I.C y PCE: Todos unidos contra la Guerra y Fascismo*, 1 May 1936, p. 24. The Republic was to be defended despite its bourgeois character and inequalities.

republican order' as disorder allowed provocateurs, assassins and forces of the Right to operate.

Furthermore, once in parliament, the Party's deputies were in the main absorbed in attending to the personal petitions of numerous workers who asked for their help, whether it was for injustices committed in the *bienio negro* (the two years of repression following the October uprising) or out of personal necessity, for example access to work.<sup>21</sup> The Party's parliamentarianism certainly raised its profile, particularly in Madrid, as communist deputies became known for the assistance they gave to ordinary people. To an extent, the Party's position as relative outsider to conventional politics may have encouraged a perception of the Party as more approachable and more energetic than some of the other organisations on the Left. Dolores Ibárruri has claimed that she and her colleagues were frequently involved in the resolution of disputes on behalf of the poorest sectors of Madrid society, often because other politicians would not get involved:

When parliament opened its doors, great numbers of delegations from towns and villages, especially from the provinces, arrived daily to petition their deputies for aid. But to the discredit of some deputies, the people were not always received by the men for whom they had voted.

Consequently, an interesting phenomenon began to take place. When a delegation arrived from the provinces and was not received by its own

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<sup>21</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p.259

deputies, who would plead urgent work, a meeting of heavy duties, the people would be so disappointed and disheartened that the parliamentary ushers began to advise them to talk to the communist deputies.

At first the visitors were uncomfortable and wouldn't venture to do this since they hadn't voted for the communists; they belonged to another Party. In a short while, however, asking to speak to a communist deputy became routine procedure.<sup>22</sup>

Of course there is a propagandistic element to Ibárruri's example. But it serves to demonstrate the Party's encouragement of the masses in the utilisation of the parliamentary channels, which in turn reflects the PCE's new political position as a parliamentary party. The communists now recommended that all popular demands pass through governmental and Popular Front organisms, including the Town Halls.<sup>23</sup>

Ibárruri's account illustrates both the nature of communist engagement in traditional politics and the types of people the PCE was interested in. The energetic 'hands-on' approach was symptomatic of the youthfulness of the Party, both in terms of the physical age of its leaders and their relative lack of experience. This youthfulness was particularly apparent among the leadership, and would be an important asset for the Party during the civil war. José Díaz was just 40 in 1936, and had only assumed the Party leadership in 1932;

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<sup>22</sup> Dolores Ibárruri, They Shall Not Pass, (International Publishers Co., 1984) pp. 171-2; El único camino, p. 237

<sup>23</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p.289

Ibárruri at 41 was the veteran of the organisation, but only began to have an important role after the declaration of the Republic in 1931; Pedro Checa, the organisation secretary of the Party was 26 and had been in the post for only a year.<sup>24</sup> The lack of an established *mode d'emploi* meant that the Party and its deputies could adopt a more flexible approach to issues, but this also meant that their initiatives and solutions were to a certain extent improvised, a characteristic which would dominate their responses in the early period of the conflict. The sheer lack of personnel in the Party also made for a very different organisational and operational structure from that in for example, the PSOE. In the PCE leaders had multipurpose roles involving the Party organisation and the implementation of Comintern policy, as well as being involved in the Party press, public speaking and representing the Party in parliament. This small Central Committee and even smaller Politburo, which were responsible for running the Party, was an asset, particularly in terms of allowing innovative responses to situations, but would also be a drawback during the war, where it placed the small leadership under enormous pressure and impeded the formation of reliable Party cadres.

Once the PCE signed up to the Popular Front alliance, the concept of political unity as a means to defend the Republic pervaded the PCE's activity, and would become increasingly important during the course of the war. On its electoral victory in February 1936, the communist leadership professed support for the government and for the Republic. In a speech on 24 February 1936, José Díaz outlined the lessons that could be learned from the electoral victory,

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<sup>24</sup> Claudín, Santiago Carrillo, p. 46

that is that left-wing unity produced concrete political results, but he cautioned against 'exaggerated optimism'. For him

...[the] triumph of the Popular Bloc represents nothing more than the start of the struggle against reaction and fascism. If the bloc is broken up, it is clear that reaction and fascism will take courage anew and.... will launch the acquisition of their criminal objectives. This cannot and will not be.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of political unity clearly referred to the resolutions adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress. There it had been advocated that the choice between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy had been superseded, in the short-term at least, by one of bourgeois democracy or fascism. Therefore the defence of bourgeois democratic liberties had to be secured by 'a broad, people's antifascist front,' with 'the proletarian united front' of communist and socialist workers at its heart, and these would be strengthened by a 'fighting alliance' with the peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie.<sup>26</sup> Thus the communist movement sought to mobilise as many different sectors of society against fascism around the nucleus of a single proletarian party.

In Spain, this policy was pursued through communist support for the broad antifascist unity enshrined in the Popular Front, the creation by the PCE of antifascist groups, and the promotion of working-class political unity. To this end

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<sup>25</sup> Mundo Obrero, 24 Feb 1936.

<sup>26</sup> McDermott & Agnew, The Comintern, p. 131

the Party tried to organise peripheral groups such as the unemployed, and to create agricultural federations in Galicia, independent of the UGT, in a bid to attract the small peasantry.<sup>27</sup> The communists responded to socialist criticisms of their action by declaring that these were not proletarian organisations but were composed of small peasants, and promised their organic incorporation into the peasant syndicate of the UGT at the opportune moment.<sup>28</sup> An integral part of Popular Frontism for the communists was the strengthening and growth of the PCE which would bring the single party of the proletariat a step closer. José Díaz affirmed this in a speech to communist militants in the Barbieri theatre in Madrid:

Our current preoccupation is to arrive at the creation of a single revolutionary party inspired by Marxist-leninist doctrine. To achieve this it is essential to achieve an even closer unity of action between communists and socialists, in order to reach mutual understanding in tactics and political strategy, eliminating all differences between socialists and communists. One of the essential tasks for this is the strengthening of the PCE.<sup>29</sup>

Importantly, this was to be a single party dominated by the PCE. As with their acceptance into the electoral coalition, the PCE was brought closer to this goal by the Caballerista wing of the socialist movement. The Caballeristas also aspired to the creation of a single revolutionary party, but one which would be led by left socialists, rather than communists. Furthermore, from November

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<sup>27</sup> Mundo Obrero, 24 February 1936.

<sup>28</sup> Santos Juliá, La Izquierda del PSOE p. 182

<sup>29</sup> Mundo Obrero, 24 February 1936

1935 the Caballeristas had actively pursued this as a policy, and interpreted the absorption of the CGTU within the UGT as the first step in this direction.

However, unfortunately for the socialist movement, the easy success of the syndical absorption of the CGTU by the UGT reinforced the Caballerista's (mistaken) belief in left socialism's hegemony over the working class; they also assumed that a unification of the youth movement, and ultimately of the adult parties (both of which Largo Caballero rhetorically supported) would follow the same pattern as union unification, which had seen the CGTU subsumed within the larger UGT. But they failed to realise the substantive differences between syndical and political unity. The left of the PSOE failed to pick up on the fact that the Seventh Comintern Congress advocated prior unity of action before establishing the party on the basis of democratic centralism – which was simply a euphemism for establishing a single party on the basis of the PCE. In this respect, there was a certain continuity with pre-1935 communist theory. Ultimately the PCE still aspired to lead the working-class. The PCE made this ambition more explicit in a letter sent from its Central Committee to the executive of the PSOE in March 1936, which was published in *Claridad* and which asked the executive for a response. The executive of the PSOE met such proposals with silence, clear in their understanding that the PCE intended to engage in liaison committees on an equal footing with the PSOE, incommensurate with their minority status.<sup>30</sup> In such a way a new organisation could come about whose control by the PSOE would have been impossible. However, the rejection of the proposal by the centrists of the PSOE encouraged

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<sup>30</sup> Juliá, *La Izquierda*, pp. 189-95



the left to pursue it, at least rhetorically. The left-wing used the idea of unification to gain advantage over their adversaries in the PSOE, in the battle for organisational control, while the PCE, in its discussion of the single party, also advocated support for the PSOE's left-wing in its struggle against the reformists in their Party, who would be jettisoned in the creation of any single, revolutionary party of the proletariat.<sup>31</sup>

The danger for the socialist movement was that this idea had also become extremely popular with the socialist youth (FJS), which since the election of a more radical executive in 1934 increasingly favoured the 'Bolshevisation of socialism.' It was hoped that youth unification would serve as an example to the parent parties, and the leaderships of both youth organisations were involved in negotiations on this point throughout 1935. The shared experience of prison together with pressure from the base had a significant impact. The last stage of the unification process was given impetus by both the merger of the UGT with the CGTU and the advance of centrists to positions in the PSOE, above all when Largo Caballero was displaced from the executive.<sup>32</sup> In parallel, unified socialist and communist organisations, not sanctioned by their respective executives also emerged at this time: in Torre del Mar in the province of Málaga, for example, where there had been no previous organisation, the Union of Marxist Youth was created. Simultaneously unification meetings occurred all over Spain reflecting the groundswell of support for unity (and thus unification)

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<sup>31</sup> Helen Graham, *Socialism and War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 21, Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda*, p. 181; pp. 189-193, p. 192

<sup>32</sup> Ricard Viñas, *La formación*, pp. 52-3

initiatives. Unification of the FJS and UJC occurred at a meeting at Las Ventas bullring in Madrid on 5 April 1936.<sup>33</sup>

However, although the unification bases agreed that the much smaller communist youth would join the larger socialist youth movement, there were a number of unresolved issues whose potential for damage was unforeseen, but which would cause serious problems for both communists and socialists during the war. For the PCE the effective reincorporation into the Party of former communists expelled from the Party including Bullejos, who had joined the FJS in Madrid after 1932, and presided over a 'trotskyist' faction, was a problem.<sup>34</sup> For the socialists' part, the youth movement was not considering at this time any kind of separation from the PSOE. It sought to maintain its organisational integrity, requesting, for example that socialist militias and the MAOC be kept separate. The socialist aspiration to Bolshevise the Socialist Party was not a tactical manoeuvre by the national youth executive, easily manipulated by the PCE, but predicated on the belief in the strength of the Caballerista faction in the heart of the PSOE. In reality the left-wing of the PSOE was grouped predominantly in the Agrupación Socialista Madrileña, and outside Madrid they had a much smaller following, with the Prietistas dominating the federations of the North. Furthermore, particularly within Madrid, communism and anarchism were attracting parts of their traditional base. The JSU leadership would continue to support the idea of the Bolshevisation of the Socialist Party in the first months of war, and only change its policy radically after it witnessed the organisational capacity of the PCE in the defence of Madrid, with the result that

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55, p. 59

<sup>34</sup> Elorza & Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas*, p. 283

its leadership would join the ranks of the PCE and take the organisation with them.<sup>35</sup>

On fundamental questions such as the proposals of the KIM (international communist youth movement) to create a mass antifascist youth movement, the FJS leaders were divided and remained so, failing to resolve the issues prior to unification. As a result, the massive influx of new members (in the first 4 weeks alone the joint organisation increased its membership from 100,000 to 140,000), meant that the new organisation was increasingly less a party of politically educated socialist cadres, and therefore less under the control of the PSOE. The propaganda apparatus which accompanied unification and the new newspaper of the JSU, *Juventud*, was a contributory factor in the spectacular growth of the organisation. *Juventud* achieved a print run of 150,000 copies for the first issue, its character coinciding completely with the orientation that the IJC tried to give the youth movement.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the outbreak of war prevented the celebration of the unification congress which should have finally established the tactics of the JSU and named a National Committee. In its absence a unified Executive Commission was named on 9 September, which assumed all leadership functions.<sup>37</sup> The infrastructure was in place for the creation of a mass youth movement which would embrace all Spanish youth irrespective of class, background, or political affiliation, provided they supported antifascism. It would also spell the loss of the socialist youth organisation to the socialist movement, which would have

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54; Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda*, p. 187

<sup>36</sup> Ricard Viñas, *La formación*, pp.61-63

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

enormous repercussions in wartime.<sup>38</sup> It is imperative to appreciate, however, that in its relationship with left-wing socialism and the FJS, the PCE was in significant measure assisted in its goal of hegemony of the working class by those sectors themselves. The recourse to communist language which the left socialists adopted, the 'Bolshevisation of the party', the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and so forth, undoubtedly favoured the communists and blurred distinctions between the two, particularly in the minds of the politically unsophisticated.<sup>39</sup> Youth unification also reflected a substantial desire for working-class unity at the grassroots. Workers often perceived themselves as simply 'proletarian' or 'Left'. In Madrid youth unity was demonstrated in joint youth initiatives in 1935 and 1936 such as the show of youth solidarity at the funeral of the young socialist Juanita Rico murdered by Falangist gunmen.<sup>40</sup> Thus the PCE founds itself responding to a particular political and social conjuncture, which coincided with its aspirations but which was not created by it.

The Party's growth can also be seen in this light. Commensurate with its ultimate objective of creating a single party of the proletariat, the Party also sought to strengthen itself in the period after February 1936, through the active recruitment of new members. In this arena the PCE was very successful and the Party grew at an almost vertiginous pace. The stance adopted by the Comintern responded to a new world view emanating from the Soviet Union and its theoreticians, and was instrumental in carving out a new role for the PCE in its national milieu. But the Party's growth was not solely attributable to the fact

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<sup>38</sup> On the JSU's affiliation to the PCE see Chapter three below. On the nature of the wartime organisation see Chapter four.

<sup>39</sup> Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE*, p. 155

<sup>40</sup> Estévez, *La vida es lucha*, p. 72, p. 96

that the Comintern's new policy made communism more palatable. In December 1935, in line with the directives of the Seventh Congress, the PCE had launched a campaign of affiliation, but saw no significant increase in its number of members. It is important to remember that regardless of the instructions of the Comintern, the PCE did not operate in a political and social vacuum, even more especially now that it had entered into the Spanish political mainstream. Undoubtedly the rise of the Right was an international phenomenon at this time, but the economic structure of society and the political and social organisations which represented its constituent parts was unique to Spain. It was the national situation coupled with the timing of the Party's entrance into the mainstream which explained the PCE's appeal.

Between February and July 1936 the Party's membership increased dramatically, rising from just over 20,000 to 46,203 in March and to 118,763 in July. In Madrid membership stood at 12,000 in July 1936.<sup>41</sup> We do not know the social composition of the new affiliates to the Party in the months between the election and the military uprising, but a significant part of these new recruits were from outside the Party's traditional base. Many of these new recruits who flocked to the Party just before and during the civil war did so for utilitarian reasons, and had an entirely different outlook from that of the revolutionary old guard of the Party.<sup>42</sup> Some of these came from the ranks of former militants, followers and voters of Lerroux's now defunct Radical Party, a trend which

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<sup>41</sup> AHPCE, Microfilm xvi, apartado 197, 1937, diciembre: desarrollo numérico del partido desde diciembre 1935 a diciembre 1937. In this report Party statistics put membership at 22,497 in February 1936, and at 88,523 in July 1936, while another Party report puts the figure substantially higher: AHPCE, carpeta 17, 'militantes del partido en marzo de 1936' put the figures at 46,203. See also AHPCE, carpeta 17 'militantes del partido en julio de 1936'.

<sup>42</sup> Rees, 'Good Bolsheviks' p. 198

would gather momentum during the course of the war.<sup>43</sup> It would also seem that many were attracted by its more moderate policies, although it has also been argued that the antifascist Popular Front policies of communist parties across the spectrum attracted large numbers of radicalised rank and file workers who tended to take the parties' revolutionary credentials at face value.<sup>44</sup> And indeed in Spain there were large numbers of radicalised workers.

Following the victory of the Popular Front, workers became even more strident in their demands for material improvements. Frustrated by the slow pace of reform, particularly in the area of land redistribution, in some parts of Spain, landless agricultural workers took matters into their own hands and occupied estates, most notably in the predominantly latifundist provinces of Ciudad Real, Albacete and Toledo in the central region, and Jaén in the South.<sup>45</sup> Although the PCE had previously always supported the revolutionary seizure of land, within three weeks of the election victory the PCE had modified its agrarian policy, replacing revolutionary land seizures with an intensification of the application of the agrarian reform introduced by the government. It would also seem that this message was slow to reach the grassroots, as they had to be reminded of the Party's position after the outbreak of hostilities in a Party declaration on 8 August 1936.<sup>46</sup> However, given that land occupations were invariably ratified by

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<sup>43</sup> Rafael Cruz, 'Del Partido Recién Llegado'. For the demise of the Radical Party see Nigel Townson, The Crisis of Democracy in Spain, Centrist Politics under the Second Republic, 1931-36, (Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2000), especially pp. 330-346

<sup>44</sup> McDermott & Agnew, The Comintern, p. 133

<sup>45</sup> Natividad Rodrigo González, Las Colectividades Agrarias en Castilla La Mancha, (Junta de Comunidades de Castilla La Mancha, 1984?), p. 42; Luis Garrido González, Colectividades Agrarias en Andalucía: Jaén 1931-1939, (Universidad de Jaén, 2003), pp. 21-26

<sup>46</sup> Cruz, El Partido Comunista, p. 271

retrospective application of the Agrarian Reform Law, the situation on the ground was, unsurprisingly, unclear.<sup>47</sup>

The PCE's moderate position was also echoed in the attitude it adopted towards the increasing number of strikes occurring in the city of Madrid in the summer of 1936, the worst of which was in the construction sector in June and July, which at its peak saw over 110,000 workers on strike.<sup>48</sup> The increasingly volatile social situation in Madrid was a result of a complex interplay of factors: the construction boom of the 1920s and accompanying migration of workers to Madrid, followed by an economic slump which affected all employment sectors; the large numbers of unemployed with little recourse to assistance from social and cultural networks; the incapacity of the UGT to deal with the sheer scale of the problem, and the resultant shift in the balance of power between the two main Spanish syndicates in the city. The CNT with its method of direct action was able to capitalise on the more radical mood of labour relations in the city and to offer protection to those emerging sectors without representation. In the first months of the Republic, the CNT hardly counted in Madrid, its adherents numbering 6,057, with approximately one fifth of those belonging to the *sindicato gastronómico*. Five years later the majority of its Madrid members were from the construction industry, numbering 16,919 affiliates, enjoying similar numbers to that of the UGT's *federación local de la edificación*.<sup>49</sup>

The strikes in Madrid in the summer of 1936 above all reflected an attempt by the CNT to gain ground (and members) from the UGT, which had traditionally

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<sup>47</sup> Garrido González, *Colectividades Agrarias*, p. 21

<sup>48</sup> Paul Preston, *Coming*, p. 195

<sup>49</sup> Santos Juliá, *De la fiesta popular*, p. 56; p. 67; pp.78-89; p.173; pp. 188-90

represented working-class interests in the city.<sup>50</sup> The general strike, declared by the CNT on the fifth anniversary of the Republic in April, appealed to the radicalised mood of many workers, and witnessed for the first time, the participation of UGT workers, in spite of the opposition of ASM, the PCE, the JSU and the administrative council of the Casa del Pueblo.<sup>51</sup> In the construction strike of June and July 1936, the UGT leadership found itself caught between the criticisms of the reformist wing of PSOE at its loss of control of the Madrid workers and the cries of scab and traitor being hurled from anarchist quarters.<sup>52</sup> The UGT thus initially agreed its support for the strike, siding with the anarchists against the PCE, only to seek a negotiated agreement half-way through.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to what has often been suggested, it is not at all clear that the radicalisation of the socialist left occurred in response to anarchist pressure. Indeed, as CNT radicalism increased, so did the Caballeristas' tendencies to adopt more moderate positions.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the vacillation of the left socialists over the construction strike, and the radicalism of the CNT created a space for the PCE in the middle ground. The PCE consistently urged caution in respect of the strikes, both outside and inside the UGT.<sup>55</sup> In the summer construction strike the PCE strongly censured the 36 hour week that the unions demanded. It thought this unreasonable and claimed that a working week of 40 hours was fairer.<sup>56</sup> Within the UGT, this position made the communists deeply unpopular as was demonstrated at the assembly in the Madrid bullring which

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<sup>50</sup> Santos Juliá, 'Economic crisis, social conflict and the Popular Front: Madrid 1931-36' in *Revolution and War in Spain 1931-39*, (ed.) Preston, p. 154

<sup>51</sup> Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE*, p. 249

<sup>52</sup> Graham, *Socialism and War*, p. 49; Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE* p. 258.

<sup>53</sup> Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE*, p. 188; p. 260

<sup>54</sup> Graham, *Socialism and War*, p. 45

<sup>55</sup> The Communist trade union organisation the CGTU had merged with the UGT in 1935.

<sup>56</sup> Cruz, *El Partido Comunista*, p. 270 & Santos Juliá, *La Izquierda del PSOE*, p. 183



decided the petitions of the construction sector. Once the strikes had started, the PCE did side with the workers, but also spoke in meetings in favour of the pacific channelling of conflicts and concessions. Meanwhile, the Caballeristas' realisation that they could not follow the CNT to the brink with the strike ultimately reinforced the moderates' position in the UGT, which was represented by both the communists and Prietista socialists.

Most significantly, the role of moderation that the PCE had carved out for itself in these scant few months, would be, despite the initial ambiguity of its position once war broke out, its hallmark throughout the Civil War.

### **The road to civil war: communist responses**

Madrid's construction workers were still on strike when the military garrison in Melilla, Spanish Morocco rose in support of the military coup organised by a group of generals in the Spanish army. The risings spread to garrisons all over mainland Spain on 18 and 19 July with varying degrees of success. The conspirators were a small minority in the army but the rising was backed in many places by the junior officer class whose career aspirations had been curtailed by Republican budgetary restrictions.<sup>57</sup> Generally speaking, senior army officers remained loyal to the Republic. The conspirators were aided by some sectors of the Civil and the Assault Guard, and local right-wing political groups especially Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera's Falange and the JAP. In

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<sup>57</sup> Helen Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 79

Navarra the traditionally Catholic Carlists had allied themselves with the rebels on account of the Republic's anticlericalism.

Although the situation remained fluid to a certain degree, by 20 July certain characteristics of the two camps could be discerned, both in geographical and socio-cultural terms: the landowning classes and provincial petit bourgeoisie (joined by the industrial bourgeoisie if they happened to find themselves in or could reach the insurgent zone) sided with the rebels while the industrial and rural proletariat and the urban petit bourgeoisie remained loyal to the Republic. Peasant Spain, the area above Madrid stretching east to Salamanca and west to Zaragoza was in insurgent hands. Parts of Galicia had also been taken, with the cities of Vigo and La Coruña falling later. Latifundist Spain was divided. The insurgents had captured seven of the fourteen provincial capitals to which this term could be applied. In Andalucía, the cities of Sevilla, Córdoba, Granada and Cádiz had been taken, as well as Cáceres (Extremadura) and Albacete (which was quickly recaptured by the Republic). This contrasted with the urban situation: five of the country's seven largest cities were in Republican hands: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Málaga and Bilbao. Resistance continued for a few days in Sevilla and Zaragoza, but the working classes there had been disorganised. Where the insurgents had been defeated civilian resistance had played a large part. But – contrary to popular belief - in no major town had the people alone crushed the military revolt. The loyalty of the security forces was essential to victory. Equally, the police forces had nowhere fought successfully without strong civilian support. The combination of the two in attack brought victory in Barcelona, Madrid, Málaga and Gijón, quickly followed by Valencia

and San Sebastián.<sup>58</sup> The retention of the major cities by the Republic together with the failure of the insurgents to capture decisively many areas, meant that initially the Republic had the upper hand.

In Madrid, one of the conspirators, General Fanjul, had gone to the Montaña barracks on 19 July to take command of the 1,200 officers and men of the infantry and engineers regiments. They were joined by some 250 Falangists (who had been operating clandestinely in the city since the organisation was made illegal in March 1936). Here they awaited columns advancing from outside Madrid, from Getafe, Cuatro Vientos and Carabanchel. Although the news of the rising in Melilla was not published in any of the newspapers of the capital, Indalecio Prieto, the Socialist Party leader had appeared before the Cortes to announce it. Word quickly spread around the local trade union and political organisations, and many *madriños* mobilised themselves, making their way to local party and union offices. Members of the MAOC were also on stand-by. On 18 July the socialist and communist parties issued a joint statement broadcast on the radio supporting the republican government, and calling on working class people to prepare to fight in the streets. The CNT also came out in support of the Republic siding with the socialists and communists in asking that the people be armed and declared a general strike. A number of army officers sympathetic to the Republic handed out a few rifles to card-carrying members of left-wing organisations, but the republican Prime Minister Casares Quiroga vacillated, fearful of arming a radical working class rabble and, keen to play down the scale and significance of the revolt, issued a number of

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936-1939, (Middlesex, Penguin, 1981), pp. 70-1, p. 106

decrees dissolving those military units involved in the rising and relieving troops of their duty of allegiance to rebel officers.

That evening the government resigned, but its replacement headed by the Unión Republicana leader, Martínez Barrio was met with indignation from the people in the street. Unión Republicana was the party furthest to the right in the Popular Front and the cabinet, an exclusively republican one. This was widely interpreted as a betrayal of working class interests, especially as workers were already taking on the rebels with what little arms they had – in the streets of Madrid, and in the mountains of the Guadarrama to the north of the capital. Martínez Barrio resigned on the morning of 19 July and in his place Azaña appointed another all-republican government under José Giral of Izquierda Republicana who allowed the arming of the workers. Lorries were sent from the government arsenals to the headquarters of both the CNT and UGT. But the bolts for the vast majority of the 65,000 rifles distributed were still inside the Montaña barracks, which refused to accede to orders from the Ministry of War to hand them over. On 20 July the militias' siege of the barracks gave way to an assault by cannon fire. With the support of some Civil and Assault guards, the barracks were taken and General Fanjul taken prisoner, although at considerable human cost. Large numbers of the militias had not been armed and many were killed when a white flag was raised by the rebels who subsequently fired on the surging crowd with machine guns. In turn when the barracks were finally overrun many officers chose to commit suicide or were killed by a vengeful crowd. Of the 145 officers inside the Montaña, 98 died either in action, before firing squads, massacred or at their own hands. Those

that survived were arrested and transferred to the Model Prison, although in the confusion some managed to slip away unnoticed.<sup>59</sup>

Although communist sources have tended to overstate the role of the Party and its preparedness for the attempted coup,<sup>60</sup> research indicates that working-class organisations anticipated a military conspiracy. The socialist movement was divided in its evaluation of the threat. The moderate socialist leader Indalecio Prieto repeatedly warned the Prime Minister, the Left Republican Casares Quiroga, who buried his head in the sand.<sup>61</sup> The socialist left were suspicious of Prieto's warnings, believing them to be a mere tactic into winning support for his premiership of the government, which it refused to sanction.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the leadership of the UGT appeared so completely unaware of danger that they sent a large delegation to the Seventh Congress of the International Syndical Federation in London at the beginning of July.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless working class organisations maintained vigilance, and prepared themselves for combat. Socialist and communist militias kept watch in the street of Madrid, particularly around the environs of the barracks, and CNT members constituted comités de barrio (neighbourhood committees), in order to defend themselves.<sup>64</sup> The PCE had been working clandestinely within the armed forces for some time, and in 1935 had created antifascist soldiers' and corporals organisations in a number of regiments. In Madrid, the Party claimed organisations in all the barracks, although in the provinces the work and the organisation were much weaker. In

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<sup>59</sup> Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 49, p. 53, pp. 76-78; Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 79-82

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Lister, *Memorias de un luchador*, chapter four, Modesto, *Soy del Quinto Regimiento*, pp.17-26; Ibárruri, *El único camino*, pp. 263-67

<sup>61</sup> Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 80

<sup>62</sup> Paul Preston, *Coming*, p. 192

<sup>63</sup> Amaro del Rosal, *Historia de la U.G.T.*, p.489

<sup>64</sup> Pedro Montoliú, *Madrid en la Guerra Civil, La Historia, Vol. I*, (Sílex, Madrid, 2000), p. 26

the days immediately before the uprising a team of ten people maintained constant contact with the barracks, and apparently thwarted an attempt by rebel sympathisers to remove bolts from the guns at the Artillery Park. The head of the Park, lieutenant Colonel Rodrigo Gil informed the PCE of this attempted manoeuvre and the weapons were later used to arm the people.<sup>65</sup>

But while the Party anticipated the coup, initially it seems to have profoundly misunderstood the nature of the uprising and therefore failed to formulate an appropriate response. In a telegram sent by Codovilla to Moscow in response to requests from Dimitrov for information on the military uprising it is clear that Codovilla misunderstood the situation, applying to all of Spain the experience of the capital, where popular mobilisation had put down the insurrection. In the first two weeks of war, the Comintern secretariat received misinformation to the extent that the international press presented a more reliable account of events than their own representative in Spain. Similarly, the Comintern felt compelled to communicate repeatedly the necessity to defend the Republic, support the Popular Front, and to avoid getting carried away with plans for after the victory.<sup>66</sup>

In light of Codovilla's untrustworthiness, the Comintern sent Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos and Andre Marty from the French Communist Party (PCF) to

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<sup>65</sup> Lister, Memorias de un luchador, pp. 59-67; Modesto, Soy del Quinto Regimiento, p.18. Caution should be exercised with communist memoirs, as like any other personal account they seek to emphasise the individual's protagonism. Communist sources also notoriously exaggerate the role and the competency of the Party. Lister's memoirs were written after he broke with the Party, many years after the Civil War. Consequently he is particularly critical of the Party leadership, and downplays the role of his erstwhile comrades. Both Modesto and Lister provide an account of the incident at the Artillery Park, but neither mentions the attendance of the other at the meeting. It is probable that the incident occurred, but we do not know who was involved.

<sup>66</sup> Elorza and Bizcarrondo, Queridos Camaradas, pp. 292-297

Spain, in order to act both as reliable sources of information and to assist the leadership of the PCE who seemed to be struggling with the situation.<sup>67</sup> The PCF had a key role in disseminating in Europe the message that what was happening in Spain was a popular mobilisation in defence of the democratic Republic. They were also responsible for entering into discussions alongside representatives from the PCE with the other political forces on the Republican side in order to establish a communal line of conduct to crush fascism.

Besides the fact of Codovilla's ineptitude, this intervention was necessary from a purely practical point of view. Several reports from André Marty to the Comintern secretariat outlining the activity of the Party from 18 July to the beginning of October make clear that the Party leadership was a tiny force numerically and was stretched beyond its capacity and capabilities. Marty found the Party's organisational ability in complete disarray:

The party committees discussed urgent questions (collection of weapons and explosives; supplies, questions of housing and so on), but without setting forth perspectives [for the future] or still less following a general plan.<sup>68</sup>

In this period he also claims that the 'large role of the party' often faded away, enabling the CNT to 'come forward as the saviour of the situation with its ideas about the national defence council' and that the CNT was at least as dominant in Madrid as the UGT. The leadership of the Party, which was represented by

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301-307

<sup>68</sup> Radosh, Habeck & Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed*, Document 14, Report from André Marty to the Comintern on the condition of the PCE, p. 35

the politburo alone, was completely absorbed in practical matters. It had no time for party agitation or for political work.<sup>69</sup>

The second report suggested that the Party had been able to regain the initiative by the beginning of September, and was able to organise mass meetings, including the first inner-Party gathering since the beginning of the war. The leadership was beginning to act independently, but its leaders were terribly overworked. Many from the leadership headed the struggle in the first few days of the conflict. The Central Committee no longer existed due to several of its members being killed at the front; others were expelled or removed for various reasons.<sup>70</sup>

Although representative of an individual view on the condition of the PCE, and perhaps symptomatic of the communist tendency to be overly self-critical, Marty's report offers a valuable insight into the workings of the Party in the first few weeks of the conflict. Research by Tim Rees has also revealed that the Party leadership and the Comintern representatives on the ground in Spain were often overwhelmed by the situation, a state of affairs compounded by frequent and indiscriminate requests from Moscow for reports and other paperwork.<sup>71</sup>

Marty's report also depicts a rather weak organisation with a distinct lack of purpose or at least clear direction in the initial stages of the war. The fact that

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Document 14, p. 35 and Document 15, Summary of the general situation in Spain by André Marty to the Comintern, p. 50

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Document 15, pp. 50-51

<sup>71</sup> Rees, 'The Highpoint of Comintern Influence?' pp.150-51



much of the leadership was involved directly in combat, and that some lost their lives does not suggest a party contriving to assume power. This is consonant with Rees's findings which demonstrate that the Party at crucial times, at least until the arrival of the Comintern delegate Togliatti in the summer of 1937, seemed rudderless and unable to make decisions. The Party, reliant on directives from the Comintern, were let down by erratic communication channels between the Comintern headquarters in Moscow and the PCE in Madrid. As a result the Party found itself bereft of Comintern guidance at crucial times, and consequently had to improvise solutions as best they could in line with general Comintern policy.<sup>72</sup> Marty also highlighted the relative strength of the unions juxtaposed with the relative *political* weakness of the PCE which at this time reflected the very real situation in Madrid. The PCE was indeed growing at a steady pace, but as with other political parties, the PCE influence had been eclipsed by the trade unions. The CNT was challenging the legitimacy of the UGT to represent working-class interests in Madrid, as we have seen, but nevertheless, it was the UGT who was the dominant force in Madrid.

In spite of its apparent disorganisation, the PCE had, by the beginning of August, formulated a set of ideas concerning its theory of war, clearly influenced by the Comintern, which would change little over the course of the next three years. In a Party manifesto published in August 1936 entitled '*Balance de un mes de lucha*', the PCE set out its ideas about the nature of the war and what was required in order to win it. The central themes which the Party adopted for the duration of the conflict were set out here. The war was characterised as a

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-51

struggle between democracy and fascism, reflecting the preoccupations of the Comintern. It was also a war between reaction and progress, in which the Spain of science, culture, art, and workers was under threat. It was also described as a national war in which the independence of Spain was in danger (In the respect that fascism represented a threat to national sovereignty).<sup>73</sup> All these ideas would continue to be articulated by the PCE and the JSU during the course of the war. There were also clear echoes of Popular Frontism and the need to mobilise a broad front against fascism. This front, championed by the Party, particularly after February 1936, as a means to protecting the Republic from its political enemies, was even more necessary now that the Republic was engulfed in a civil war.

The Republic attacked by the military uprising on 18 July was already fragile. The government's vacillation in arming the people, even when the Republic was under attack from its enemies, only served to further undermine the faith of the masses in its institutions.<sup>74</sup> The disintegration of army, police and judicial functions wrought by the coup and wholesale desertions of personnel meant that the Republic was deprived of the means to exert its authority over its population. The organs of state, *ayuntamientos* and *diputaciones* – town halls and county councils respectively – were paralysed, not least because in the confusion that reigned across Spain during the first few days of the rising many middle-class republican functionaries and elected officials prevaricated or 'went missing', fleeing their public responsibilities.<sup>75</sup> In the majority of areas where

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<sup>73</sup> AHPCE, Carpeta 17, Manifiesto del PCE, Agosto 1936: 'Balance de un mes de lucha.'

<sup>74</sup> See Paul Preston, Coming, especially chapter seven, for a resumé of the pre-war situation.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Graham, 'The Spanish Popular Front and the Civil War' in The Popular Front in Europe, (eds.) Graham and Preston, p.114, Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 81

the coup had been resisted (with the exception of the Republican Basque Country) local committees sprang up to organise everyday life: transport, food supplies, communications and so forth. The constitution of these local committees varied and was dependent on the relative strength of the political forces in a given area.<sup>76</sup> In Madrid the declaration of the general strike had assisted the government in its resistance to the rebels but also meant that influence over many sectors of the working population had passed to the unions, especially the UGT, which was particularly strong in the capital. Union and neighbourhood committees were formed as well as collectives and cooperatives overseen by worker committees both in the municipal sector and to some extent in private industry and commerce. But this occurred on a significantly smaller scale than in Barcelona and it was driven more by practical imperatives, given the proximity of the city to the front, than by popular ideological and cultural preferences.<sup>77</sup> In terms of urban collectivisation there were dramatic differences between Madrid and Cataluña: it has been suggested that around 560,000 individuals were involved in industrial collectivisation in Cataluña, which could have affected as many as 1,020,000 families, whereas in the centre it was much less, with perhaps around 30,000 persons involved.<sup>78</sup> But while influence had passed to the unions, that is not to say that the leaderships were always in control of their affiliates. The period between the February elections and the coup was already characterised by a radicalisation of workers in the capital who were frequently beyond the control of leadership. The coup further exacerbated this situation.

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<sup>76</sup> Graham, 'The Spanish Popular Front' p. 114

<sup>77</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, pp. 96-7

<sup>78</sup> F.Mintz, Autogestion et anarcho-syndicalisme: analyse et critiques sur l'Espagne 1931-1990, (Editions CNT Région Parisienne, Paris, 1999) pp. 45-46

Agrarian collectivisation also occurred, but this phenomenon actually pre-dated the military coup, was much more widespread than urban collectivisation and was less directly related to the transfer of power in the wake of the uprising.<sup>79</sup> On the whole, expropriation of land in general was less common in the province of Madrid than in the south, where the direct occupation of lands was concentrated in the provinces of Jaén and Granada.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the central region, in Jaén local Communist Party affiliates had been involved in the occupation of estates along with other political and syndical groups.<sup>81</sup> This seemed to contradict the moderation that the PCE leadership had been promoting in the spring of 1936 and which it continued to articulate into the summer of 1936, and beyond. Despite this apparent divergence between the leadership and the grassroots, the Party's central organ articulated the leadership's line: On 21 July *Mundo Obrero* proclaimed 'It is essential to create order in the Republic' and on 30 July declared that 'we are defending a regime of liberty and democracy...it is the democratic bourgeois revolution which in other countries occurred more than a century ago.' The truth of the matter was however, that the Party's central direction had been severely undermined in the first few weeks and months of the war, and as a result, local organisations made choices pertinent to the circumstances in which they found themselves.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jacques Maurice, 'Problemática de las colectividades agrarias en la Guerra Civil' *Agricultura y Sociedad*, no. 7, 1978, p. 54

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62

<sup>81</sup> Garrido González, *Colectividades agrarias en Andalucía*, p. 29

<sup>82</sup> Marty's report (above) reinforces this view. See also Tim Rees, 'The Highpoint of Comintern Influence?' p. 149, p. 153

Within the city of Madrid, the Communist Party found itself responding to a situation in which the authority of the central government had been severely weakened. A series of governmental decrees compounded the problem, but in the face of possible civil war, in reality it had had little choice. On 19 July the government had decided to arm the people, issuing weapons to those that could be vouched for by the Casas del Pueblo.<sup>83</sup> On 21 July the government dismissed all hostile elements from their public sector posts,<sup>84</sup> thus rendering ineffective many sections of the army, police and civil service. In these circumstances new appointments often required the backing of antifascist political and syndical groups in what amounted to a rather crude test of Republican loyalty, rendered necessary by the fact that the state apparatus was riven down the middle. Civil servants, for example were required to 'reapply' for their jobs with an application to the Administrative Militias organised by the National Union of Civil Servants. Such applications were frequently accompanied by a declaration of antifascist tendency or display of credentials.<sup>85</sup> With a great number of arms in circulation and a weakened police force, the enforcement of law and order and the administration of justice passed to political and syndical organisations.

Despite a broadcast from the Interior Ministry on 26 July reminding the public that the arrest and detention of the population could only be effected by agents of authority, assault guards or civil guards, and that the function of militias was

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<sup>83</sup> El Sol, 21 July 1936, Fraser, Blood of Spain p. 75

<sup>84</sup> Gaceta de Madrid, 22 July 1936

<sup>85</sup> Archivo General De la Guerra Civil Española (henceforth AGC), Sección Político-Social (Madrid) (Henceforth PS Madrid), Carpeta 82, Legajo 995, documents 1, 9, 53, 74, 77, 78. Various individual applications by civil servants (some typed, some handwritten) to join the administrative militias.

to inform on those suspected of being enemies of the regime, party and union groups operated *checas* (secret police units) out of their local offices. Such a situation arose when the role of the militias was ambiguous. Other government organs, for example the Information Cabinet of the very same Interior Ministry on 23 and 24 July had called on the militias to help the ministry in the control of the streets, protection of buildings and the uncovering of enemies within the city.<sup>86</sup> The reality was that with police functions dislocated and government departments infiltrated by rebel sympathisers, the Republic was extremely weak and was forced to rely on these loyal elements.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that members of the PCE were involved in the administration of public order in the city and in maintaining vigilance against the Falangist elements operating clandestinely in the capital. The Party mounted its own investigations of people and their property, usually if they were suspected of being 'dangerous fascists' or members of the Falange. There are some 200 such warrants authorised by the Madrid Provincial Committee for the searching of premises of suspects in August and September 1936.<sup>87</sup> Pedro Checa, of the PCE leadership and the Madrid Provincial Committee was responsible for directives for the conduct of interrogations of those under serious arrest.<sup>88</sup> There is also documentation which authorises one Agapito Sainz de Pedro to carry out investigations in a number of properties listed as

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<sup>86</sup> Javier Cervera, Madrid en Guerra. La Ciudad Clandestina, 1936-39, (Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1999), p. 51

<sup>87</sup> AGC, PS Madrid, Carpeta 391, Legajo 4. 200 typed search warrants for use by the Popular Militias (Milicias Populares) authorised by the Madrid Provincial Committee.

<sup>88</sup> Radosh, Habeck & Sevostianov, Spain Betrayed, p. 51

belonging to dangerous fascist elements in September 1936.<sup>89</sup> Sainz was also allegedly involved in *sacas*, the removal and execution of prisoners from state prisons, activity recorded in the Causa General.<sup>90</sup> In Madrid it would also appear that communists, anarchists and socialists collaborated with each other in the detection of hostile elements.<sup>91</sup>

Daily existence was punctuated by the occurrence of *paqueos* – lone riflemen, often Falangists, firing at the militia patrols policing the streets, from open windows or rooftops. It was also punctuated by the *paseos* – a disturbing development in the administration of revolutionary justice. The term derives from the ordinary meaning of the word – a walk – and was a euphemism for execution because the *paseo* always ended in death. The Party *chequistas* would usually act after an anonymous denunciation. Motives for denunciation were varied and were frequently the result of a class and sometimes personal hatred; many people used them to settle personal scores. People could be denounced for right-wing views, affiliations or collaborations, for an anti-Republican past or for having opposed some strike action or other or for approving of the repression in October 1934.<sup>92</sup> It was sometimes the case that a person was not guilty at all, as recounted by the socialist newspaper editor and later Interior Minister Julian Zugazagoitia in his memoirs: a man about to be executed in such circumstances hands over a piece of paper which turns out to

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<sup>89</sup> AGC, PS Madrid, Carpeta 391, Leg. 4, doc 205 Typed document authorising Sainz de Pedro to search the premises listed of a number of 'dangerous fascists' in Madrid (names and addresses supplied).

<sup>90</sup> Cervera, *Madrid*, p. 97. For a discussion of the *sacas* see chapter 3 below. We should exercise some caution with books such as this which rely heavily on the Causa General. See chapter 3 below for a discussion of its origins and limitations.

<sup>91</sup> Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, (Phoenix Press, London, 2000), p. 127

<sup>92</sup> Cervera, *Madrid*, p 56

be an IOU. The man who had denounced him had owed him money. The lender was freed and the debtor subsequently arrested and shot by the same group.<sup>93</sup>

Communists, as well as socialists and anarchist organisations have been implicated in these extra-judicial killings.<sup>94</sup> It is claimed that there were several hundred *checas* in Madrid alone: 55 in the district of Chamberí, 26 in Buenavista, 73 in Universidad, 49 in Palacio, 11 in Canillas, 21 in Puente de Vallecas and 54 in Congreso.<sup>95</sup> However, although the *checas* appeared to operate entirely beyond the law, the very nature of the *checas* and their authority to carry out such justice was ambiguous. On the one hand, there were many who felt that in the absence of a judiciary that could be trusted, and with the tangible threat to the Republic ever present in Madrid, such revolutionary measures was justified. On the other the *checas* seemed to be imbued with a semi-legal authority.

One of the first to begin the crackdown on those disaffected with the regime was the official *checa*, located firstly at Bellas Artes and later at Fomento. According to various testimonies it was at the start of August that the director general of Security, Manuel Muñoz Martínez established this centre, known as the Provincial Committee of Public Investigation at a meeting of representatives of Popular Front organisations. Its mission was to investigate the conduct of

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<sup>93</sup> Julián Zugazagoitia, Guerra y vicisitudes de los españoles, (Tusquets Editores, Barcelona, 2001), pp. 90-91

<sup>94</sup> Jesus de Galíndez, Los vascos en Madrid sitiado, (Editorial Vasca Ekin, Buenos Aires, 1945), pp. 41-43

<sup>95</sup> Rafael Casas de la Vega, El Terror. Madrid 1936, (Editorial Fenix, Madrid, 1994), p. 82. This book should be treated with caution as it primarily draws on evidence from the Causa General, which the author takes as proof of definitive guilt. See also Javier Cervera, Madrid, pp. 62-66 for the most formidable *checas*, p. 67 for a sketch of the socialist García Atadell who ran the 'Dawn Brigade', and p. 70 for the implication that communists were involved in the *paseos*.



persons disaffected with the regime. It was comprised of three representatives of all the political and syndical organisations which supported the Popular Front, including the CNT,<sup>96</sup> but gained a reputation for summary executions. According to one person active in the republican regime who lived in Madrid during this period, to be taken the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* meant to be found at dawn at the *Casa del Campo*, with one's neck shattered by a bullet.<sup>97</sup> Although the usual procedure for detention of a suspect rested on a denunciation, at times the archives of the Interior Ministry were used to uncover 'enemies'. The file of Political Nuances (*el fichero de Matices Políticos*) or of the Control Lists of the General Department of Security (*el fichero de Control de Nóminas de la Dirección General de Seguridad*) contained information on *madriños* who had been members of political parties, or organisations hostile to the Popular Front and was created after the seizure of the archives of rightist organisations.<sup>98</sup>

The interrelatedness of the *checas* with revolutionary justice on the one hand and official structures on the other raises two points. Firstly, although the political leaders had called upon members of their respective organisations to assist them in the enforcement of law and order, they were not always controllable. Secondly, the whole of the Republic and its institutions were tainted by these events. Acknowledging both these points makes it easier to understand how the PCE (and the JSU) could be implicated in the occurrence of *paseos* and yet at the same time be seen to want to do everything it could to bring about the end of such arbitrary justice. As we have already seen, the

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<sup>96</sup> Cervera, *Madrid*, p. 176, p. 227, Ian Gibson, *Paracuellos: Cómo Fue*, (Barcelona, Argos Vergara, 1983), p. 42

<sup>97</sup> Arturo Barea, *The Forging of a Rebel*, (London, Granta Books, 2001), p. 547

<sup>98</sup> Cervera, *Madrid*, p. 61

communists had favoured both legal and extra-legal approaches to protect the working-class between February and July, although the leadership increasingly supported established political channels to articulate demands and resolve conflicts. It is also clear that the grassroots had not necessarily absorbed the nuance of their arguments, and believed that the revolutionary juncture had arrived. The MAOC and socialist militias before the outbreak of war had been involved in street-fighting and confrontations with the extreme right-wing youth organisations of the JAP and the Falange.<sup>99</sup> In many respects the execution of revolutionary justice once the war had broken out was a continuation of this activity.

Given the rapid influx of new members to the PCE, it is also possible that many joined the Party for personal advancement, or for the protection offered by a Party card. The Party leadership became increasingly concerned about the types of people joining the Party,<sup>100</sup> and an article which appeared in *Milicia Popular*, the newspaper of the communist Fifth Regiment, formed from elements of the pre-war MAOC, reflects concerns over the conduct of their militia:

The revolutionary ethic is just that, an ethic, it is not a lack of self-control. And revolutionary justice is also justice, not brutality or irrational stupidity. The irresponsibles do not serve peace or war. Nor do they serve the revolution.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, *El Quinto Regimiento*, p.26

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter five below.

<sup>101</sup> *Milicia Popular*, 12 September 1936.

This is an oblique attack on the anarchists who were widely perceived to be the 'uncontrollables' in Madrid, but is also a warning to its own groups.<sup>102</sup> The JSU leader Santiago Carrillo, who from November 1936 would take firm measures to put an end to the *paseos* in his capacity as Public Order delegate on the Defence Council of Madrid, talked of the embarrassment of the *paseos* for the Republic, particularly in the international arena.<sup>103</sup> Given that the Comintern was pushing the Popular Front policy of broad anti-fascist unity in the hope of securing an alliance with Great Britain and that the Republic itself was keen to foster good relations with France and Britain in the hope that they would sell them arms, it seems unlikely that the PCE leadership, or indeed the Comintern, would encourage acts of revolutionary 'justice'.

The Popular Tribunals that were officially created on 23 August were an attempt by the Republican authorities to bring a semblance of due process to revolutionary justice. These were composed of a jury of representatives from all the Popular Front parties and presided over by a professional judge, assisted by two others.<sup>104</sup> They were designed to put an end to the *paseos* and summary 'justice'. But although this marked the beginning of a state recuperation of control over the application of justice and recourse to violence, it would be several months before this process was complete.

In the meantime a new government was confirmed by the Republic's president, Manuel Azaña on 4 September 1936. It had been hoped that an agreement

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<sup>102</sup> Cervera, Madrid, p. 71. Cervera refers to the fact that among public opinion in Madrid it was widely perceived that the anarchists were responsible for the *paseos*.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 68

<sup>104</sup> Fernando Díaz-Plaja, La Guerra de España en sus documentos, (Plaza y Janés, Barcelona, 1972), p.93

could be reached on the creation of a republican-led cabinet reinforced by PSOE participation.<sup>105</sup> This would have offered an acceptable government to the radicalised population, whilst saving Republican institutions and presenting a picture of moderate government to the outside world. Such an option was favoured by most groups within the Popular Front; the republicans, moderate socialists, and indeed the PCE. In fact the PCE had been instructed to avoid as much as possible direct participation in government by Moscow as early as 24 July 1936. Curiously, in a study by Ronald Radosh and Mary Habeck documents which support this fact have been sidelined, and interpreted as a mere tactic in order to present Republican Spain to the rest of the world as a democratic bourgeois state rather than a revolutionary communist regime. Similarly, communist support for the Popular Front is also seen as a ploy, designed to create the impression that 'the steps the Comintern desired emanated from the entire Spanish polity rather than just the communists.'<sup>106</sup> Such arguments have denied the same Spanish polity any protagonism or responsibility of its own, and disregard the relative *weakness* of both the PCE and the Soviet Union at this juncture. They also certainly overlook the fact that communist participation would have run counter to both Comintern and Soviet policy at that time, which was primarily driven by a search for alliances especially from Britain and France against fascism.

However, just as he had blocked attempts by the moderate socialists to enter a republican-socialist government under the premiership of Indalecio Prieto in

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<sup>105</sup> Helen Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 132

<sup>106</sup> Radosh, Habeck & Sevostianov, Spain Betrayed, Document 6 Telegram from Dimitrov to Díaz, instructing the PCE on the course of action to take in the developing war, pp. 13-14 and p. 2

May, so Largo Caballero vetoed this sort of coalition again in September. Largo wanted the premiership for himself. It was Largo's symbolic importance among working-class constituencies, as a guarantee of Left unity and proletarian ascendancy, which overrode the reluctance of the more moderate groups and, indeed, President Azaña himself. His radicalism was seen as little more than empty rhetoric, a view increasing held by the moderate wing of the PSOE, especially after the failure of the revolution of October 1934. For this reason it was considered reasonably 'safe' to appoint him as Prime Minister. Largo also made his acceptance of the premiership conditional on the inclusion of the PCE in the cabinet for fear that they gain would credit from the freedom of opposition, much to the reluctance of the Communist Party.<sup>107</sup>

The new cabinet included Largo Caballero as Premier and Minister for War, the socialists Julio Alvarez del Vayo, Angel Galarza, Anastasio de Gracia, Juan Negrín and Indalecio Prieto as ministers for foreign affairs, the Interior, Industry and Commerce, Finance, and War respectively; the communists Jesús Hernández and Vicente Uribe as ministers for Education and Fine Arts, and Agriculture; the Left Republican Mariano Ruiz Funes as minister of Justice; the Union Republican Bernardo Giner de los Rios as minister of Communications and José Tomás y Piera, of the Left Republican Party of Cataluña, the Esquerra, as minister of Labour and Health.<sup>108</sup> These were joined later in the month by the Left Republican Julio Just as minister of Public Works, and Manuel de Irujo of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) as minister without portfolio. Largo also sought to bring the CNT into the government for the first time in the movement's

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<sup>107</sup> Letter from Dimitrov to Voroshilov, 8 September 1936 in Radosh, Habeck & Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed*, p. 18

<sup>108</sup> *Gaceta de Madrid*, 5 September 1936

history, and throughout September and October he worked towards this end, finally securing its inclusion on the eve of his government's evacuation from Madrid, on 4 November. Although the CNT gained four titular cabinet portfolios these really amounted to two politically significant posts: the moderate syndicalist Juan Peiró and his colleague Juan López took over industry and trade between them, whilst the more radical FAI leader, Juan García Oliver, was given the justice portfolio. His fellow FAI member, Federica Montseny, became health minister and the first woman in Europe since Aleksandra Kollontai to occupy a ministerial post of cabinet rank. It seems likely that the appointment of a CNT member to the justice portfolio was made with the intention of reining in the patrols,<sup>109</sup> as despite the creation of the Milicias de Vigilancia (Vigilance Militias) on 17 September<sup>110</sup> (with the intention of doing just that) the irregular patrols, bound by no due process, continued to operate at the margins of the authority, and earned themselves a reputation for violence and looting.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Fifth Regiment**

In contrast to a somewhat muddled start in the political and social arenas, the PCE was able to demonstrate its relative organisational strengths and abilities in the military domain. It seems clear that the PCE anticipated the uprising, emphasising to the soldiers it was in contact with that in the event of an uprising they should do everything they could to stop the troops going out on the

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<sup>109</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 165

<sup>110</sup> Gaceta de Madrid, 17 September 1936

<sup>111</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 162

streets.<sup>112</sup> We must be careful not to over-emphasize the role of the PCE in the suppression of the attempted coup in Madrid, but the Party did value military preparedness very highly, as the existence of the MAOC demonstrates. This was consonant with the Soviet experience. Soldiers had played a decisive role in the March 1917 revolution, which was partly the result of years of agitation within the army by the revolutionary parties in Russia.<sup>113</sup>

Communist Party culture also lent itself naturally to a conflict situation. As Fernando Claudín has argued

If the Bolshevik type of party – extreme centralisation, almost military discipline, rigorous hierarchy, selfless militancy, almost religious faith in the 'cause' was for anything, it was precisely for the armed struggle.<sup>114</sup>

And it was precisely this which gave the Party the advantage over other groups in the first few months of war. It is, nevertheless, important not to over-state its capacity in the initial stages of the war. The Party was better suited than most to this type of situation, but it was far from organised and well prepared for what occurred, and nor could it count on much in the way of an organised militia.

Although communist doctrine supported the creation of militias, in reality the MAOC that had existed in one or other form since 1933 were numerically weak and disorganised, comprising around 2,000 nationally by May 1936. By the time

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<sup>112</sup> Enrique Lister, Memorias de un luchador, pp. 59-61 p. 74

<sup>113</sup> Mark Von Hagen, Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, USA & London, 1990), p. 14

<sup>114</sup> Claudín, Santiago Carrillo, p. 44

of the uprising they numbered about 1,500 in Madrid and 4,000 nationwide. Nor did the image of a structured and disciplined organisation visible in some of its parades from the spring of 1936 coincide with internal reality, for indiscipline was rife and some militia groups had to be excluded.<sup>115</sup> Back in 1935 steps were taken to bring the MAOC groups under the direct control of the local communist *radios* 'in order to avoid deviation in mission and tactics'.<sup>116</sup>

Although the PCE had repeatedly denounced the plot of rebellion, there was never a general mobilisation of the MAOC before the uprising occurred. The groups were involved in vigilance activity in the days prior to the attempted coup, but their response when the time came was limited owing to a distinct shortage of arms. Nevertheless, young male members of the MAOC, largely drawn from the UJC and increasingly, from the peasantry,<sup>117</sup> were instrumental in the formation of the first militia groups. Within the Ministry of War, some members of the UMRA (Unión Militar Republicana Antifascista), an antifascist officers organisation, with lieutenant colonel Hernández Saravia at its head, organised five battalions of volunteers commanded by the lieutenant colonels Mangada, Marina and Lacalle and the commanders Sánchez Aparicio and Fernández Navarro. The Fifth Battalion had been involved in the taking of the Montaña barracks, and had had as its recruitment zone the district of Cuatro Caminos. It was made up of members of the MAOC, commanded by Manuel Carnero, leader of the Radio Norte del PCE and Francisco Galán, together with Enrique Castro Delgado as envoy from the Provincial Committee of the PCE. They

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<sup>115</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, pp. 18-22

<sup>116</sup> AHPCE, Microfilm xii, apartado 152, 'Boletín informativo de las MAOC de Madrid y provincia, no. 2'.

<sup>117</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, pp. 23-24



occupied the Silesian convent on Francos Rodríguez and from here some of the first militia columns left for the sierras.<sup>118</sup> On 20 July Modesto, as national leader, visited all the districts of the MAOC in Madrid to transmit the orders of the PCE leadership for all detachments to organise recruitment of volunteers in local PCE offices and to concentrate them in the barracks of Francos Rodríguez, creating the bases of what would be the Fifth Regiment of Popular Militias.<sup>119</sup> The name the Fifth Regiment was not used until end of July.<sup>120</sup>

The Regiment quickly extended beyond Madrid. Command and recruitment centres were created in various cities. In the beginning the creation of units seems to have been a response to a fear of being left behind in the process of forming militias which other organisations such as UGT and CNT had been involved in.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, in the first days and weeks, the organisation of these militias was haphazard. It seems there was no formal meeting to constitute the Fifth Regiment, which rather evolved. Most of the first commanders of the regiment - Enrique Castro, del Val, Barbado, Modesto, Gallo, Galan and Líster - developed their activities in the first days on the fronts of the Sierra with little contact with the barracks of Francos Rodríguez. Indeed much of the training of the first militias took place behind the front lines in the Sierra de Guadarrama.<sup>122</sup> Militia leadership was also ambiguous, with some such as Enrique Castro or Enrique Líster over-emphasising their own roles, a tendency endemic in

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<sup>118</sup> See map 4.

<sup>119</sup> Modesto, Soy del Quinto Regimiento, p. 25

<sup>120</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, pp. 27-28; p. 38

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 47 In Albacete it was led by Jose Silva, in Valencia Jose Antonio Uribes, in Alicante Antonio Guardiola, in Murcia Luise Cabo Giorla, in Almería Antonio Navarro and Juan Maturana, in Jaén, Valenzuela, in Espejo, Joaquin Feijoo, in Andújar, various, in Guadix and Baza, Adriano Romero.

<sup>122</sup> Modesto, Soy del Quinto Regimiento, pp. 37-38

communist memoirs but made all the more complicated by the later dissociation of these two from the PCE. It would appear that initially Carlos Contreras (the pseudonym of Italian communist Vittorio Vidali) was chief of the Fifth Regiment with Castro as his second-in-command. Within a few days Castro and Francisco Barbado assumed the leadership with Contreras as political commissar. Lister was appointed chief on 19 September. The political leadership also underwent a series of changes in the first weeks of the conflict as the national leadership of the PCE came to terms with the situation. Initially under the direction of the leadership of Radio Norte and the Provincial Committee the militia was soon under the control of the politburo itself.<sup>123</sup>

But this relationship was not without its problems. Andre Marty refers to 'friction' between the politburo and the Regiment, the latter complaining about the lack of attention from the Party, from which it received nothing 'but the most general of directives.' This in turn reflected a serious shortcoming on the part of the Party, as in general it lacked any concrete knowledge of military matters. It was the most active elements of the middle cadres of the Party who had been instrumental in the organisation of the militia units which became the Fifth Regiment. Thus the most dedicated people the Party had were involved at the front.<sup>124</sup>

Despite its military naiveté, the Party seemed to learn quickly from the situation and to develop a clear idea of what was required early on in the conflict. Already the Party appeared to understand that the conflict could be lengthy and that the

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41

<sup>124</sup> Radosh, Habeck & Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed*, p. 35

reorganisation of the armed forces and the rearguard was necessary. In so many ways these lessons were being learned first hand by its leaders operating as commanders and political officers on the front line.<sup>125</sup> But while the PCE concurred with the politicians of Izquierda and Unión Republicana on the need for a reconstructed army, it differed dramatically from them on the subject of the character of the new forces. For the Party, the very fact of the uprising had revealed the rottenness of the old army, and the desperate need to create a new, fully representative replacement.<sup>126</sup>

A series of Government decrees in August 1936, among them one for the creation of an army based on volunteer battalions were ill-received, and revealed a desire on the part of the republican-led government to recreate the old army.<sup>127</sup> It was proposed that the battalions be led by officers and career NCOs. They were to wear uniforms and would serve a minimum of two months or the duration of the campaign. They would also have the same rights as soldiers and preferential entry into the state corps.<sup>128</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the antimilitarism of large sectors of the working-class, these were unpopular. The republicans seem to have misunderstood the nature of the conflict, (for it was at its heart a class war) and the fact that other political groups and not least the people themselves would not permit a return to the status quo. The PCE also opposed any concept based on a recreation of the old army, but was more nuanced in its response. The PCE advocated the creation of an army for the Republic, but believed it should be based on the militias that were already in

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<sup>125</sup> Enrique Lister, Memorias de un luchador, p. 88; p. 110

<sup>126</sup> AHPCE, Carpeta 17, Manifiesto del PCE, Agosto 1936: 'Balance de un mes de lucha.'

<sup>127</sup> Gaceta de Madrid, 3 August 1936

<sup>128</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento pp. 79-80

existence and, that like the Fifth Regiment, it should be composed of the forces of the Popular Front. The Party articulated its ideas through the pages of its militias' press organs: the difference between militarism, which the militias so opposed, and the militarization of the militias which it advocated, was explained. Militarism turned soldiers into automatons, whereas militarization required voluntary submission to discipline and enthusiasm for obedience, predicated on an understanding of what is to be obeyed.<sup>129</sup> The popular army it favoured was based on *mando único* (a single military command) which was essential in war, and also 'camaraderie and discipline'.<sup>130</sup>

The most decided opposition to the militarization of the militias came from the anarchists. But there was hostility also from socialist quarters, especially in the first few weeks of war, when the left socialists around Largo Caballero felt confident in the militia system.<sup>131</sup> Yet, the success of Mola attacking from the west in Guipúzcoa, and the action of Quiapo de Llano in Andalucía, dispersed the militias easily and highlighted their deficiencies. It is also forced a reconsideration of militarization and the creation of a popular army, particularly by Largo Caballero, who was now head of the government. With this in mind a decree was published on 30 September which would establish the militarization of the militias in the centre zone on 10 October and in the remainder of Republican territory on 20 October.<sup>132</sup> Militarization involved the mobilisation of all politically reliable officers and NCOs and the militia battalions were to form

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<sup>129</sup> ¡Salud! Organo del Regimiento 1° de mayo de los Carabancheles, 29 October 1936

<sup>130</sup> Milicia Popular, 20 August 1936

<sup>131</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento pp. 91-92

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 97

the basis of the Mixed Brigades, the beginnings of the new army.<sup>133</sup> The second decree established new minimum and maximum ages for military service – 20 and 35 years respectively and subjected the militia battalions to military justice, although those not wishing to be militarised could communicate this to the Comandancia de Milicias and they would be removed from their lists.<sup>134</sup>

Communist sources attribute to the Fifth Regiment a significant role in the militarization that took place, claiming for themselves a decisive role in the creation of the mixed brigades.<sup>135</sup> Unquestionably, the Fifth Regiment was more advanced than other units. It had its own General Command (Comandancia General) which was responsible for the administrative and military leadership of the Regiment and which was divided into several sections: organisation, information, operations, services and social work, and it was also quite sophisticated in its internal structure, with each of its units designed to be autonomous, (each carrying its entire military infrastructure within itself).<sup>136</sup> These undoubtedly influenced the way that the new popular army was structured and would become the blueprint for the Mixed Brigades. The first six mixed brigades created by decree on 10 October were formed exclusively from units of the Fifth Regiment, with Lister commanding the first.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Gaceta de Madrid, 29 September 1936

<sup>134</sup> Gaceta de la República, 30 September 1936

<sup>135</sup> For a summary of the sources claims' see Juan A. Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento pp. 99-101

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., pp. 197-98

<sup>137</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, p. 382; Lister, Memorias de un luchador, p. 140

The popularity of the Regiment is also unquestionable. Enrolment figures indicate a trend rather than a complete total, given that not all who joined had been originally enrolled by the Regiment. Groups who had gone to the front of their own accord would later incorporate themselves, as well as peasants from nearby villages, and some groups not belonging to communist organisations:

**Table 2.1 Fifth Regiment recruitment figures (Jul-Dec 1936):**

July	7,900
August	14,800
September	24,100
October	11,300
November	5,250
December	1,550
Total	64,900

Source: Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, p. 240

With a view to achieving the best results from its soldiers, the Regiment had its own social work section (Comisión de Trabajo Social), also known as the political section. This was created at the beginning of the conflict and was responsible for the publication of *Milicia Popular*, which ran from 26 July until 24 January 1937. It had a variety of contributors: Ramón J. Sender, José Bergamín, Rafael Albertí, Maria Teresa Leon, Miguel Hernández and Mikhail Koltsov. The section was also involved in street theatre, and radio transmissions, and

perhaps even more significantly, in the projection of film both in cinemas in the rearguard and at mobile screenings at the front.<sup>138</sup>

Through the Commission the PCE also pioneered the role of the political commissar, as along with the battalions of the JSU the Fifth Regiment was the first militia unit to have commissars. Líster was designated a political delegate of the column he accompanied to Guadarrama on 23 July; and the JSU leader Santiago Carrillo was appointed political commissar in the Largo Caballero Battalion formed by the youth organisation in Madrid.<sup>139</sup> The concept appears to have its origins in the experience of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. It is not clear who was directly responsible for the importation and dissemination of the idea of the commissar, although it would seem that Carlos Contreras inspired its basic lines of action. Nevertheless, unlike the Red Army institution, which grew out of the need to rely on individuals who were professionally qualified but politically suspect,<sup>140</sup> the origins of the commissars within the Fifth Regiment had much less to do with maintaining vigilance over its soldiers and the loyalty of the professional officers. Particularly at the beginning of the war, the loyalty of the volunteers was not an issue, and the need for commissars arose out of the exigencies of war. It was the reality of the first columns which highlighted the need for mediation between militiamen and the military command. Unsurprisingly in the circumstances, the *milicianos* mistrusted military professionals, and discipline was poor.<sup>141</sup> One of the key tasks of the

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<sup>138</sup> See further chapter four below

<sup>139</sup> Enrique Líster, Memorias de un luchador, p. 81; Pedro Montoliú, Madrid en la Guerra Civil: Los Protagonistas, Vol II, (Sílex, Madrid, 1999), p. 77

<sup>140</sup> Ellen Jones, Red Army and Society: A Sociology of the Soviet Military, (Allen & Unwin, London, 1985), p. 120

<sup>141</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, p. 186

political commissar was to pay attention to and develop mutual understanding between the troops and the command.<sup>142</sup> The commissar was also responsible for the discipline of his unit. Formally institutionalised through the creation of the Commissariat in a government decree on 16 October, the commissar's role would evolve, encompassing other responsibilities relating to the cultural and political formation of the soldier, becoming an important (albeit somewhat controversial) function within the Popular Army.

In a different way, the recruitment tactics of the Fifth Regiment also appears to have been significantly influenced by the Russian revolutionary model. Special attention was dedicated to the enrolment of peasants. For the PCE the human reserves for the future army were in the countryside, and more than thirty per cent of the Fifth Regiment's militiamen were drawn from the ranks of the peasantry.<sup>143</sup> The Bolsheviks had initially ignored the peasantry in its recruitment for the Red Army, following Marxist ideology to the letter in focussing on the historic role of the industrial proletariat as the vanguard of the revolution. It had preferred to target the urban population in recruiting for the Red Army. However, two major factors had influenced a dramatic shift in policy. Firstly, the Bolsheviks realised that better relations with the peasantry would improve the food situation, and that their success against the 'white' armies depended increasingly on the attitudes and behaviour of peasants. As Lenin had realised, unless a 'red' dictatorship offered something better than a 'white' dictatorship, the peasants would be unlikely to give their active support. Secondly, the Red Army was unlikely to defeat the whites with the forces it had.

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<sup>142</sup> Mundo Obrero, 29 September 1936

<sup>143</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento, p. 352



Furthermore, as industrial output plummeted, *Sovnarkom* (Council of People's Commissars) had decreed more and more exemptions from military service for categories of factory workers and administrative personnel, so there seemed little choice but to turn more decisively to the peasantry.<sup>144</sup> This perhaps explains the importance placed on the Spanish peasantry in terms of potential combatants. In the province of Madrid different enrolment points were created in the towns and villages, for example in Aranjuez; the estate of 'El Campillo' between El Escorial and Guadarrama; Collado Mediano and Buitrago. The Regiment would give various proclamations in the villages, gather the men in the main square, and harangue them. Volunteers were then incorporated at the instruction centres.<sup>145</sup>

The PCE had also developed fairly sophisticated ideas concerning the way the war should be facilitated by the rest of society. They had a vision of a command economy, where all aspects of the economy and society would be focussed on contributing to the war effort. This also seems to have been influenced by Soviet theory and policy. Central planning under the auspices of the Five-Year Plans was already underway in the USSR. After initially applauding the heroism and courage of women who took up arms at the front, and continuing to support them through the provision of nurseries and schools for the children of militiamen and women,<sup>146</sup> the Party's publications tended to emphasize the important role women could play in the rearguard. The Party's August manifesto called for the immediate transformation of civil industries into

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<sup>144</sup> Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship*, pp. 47-48

<sup>145</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, *El Quinto Regimiento*, p. 236, p. 240; see also map of Madrid province, p. 3 above.

<sup>146</sup> *Mundo Obrero*, 30 July; 14 & 30 August 1936

industries of war and the entry of women into factories, workshops offices, railways and trams, with all able men going to the front.<sup>147</sup> But a woman's capabilities went further than that. She had in her hands the morale of the rearguard, and ultimately of the front too. Women were the homemakers, responsible for the care and well-being of their families in these difficult times, and as wives were the comfort of their husbands on leave from military service.<sup>148</sup> The idea that the rearguard and women in particular could play an important role in the defence of the Republic and the prosecution of the war was also related to the strategy of broad antifascist unity which the PCE championed.

In a series of articles published in *Mundo Obrero* the Party called for the centralisation of all resources in the hands of the government, and the centralisation of provisioning and the implementation of rationing particularly within Madrid.<sup>149</sup> The key themes of 'a single power, a single command and a single discipline' in the headline on 15 September embodied the Party's philosophy of unity, not only in the military sphere to which the article related directly, but to all spheres of life during the war. In the civilian sphere a single power would be represented by the restitution of the authority of the central government, for which the PCE continually manifested its support, through press organs, meetings, broadcasts and declarations. The ideas of a single command and a single discipline naturally related specifically to its ideas concerning the way the war should be executed and the need for military discipline within the militia units, including the units of its own Fifth Regiment,

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<sup>147</sup> AHPCE, Carpeta 17, Manifiesto del PCE, Agosto 1936: 'Balance de un mes de lucha.'

<sup>148</sup> Milicia Popular, 24 September 1936

<sup>149</sup> Mundo Obrero, 9, 15 & 19 September 1936.

which were a constant theme in *Milicia Popular*,<sup>150</sup> but also extended to discipline in the rearguard:

Militia dress imposes responsibility. Whoever does not understand this and who believes that carrying a weapon in the streets of Madrid, when he is not already at the battlefront, constitutes a certificate of impunity, then he is not worthy of carrying a rifle, nor wear the uniform of a militiaman, nor show a union card. These are the three things that no man is permitted to dishonour.<sup>151</sup>

In the rearguard discipline could also be maintained by militiamen on leave.

Visual aids were used to great effect in reinforcing a message similar to the

Second World War campaign slogans of 'idle gossip costs lives':

Miliciano... ¡Callate! ¡Desconfía! Los oídos enemigos te escuchan.<sup>152</sup>

Political commissars and agitators were to be identified from the ranks of the better Party militants in order to work to raise awareness among the masses of the struggle against fascism, the elevation of morale and the mobilisation of the rearguard for essential tasks. The commissar, who was based within the army unit, would be complemented by the agitator who would act as liaison between the militiamen and civilian quarters.<sup>153</sup> An organic relationship between the front and the rearguard was central to the PCE's philosophy: *mando único* was seen

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<sup>150</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, *El Quinto Regimiento* pp. 123-28

<sup>151</sup> *Milicia Popular*, 12 September 1936

<sup>152</sup> *Milicia Popular*, 13 September 1936, and Ministry of Public Instruction poster 1936

'Milicianos contra el espionaje' in Jordi and Arnau Carulla, *La Guerra Civil en 2000 cartells*, vol. I (Postermil, Barcelona, 1997), p. 404

<sup>153</sup> AHPCE, Microfilm xv, 189. 'Nuestras tareas: Boletín Interior del Comité Provincial de Madrid,' 6 October 1936.

as both an expression of the centralisation of the military command and as an extension of the Popular Front in the military sphere. Military unity would be complemented by civilian unity achieved through the maintenance of and support for the Popular Front and the Republican government. As the war progressed, civilian unity would increasingly be couched in terms of political centralisation and unanimity. For the PCE, Popular Front unity was a goal to be strived for in all aspects of life, and the Fifth Regiment became a microcosm and representation of this unity. Its composition was yet another manifestation of the unity already so popular among the masses since the electoral victory of the Popular Front, channelled but not created by the Party, which had led to the successes of union and youth unification. In terms of the political affiliation of its soldiers the whole spectrum of republican political and syndical organisations was represented within the Regiment.<sup>154</sup> But while the PCE created or supported these broad-based groups it also aspired to communist hegemony over them.

The PCE's evolution from an insignificant political and social force, concerned with the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois Second Republic, to a competent military organiser and defender of the same Republic, was quite staggering. This new role encouraged a steady increase in affiliation both to the Fifth Regiment and the Party itself as well as to the JSU, and translated into real influence, which was for the moment, limited to the military sphere. However, its rapid progress from one stage to the next left a number of unresolved questions concerning its identity. It also meant that within the Party there were a number

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<sup>154</sup> Blanco Rodríguez, El Quinto Regimiento pp. 361-62

of very different elements, representing the diverse motivations people had for seeking membership. Furthermore, some of these were beyond the control of the leadership, who were struggling to keep up with the workload. Both the role the Party had begun to carve out for itself and its complex character would have even greater significance as the war progressed.

### **Chapter Three. The defence of Madrid: The emergence of communist hegemony?**

The defence of Madrid in the winter of 1936 was perhaps the single most important event of the entire conflict. Undoubtedly Madrid marked a turning-point in the war, and with the failure of the rebels to take the city came the realisation on both sides that the conflict would not be over quickly. Beyond this, the city acquired a symbolic value on both sides. For the Republic, the successful defence of the Madrid resonated through the war effort for the remainder of the conflict. Its propaganda value was quickly exploited by the communists, which in turn reinforced their belief in victory against all odds.

The failure of government and military circles to formulate a coherent defence policy meant that by the end of October 1936 the rebels were at the outskirts of Madrid. Throughout October Largo Caballero's government had debated the merits of both an 'external' defence, advocated by General Asensio who favoured offensive measures from the Tajo valley, and an 'internal' defence of the capital, which would be supported by the fortification of the city and the establishment of concentric defensive lines. Broadly speaking, a political formation of socialists, Left Republicans, and Pestaña's syndicalists agreed on the suitability of external defence, that is, the creation of a series of fronts to prevent the rebels' arrival in Madrid. The JSU and the PCE echoed these proposals, but crucially, the PCE believed in the mobilisation of the population

including the rearguard, for the purpose of creating an iron fortification of the city from within.<sup>1</sup>

Belatedly, in mid-October under the direct command of General Pozas a series of concentric defence lines were created, staggered along the secondary highways extending around Madrid. The lines were not continuous, but had their bases in the most important villages and communications centres. These four fortified lines of defence were intended to prevent the further penetration of Nationalist forces, but by 21 October the first line had been breached, and the second line was overrun by 2 November. On 4 November the rebels had reached the most important towns on the third line, and on 6 November the last line fell. The rebels were now at the gates of the city and the semi-circle of hostile forces around Madrid was complete.<sup>2</sup>

For the rebels Madrid's importance derived from its function as the capital of the state. To take it would facilitate international recognition. It was the centre of communications and the seat of the financial resources of the state, and, with a population of more than one million, its political and administrative tradition exercised an irresistible attraction.<sup>3</sup> What is more, there was a genuine belief that Madrid would fall to the rebels. Viewed retrospectively there is a sense among historians that the fall of Madrid would certainly have meant the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Julio Aróstegui and Jesús A. Martínez, La Junta de Defensa de Madrid, (Madrid, Comunidad de Madrid, 1984), p. 26, pp. 28-30

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-35

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Cardona 'Las operaciones militares' in La Guerra Civil Española. 50 años después, (ed.) Manuel Tuñón de Lara [et al] (Edición Labor, Barcelona, 1986), p. 215

the war.<sup>4</sup> However, the leader of the Republican government, Francisco Largo Caballero, certainly did not see the war in these terms and on 6 November his government left Madrid for Valencia. It was intended that Madrid, if lost, would be retaken from the outside. But the secret and rushed manner in which this occurred created an overwhelming impression of panicked flight.<sup>5</sup>

Initial opposition to the government's evacuation came from the two communist ministers and above all from the newly incorporated CNT ministers. But while it was ministers of all political persuasions that were manhandled by the anarchist checkpoints at the perimeter of the city,<sup>6</sup> it would be the CNT and the PSOE who would suffer the most damage to their prestige in this episode. The prominence of the socialists within the government coupled with the perceived compromise of the anarchist leadership in entering government led to the irreversible tarnishing of these organisations when the government fled the city. Keen to emphasise their party's own protagonism, post-war communist versions of events certainly propagate this idea. In a variety of sources Santiago Carrillo, in particular, has made much of the contrast between government (and socialist) inaction or absence and communist resistance. Indeed, socialist absence, and particularly the departure of the Caballero government is always cited by Carrillo as the reason why the leadership of the JSU solicited entry to the PCE

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<sup>4</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 19 and Graham The Spanish Republic, p. 165. Graham argues that while it was not crucial to the military prosecution of the war, the loss of the capital would mean loss of legitimacy in eyes of civilian population and foreign opinion.

<sup>5</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 165

<sup>6</sup> J. Alvarez del Vayo, Freedom's Battle, trans. Eileen E. Brooke, (Heinemann, London, 1940), pp. 206-8. Ministers from Largo's government including Julio Alvarez del Vayo, the PCE's Jesus Hernández and Vicente Uribe, and the CNT's Peiró and López had been detained and threatened with execution for cowardice by militiamen from the del Rosal column as they attempted to travel to Valencia. They turned back towards Madrid but travelled to Valencia by a different route.



at this time.<sup>7</sup> Carrillo's erstwhile comrade-in-arms and biographer, Fernando Claudín, in spite of his later estrangement from the PCE accepts this version of events as a fair representation of the situation.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast the communist press at the time treated the episode sympathetically, explaining the necessity of the government's departure to its readership,<sup>9</sup> and a wartime JSU activist, Rosario Sanchez, in a recent interview opined that she thought the government was right to leave.<sup>10</sup> However, other sources illustrate that prominent socialists themselves were worried or frustrated by the government's departure and the consequent loss of prestige for the PSOE.

Much to the consternation of the Comintern leadership, the socialist parliamentary deputy Margarita Nelken was involved in a high-profile 'defection' to the PCE, following an abortive attempt to harangue Largo into action over the defence of Madrid and the spread of communist influence.<sup>11</sup> The editor of *El Socialista*, Julián Zugazagoitia stayed behind out of a sense of professional and personal duty despite attempts by Indalecio Prieto to make him change his mind. Zugazagoitia believed that suspending publication of the Socialist Party newspaper would spell the end of the PSOE. Additionally he felt staying to be the obligation of his post. To leave someone else in his place would be tantamount to saying that their life was worth less than his, for with a rebel

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<sup>7</sup> Santiago Carrillo, *Memorias*, (Planeta, Barcelona, 1993), pp. 186-89; Gibson, *Paracuellos*, p. 217

<sup>8</sup> Claudín, *Santiago Carrillo*, p. 44, p. 45, p. 47. Claudín was expelled from the party along with Jorge Semprun in 1964: Jorge Semprun, *Literature or Life*, trans. Linda Coverdale, (Viking, London, 1997), p. 269

<sup>9</sup> *Juventud*, 9 November 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Pedro Montoliú, *Madrid en la Guerra Civil: Vol II*, p. 68

<sup>11</sup> Paul Preston, *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain*, (HarperCollins, Hammersmith, 2002), pp. 360-66

victory, it would be a matter of death.<sup>12</sup> It is such accounts by contemporary observers which provide a real sense of the high stakes and the sheer chaos in the city. Fearing all was lost, defections to the enemy became a problem in the Ministry of War.<sup>13</sup> In other government departments confusion reigned. Arturo Barea, who had been working for the Press and Propaganda Department at the Foreign Ministry as a censor for press telegrams and telephonic press dispatches was given instructions for the twenty-four hours which followed the government's evacuation, but nothing more. The evacuation applied only to permanent members of government staff, not wartime recruits such as Barea, who it was still hoped would stay and do their duty. When his immediate instructions had been fulfilled Barea had to search around town to find someone in a position of authority who might permit him to continue his work.<sup>14</sup>

Amid this confusion and flight, and despite the propaganda which obfuscates a clear view of the situation, the PCE appeared to have been prepared to stay and fight. Leaders of the PCE's Madrid Party organisation, such as Antonio Mije and Pedro Checa, as well as national leaders such as Dolores Ibárruri and José Díaz remained in the city. We do not know the origins of this decision to stay behind, but it was a terrible risk (which in the event paid dividends). The danger was palpable: Carrillo thought it quite possible that he would be strung up in the Puerta del Sol as soon as the rebels took the city.<sup>15</sup> Given the proximity of the rebel forces, and the decision of prominent communists and JSU members to remain, it seems evident that these groups had no exit strategy as such, and

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<sup>12</sup> Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 191

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 196

<sup>14</sup> Arturo Barea, The Forging of a Rebel, p. 570, p. 583, p. 590

<sup>15</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 102

they were prepared to stay until the end (i.e. until death) if the situation demanded. Consonant with the PCE's earlier actions, the Party's response to the threat to the city was to a certain extent, improvised. The personal sacrifice involved also suggests that the Party had an understanding of the situation that other groups (including the socialists) appeared to lack. Carrillo wrote in the pages of *Juventud* that

For foreign opinion the taking of Madrid would signal the victory of the rebels and with it the absolute inclination of the international balance in all aspects, political and economic in their favour. Because of this Madrid cannot be taken by the rebels. It is not just a question for *madrileños*. The other peoples of Spain are obliged to defend Madrid. To defend Madrid is to defend the liberty of Spain and the liberties of Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Although the government had yet to leave the city when this article was published, it would seem that the JSU had already gravitated into the PCE's orbit. Carrillo's sentiment echoes an earlier declaration in *Mundo Obrero* that 'to defend Madrid is to defend all of Spain.'<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, clear admiration for the PCE's policy of resistance is manifest in an earlier edition of the youth daily which carried a report on a meeting of communist militants held at the Monumental Cinema in Madrid, at which José Díaz had declared 'In defence of Madrid every communist should be disposed to give until the last drop of his blood'; that each communist should be prepared to 'set the example.'<sup>18</sup> In contrast with the communist sense of urgency, the tone of *El Socialista* on 3

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<sup>16</sup> *Juventud*, 3 November 1936

<sup>17</sup> *Mundo Obrero*, 28 September 1936

<sup>18</sup> *Juventud*, 21 October 1936

November was rather subdued, and given to emphasising the success of the Republican war effort on other fronts as if Madrid was not of crucial importance.

Carrillo's reading of the situation is reinforced by British diplomatic correspondence from the period. The British government's ambassador in Madrid, George Ogilvie-Forbes received instructions on 7 November to establish de facto contacts with General Franco's administration 'for the protection of British interests' should rebel forces enter Madrid. Although it clearly stopped short of recognising Franco's government as the legal government of Spain, it is evident that the British expected the city to fall, and were preparing to do business with the insurgents.<sup>19</sup>

The situation was dire, however many of Madrid's citizens rose to the challenge. Contemporary observers have attested to the significant and heroic role ordinary people played in saving the city.<sup>20</sup> Considerable numbers of ordinary *madriños* threw themselves into civil defence work. Some groups received military education from instructors who had been sergeants in the old army. Others raised flagstones in the streets as makeshift barricades. Simple cannon converted stones into dangerous projectiles.<sup>21</sup> Local trade union leaders organised battalions at their places of work. Julián Vazquez, for example, a communist garment workers' union leader, had organised a tailors' battalion and used a French infantry manual to train his men. UGT and CNT affiliates reported to union headquarters and awaited the distribution of rifles, of which

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<sup>19</sup> Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Second Series, Volume XVII (HMSO, Oxford, 1979), p. 523; no. 359

<sup>20</sup> Montoliú, Madrid en la Guerra Civil, p. 33

<sup>21</sup> Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 202 See also Interview with Eugenio Granell of the wartime POUM, in Montoliú, Madrid en la Guerra Civil, p. 58

there was always a shortage. Some made their way to the trenches in the Casa del Campo and the Parque del Oeste without weapons, having to arm themselves from the dead and the deserters. The proximity of the front line to the centre of the city saw workers taking trams from their workplaces to the frontline, often dressed in civilian clothes and carrying their own lunches as the unions could not always provide for these rapidly assembled militias. Despite fierce fighting in an around the city during November, and further attempts to break the deadlock by both sides with the battles of Jarama, Guadalajara, and Brunete in 1937, the frontline remained within the city, virtually unchanged, for the next 28 months. But it was not only the politically active who volunteered themselves at this crucial time. Other citizens too, those who perhaps occupied the middle ground between extremes of left and right during the conflict, who belonged to a 'Third Spain,' now lent their support.<sup>22</sup> Republican sympathisers, who had perhaps been hitherto ambivalent to the war, picked up rifles or lent their support (and raised morale) by bring bread, wine, chocolate, or home-cooked food, in short, whatever they had, out to the trenches, at great risk to themselves. Mothers allowed their sons to leave without a word of protest. Women prepared to defend their homes with burning oil and with knives.<sup>23</sup>

It was the PCE's key role in civilian mobilisation, which earned the Party the support of these previously unaffiliated and unmobilised during this period. The Party had been calling for defensive work for some time, albeit to little effect.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The idea of this Third Spain is articulated in Paul Preston's Epilogue in ¡Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War, (HarperCollins, London, 1999), pp. 321-32.

<sup>23</sup> For vivid personal accounts of the Defence of Madrid, see Fraser, Blood of Spain, pp. 259-71

<sup>24</sup> For examples of communist calls for fortifications see El Sol, 23 September 1936; Juventud, 20, 21, & 30 October 1936. Graham seems to suggest that Largo's government did not take such calls seriously enough, Graham, The Spanish Republic, pp. 140-41

Now with war on Madrid's doorstep, the communists called for all-out defence of the city with only women remaining in the rear. A role in the city's defence was envisaged for all citizens at this critical time. In order to mobilise these different sectors and along with their Popular Front line the PCE had promoted mass organisations which played important roles both in the winter of 1936 in Madrid and throughout the Republican zone for the duration of the war.<sup>25</sup> Women were exhorted to provide clothes and food for 'the defenders of [their] homes and children,'<sup>26</sup> while the time, effort and money wasted by some labour sectors on non-essential construction and production was lamented and criticised by the PCE.<sup>27</sup> The JSU also played an important role and its efforts are reflected in its newspaper, *Juventud*. It emphasised the importance of fortifications work,<sup>28</sup> and was involved in the instruction of more than 10,000 people in the handling of arms in 30 schools that it had created.<sup>29</sup> Such a close relationship between the front and the rearguard was central to the PCE's thinking and developed from this period. It was given visual representation in a Madrid Party poster for military instruction in the rearguard.<sup>30</sup> In the pages of *Juventud* a photo of a smiling militiaman in the trenches is attributed to 'the new morale coming from the rearguard which makes the very indifferent man into a valiant combatant for the defence of Madrid.'<sup>31</sup> Unity was central to this relationship and to the war effort, and the Party's earlier attempts to unite forces on the left, for example within the Fifth Regiment, found wider expression in the imagery and

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<sup>25</sup> These mass movements included groups such as the Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA), Socorro Rojo Internacional (International Red Aid) and Amigos de la Unión Soviética (Friends of the Soviet Union). See chapters four and five.

<sup>26</sup> *Juventud*, 8 November 1936

<sup>27</sup> *Combate*, 20 December 1936, 3 January 1937

<sup>28</sup> *Juventud*, 21 October 1936

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 November 1936

<sup>30</sup> See plate 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Juventud*, 12 November 1936

experience of Madrid's defence. Pedraza Blanco's poster for the Madrid PCE uses the images of a photograph of central Madrid superimposed on a clenched fist, and the caption, 'Unanimous obedience is triumph.'<sup>32</sup>

Communist rhetoric and action also clearly referenced the Soviet socialist realist model of the heroic narrative: 'we are the young guard that is forging the future. The misery is softened knowing that we will overcome or die.'<sup>33</sup> In the speeches of Ibárruri we find a similar refrain: 'better to be the widows of heroes than the wives of cowards' and 'better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees.'<sup>34</sup> The idea of sacrifice played a major role in the Socialist Realist literature of the period, which in part at least originated in Russian revolutionary myth (which valued its martyrs) and actual Stalinist practice. Death also assumed enormous importance in the Soviet sense of history and national identity. Most of the events held up as historically great moments – the 1905 revolution, the 1917 revolution, the Civil War, Lenin's death - were marked by human sacrifice and loss.<sup>35</sup> Although there are limitations to the extent that life can be said to imitate art, there was certainly a current within communist culture which encouraged self-sacrifice, although not necessarily to the death. Nevertheless, the PCE's wartime policy became closely associated with an idea of '*resistencia a ultranza*' or resistance to the end. The beginnings of such a stance are clearly evident in its attitude towards the defence of Madrid. Furthermore, the successful resistance of the city functioned as a point of reference for them in

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<sup>32</sup> See plate 2a.

<sup>33</sup> *Juventud*, 7 November 1936

<sup>34</sup> Dolores Ibárruri, *Speeches and Articles, 1936-38*, (Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., London, 1938), p. 33, Rafael Cruz, *Pasionaria*, p. 99

<sup>35</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1981), pp. 177-79

the face of the pessimists who increasingly favoured a mediated settlement after 1938. The PCE used the defence of Madrid as a metaphor for the war effort as a whole. Madrid was 'the heart' of Spain. To defend Madrid was to defend Spain.<sup>36</sup> Madrid subsequently became a symbol of resistance and heroism of the whole of the Republic and on behalf of the whole Republic. Communist-inspired poster art spread this imagery throughout Republican territory. A 1937 poster by Martí Bas of the UGT artists union in Barcelona, encapsulated this idea, with his socialist-realist inspired image of anonymous soldiers on the front line, weapons in hand, and the caption 'To defend Madrid is to defend Cataluña.'<sup>37</sup>

Soviet models of heroism were also transposed onto the Spanish experience as a means of achieving popular mobilisation. In particular the parallel between the successful defence of Petrograd by the Russian people during the Russian revolution and the Spanish people's defence of Madrid was an image invoked by a wide spectrum of the Republican press.<sup>38</sup> It is important, nevertheless to distinguish between Soviet *imagery*, which abounded and was a point of reference for all left-wing groups, and Soviet *influence* which was quite a separate issue. A Soviet Spain was never the end goal of the war, even for the PCE, and in much of the communist press we find articles at pains to point out the differences between the two countries, as well as the different path destined for Spain. In *Juventud* on 7 November 1936 an article explained that Spain was in the process of forging its own Red Army, but was keen to point out that 'our

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<sup>36</sup> *Combate*, 31 January 1937, *El Combatiente*, Portavoz del frente de Carabanchel. 24 December 1936.

<sup>37</sup> See plate 3.

<sup>38</sup> *El Socialista*, 7 November 1936; *Solidaridad Obrera*, 8 November 1936; *Juventud*, 21 October 1936



struggle is not the struggle of the Russians, nor a national struggle in the strict sense of the word, but it is a struggle of the new world that was born with the Russian Revolution, and of the old world that tries to establish by manoeuvre and terror the old classes which history has finished with.'<sup>39</sup> In another article, Santiago Carrillo emphasised that collectivisation in Russia could not be started until nine years after their victory. Such experiments in Spain must be postponed for the future.<sup>40</sup>

Undoubtedly, the prestige of the PCE was boosted enormously through its association with the International Communist movement and the Soviet Union particularly after the arrival of both Soviet aeroplanes and tanks on the central front, and the International Brigades in Madrid in early November. For, while Soviet help did not save Madrid, it did permit the maintenance of the war.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Republic and the Soviet Union**

The issue of Soviet military assistance to the Spanish Republic has been the subject of numerous studies and remains the centre of much controversy to this day. The circumstances under which the Soviet Government decided to provide arms and expertise to the Republican Government are still obscure. We simply do not know why or exactly when the decision was made to provide help, although, it seems likely that the decision to provide military assistance was taken in September 1936, and may have been motivated by the promise of

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<sup>39</sup> Juventud, 7 November 1936.

<sup>40</sup> Juventud, 26 December 1936

<sup>41</sup> Gabriel Cardona 'Las operaciones militares' p. 269

Spanish gold as payment. Undoubtedly Stalin also feared Nazi Germany and sought to improve relations with the European democracies and to promote Popular Front schemes.<sup>42</sup> Another right-wing regime in Europe was undesirable, but at the same time the Soviet government did not want to risk antagonising Britain and France by openly assisting the Republic.

Recent re-evaluations of the evidence, substantiated by hitherto unseen materials from the former Soviet state archives have contradicted earlier contributions to the debate on the extent of Soviet involvement. It now appears clear that despite the provision of war materiel by the USSR to the Republic, the two sides were not evenly matched militarily.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, although the Soviet government desired the Republic's victory, its intervention was far from an attempt to 'sovietise' Spain through the positioning of Soviet personnel within Spain (including members of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD). In contrast to received opinion Soviet involvement appears to have been characterised by inefficiency, ineptitude, and weakness. The majority of Soviet aid was sent in the first ten months of the conflict, and diminished as Soviet attention turned increasingly towards the protection of its own borders, both eastern and western.<sup>44</sup> Significantly this aid was not a gift but paid for with Spanish gold. The USSR was responding to requests from the Republican government for the sale

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<sup>42</sup> Kowalsky, La Union Soviética, pp. 196-98; Gerald Howson, Arms for Spain, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), p. 120, p. 123, pp. 127-28 both concur on this point.

<sup>43</sup> Angel Viñas, 'The financing of the Spanish Civil War,' in Revolution and War in Spain 1931-39, (ed.) Preston, p. 282; Howson, Arms for Spain, p.130; pp. 249-51. Angel Viñas has argued that the foreign resources obtain by the rebels were of the same order of magnitude as those received by the rebels. More recent work conducted by Gerald Howson on Soviet archival material has found that the Republic was badly disadvantaged.

<sup>44</sup> Kowalsky, La Union Soviética, Part V.

of arms, which the Non-Intervention Pact had prevented the Government from acquiring on the open market.

The Russian advisers who accompanied much of the material had also been requested and, with the exception of Soviet pilots, were intended to operate in advisory and training capacities alone. In the main they did only that, assisting the Republican government in the creation of the Popular Army, although the dire situation on the Madrid front in November 1936 and the lack of Spanish armoured vehicle personnel did see some Soviet tank specialists engaged in combat.<sup>45</sup> The advisers worked closely with high ranking members of the Republican army, particularly on the military campaigns in the early part of the war: Madrid, Jarama, Guadalajara, and Brunete. The relatively junior Kiril Meretskov and Rodion Malinovskii worked with the Spanish Generals José Miaja and Sebastián Pozas, and with Enrique Lister, who was also assisted by Alexander Rodimtsev. All three would subsequently assume high-ranking positions in the Soviet Red Army. Other more experienced Soviet military commanders also played a role: men such as General Vladimir Gorev who controlled the Russian artillery, tank and air force units on the Central front, and the Soviet aviator Iakov Smushkevich was adviser to the chief of the Republican air force, Hidalgo de Cisneros.<sup>46</sup> It is however, important not to overstate the influence of the advisers. While it is likely that they, together with the PCE, advocated the adoption of the mixed brigades as the model for the new army, it

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246, pp. 259-64, p. 308

<sup>46</sup> K.A. Meretskov, *Na Sluzhbe Narodu*, (Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, IPL, Moskva, 1970), p. 130, pp. 143-44, R. Malinovskii, 'Torbellinos de ira en España' and A. Rodimtsev 'En la dirección de Guadalajara', in *Bajo la Bandera de la España Republicana: Recuerdan los voluntarios soviéticos participantes en la guerra nacional-revolucionaria en España*, trans. Joaquin Rodríguez, (Progress, Moscow, 1975).

was also true that the General Staff of the Republican army was already receptive to the idea.<sup>47</sup>

The presence of a very few NKVD personnel, (around 20-40 men during the entire course of the conflict) has been attributed to a Soviet need to monitor its own (rather than Spanish) personnel. In fact, this task itself was hampered by the shortage of agents to the extent that it seemed preferable for the Soviet authorities to constantly rotate staff, recalling them to Moscow and providing replacements every six months or so. This ensured that Soviet personnel working closely with Spanish and International Brigade volunteers did not pick up any unsuitable ideas, but had the effect of seriously hindering the efficacy of the assistance given.<sup>48</sup> The Soviet contribution was also hampered by the lack of personnel with actual combat experience. Similarly, relationships between the advisors and the Republican army were made difficult by the lack of interpreters the Soviet Union could provide.<sup>49</sup> In purely quantitative terms the Soviet presence was very small: during the whole war there were scarcely 2000 Soviet personnel in Spain. Nor did the Kremlin ever seek to integrate the various bodies involved in Spain (defence, foreign affairs, Comintern), which also served to undermine the efficacy of its assistance.<sup>50</sup>

The International Brigades, originally the idea of the Comintern, were organised in Paris under the supervision of the PCF and the PCI in exile from September

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Alpert, El Ejercito Republicano en la guerra civil, (Ruedo Ibérico, Barcelona, 1977), pp. 82-83

<sup>48</sup> Kowalsky, La Union Soviética, pp. 279-81 Kowalsky concedes that there were some soviet agents involved in repression of the POUM in Barcelona.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 322, p. 298, pp. 284-87

<sup>50</sup> Rees, 'The Highpoint of Comintern Influence?' p. 160

1936.<sup>51</sup> But not all the volunteers were communists. Overall it has been estimated that of the 23,000 International Brigaders in Spain at the end of December 1936, approximately sixty per cent were communists.<sup>52</sup> Of the British volunteers, of 1,500 for whom political affiliation is known, 1,107 were members of the CPGB or the Young Communist League, while 110 were Labour Party members, and 15 were members of the ILP.<sup>53</sup> Among the German volunteers there were a large proportion of German anarchists, many of them already living in exile in Spain.<sup>54</sup> Nor were these part of a well-constructed 'Comintern Army'. Especially during the first few months of the conflict, many of the volunteers arrived in Spain ahead of the Comintern initiative or were merely coordinated by the organisation after they had departed from their own countries.<sup>55</sup> Others, such as the members of the KPD who were told by their party that they were not needed, travelled anyway.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the first of the Brigades who fought in the battle for Madrid were not especially numerous. The XI Brigade which went into action on 8 November under the Soviet General Kléber, numbered around 2,000 men, while the XII Brigade, also in position by 12 November (simultaneously with the column of 3,000 anarchists led by Durruti), numbered no more than 1,700.<sup>57</sup> The improvised nature of these early international forces should also be noted. Much less than an organised and well-equipped tool of

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<sup>51</sup> César Vidal, Las Brigadas Internacionales, (Espasa, Madrid, 1999), p. 51, pp. 60-1

<sup>52</sup> Bill Alexander, Volunteers For liberty: Spain 1936-39, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1986), p. 67

<sup>53</sup> Richard Baxell, British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-39, (Routledge/Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain, London, 2004), p. 14

<sup>54</sup> Josie McLellan, Antifascism and Memory in East Germany. Remembering the International Brigades, 1945-1989, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004), p. 18

<sup>55</sup> Alexander, Volunteers For liberty, p. 29 says that in the early days some arrived in Spain unrecorded. McLellan, Antifascism and Memory, pp. 20-24 Some early German volunteers, exiles as well as those from within Germany arrived before the Brigades were formally established.

<sup>56</sup> McLellan, Antifascism and Memory, pp. 24-25

<sup>57</sup> Vincent Brome, The International Brigades, (Heinemann, London, 1965), p. 80, p. 91

the Soviet Union, the volunteers had received minimal training, and many were without proper weapons, equipment and attire.<sup>58</sup> The contribution of the Brigades was valuable, but they alone did not save the Madrid from the rebels. The mixed brigades of the embryonic Popular Army had already checked the advance of Varela, preventing troops from crossing the Manzanares river on 7 November.<sup>59</sup>

The Soviet Union also helped in other, more overt ways. It made no secret of its extensive humanitarian aid, financed through supposedly voluntary solidarity campaigns which saw the Soviet people raise around 274 million roubles (around 11,416,000 pounds sterling) for the purchase of foodstuffs, clothing and toys for the people of the Republic. These were in fact orchestrated by the Soviet government in order to encourage domestic support for the regime.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, in a development parallel to the imagery utilised by Spanish communism, the communist culture of sacrifice in relation to Spain was also exploited in the USSR. Solidarity with the Spanish Republic was presented to the Soviet people as a continuation of the series of struggles against their internal and external enemies which began in 1917. Just like the previous struggles, the new movement demanded the personal sacrifice of every man, woman and child. The campaigns and the housing of child refugees had the

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander, Volunteers For liberty pp. 54-55

<sup>59</sup> Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, (Penguin, London, 2003), p. 466

<sup>60</sup> Kowalsky, La union soviética, pp. 83-84; p. 87-92. See also Denis Smyth, "We Are with You": Solidarity and Self-interest in Soviet Policy towards Republican Spain, 1936-39' in The Republic Besieged. Civil War in Spain 1936-1939, (eds.) Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1996). Even post-soviet Russian secondary sources tend to claim that the movement was voluntary, see for example M.T.Meshcheriakov, 'SSSR i Grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii' in Otechestvennaia Istoriiia, 3; 1993, p. 83, p. 94

effect of promoting the socialist values of Soviet society and portraying Stalin as the saviour and protector of the victims of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Madrid Defence Council**

The PCE and its related organisations played a crucial role in the successful defence of Madrid, and its organisational ability and solidarity with the people of Madrid was understood by the people of Republican Spain, bringing it credibility in the coming months and a steady increase in membership.<sup>62</sup> The Party's success translated into influence at the national level, where it had responsibility for two important ministries in Largo Caballero's government, and where it influenced the development of a Popular Army for the Republic. However, its reach at the Madrid provincial level was still limited at this stage to informal influence through its myriad antifascist organisations. The Provincial Committee of the PCE, for example, had little to do with Soviet intervention. It has been argued that the creation of the Madrid Defence Council (Junta de defensa de Madrid) changed this. Alleged communist dominance of the Council has been cited as evidence of the growing hegemony of the PCE in the city and throughout the Republican zone. Furthermore, it has been argued that from this position of strength the PCE challenged Largo Caballero's authority as head of

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<sup>61</sup> Kowalsky, *La Union Soviética*, pp. 101-119, p. 128

<sup>62</sup> Party membership for December 1936 (according to official party figures) stood at 142,800 nationally, with 21,000 in both the provinces of Madrid and Valencia, 13,000 in Jaén province, 12,000 in Málaga province, and 10,000 in the provinces of Alicante and Asturias, indicating the areas in which it was most prominent. AHPCE, Carpeta 17, Militantes del Partido en 31 de diciembre de 1936.

government and came to dominate police functions in the city.<sup>63</sup> Pioneering work in the Spanish archives in the post-Franco era has dispelled many of the myths surrounding the activities of the PCE and the JSU on the Council,<sup>64</sup> revealing the fragile influence of both the Republican authorities and the PCE in Madrid in the winter of 1936.

The origins of the Defence Council lay with the Government's evacuation to Valencia. Upon the Government's departure written instructions were given to General José Miaja Menant, recently appointed commander of the Madrid military area and General Sebastian Pozas, the new commander-in-chief of the centre army.<sup>65</sup> Amid the chaos the envelopes containing the instructions were mixed up, with Miaja receiving those intended for Pozas and vice versa. Fortunately Miaja did not follow the instructions on the sealed documents which requested that they (inexplicably) not be opened until 6am on the following day, 7 November. The orders specified guidelines for the creation of a defence council and the withdrawal of troops to Cuenca in the event of the fall of the city but made no mention of defence provisions.<sup>66</sup> The combination of these events certainly reinforced Miaja's view that he had been selected as a scapegoat to implement the surrender of Madrid.<sup>67</sup> Since his failure to recapture Córdoba in August his reputation had been under a cloud.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War, pp. 295-300; See also Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain, (Faber & Faber, London, 1972), p. 245

<sup>64</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez's work was written in 1984 after they had access to the Civil War archive and the minutes of the Council meetings. Bolloten's earlier work The Spanish Revolution, pre-dates the former, but he offers a response in his later work, The Spanish Civil War.

<sup>65</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 167

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 167 and Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 209

<sup>67</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p.168; Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 209; A.Lopez Fernandez, General Miaja, Defensor de Madrid, (Madrid, G. del Toro, 1975), p. 72

<sup>68</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p.168



government and came to dominate police functions in the city.<sup>63</sup> Pioneering work in the Spanish archives in the post-Franco era has dispelled many of the myths surrounding the activities of the PCE and the JSU on the Council,<sup>64</sup> revealing the fragile influence of both the Republican authorities and the PCE in Madrid in the winter of 1936.

The origins of the Defence Council lay with the Government's evacuation to Valencia. Upon the Government's departure written instructions were given to General José Miaja Menant, recently appointed commander of the Madrid military area and General Sebastian Pozas, the new commander-in-chief of the centre army.<sup>65</sup> Amid the chaos the envelopes containing the instructions were mixed up, with Miaja receiving those intended for Pozas and vice versa. Fortunately Miaja did not follow the instructions on the sealed documents which requested that they (inexplicably) not be opened until 6am on the following day, 7 November. The orders specified guidelines for the creation of a defence council and the withdrawal of troops to Cuenca in the event of the fall of the city but made no mention of defence provisions.<sup>66</sup> The combination of these events certainly reinforced Miaja's view that he had been selected as a scapegoat to implement the surrender of Madrid.<sup>67</sup> Since his failure to recapture Córdoba in August his reputation had been under a cloud.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War, pp. 295-300; See also Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain, (Faber & Faber, London, 1972), p. 245

<sup>64</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez's work was written in 1984 after they had access to the Civil War archive and the minutes of the Council meetings. Bolloten's earlier work The Spanish Revolution, pre-dates the former, but he offers a response in his later work, The Spanish Civil War.

<sup>65</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 167

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 167 and Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 209

<sup>67</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p.168; Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 209; A.Lopez Fernandez, General Miaja, Defensor de Madrid, (Madrid, G. del Toro, 1975), p. 72

<sup>68</sup> Graham, The Spanish Republic, p.168

The Madrid Defence Council was formally constituted on the evening of 7 November. Miaja's instructions had been to form the Council from representatives of all the political parties that formed part of the government and in the same proportion suggesting that the Council was intended as a Popular Front organisation, with representation also from the CNT. There was no indication as to who should nominate these representatives so Miaja allowed the organisations to nominate their own based on the portfolios allocated to them by him as a result of his prior consultations.<sup>69</sup> It is unclear who approached whom, but after consulting with Major Vicente Rojo (who was to be his chief of staff), Miaja spoke to the three subcommissars of war who had troops on the Madrid front: the socialist Crescenciano Bilbao, the syndicalist Angel Pestaña and the communist Antonio Mije. Mije also met Miaja with Santiago Carrillo and José Cazorla of the JSU along with the Communist Pablo Yagüe of the UGT Bakers' union Artes Blancas,<sup>70</sup> an incident which undoubtedly assured the communists an important role on the Council, but not their predominance. The importance that the communists attached to this body was reflected in the fact that both the PCE and JSU sent national and provincial leaders as delegates while the socialists, for example, sent two grassroots militants.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lopez Fernández, General Miaja, pp. 59-60; Graham, The Spanish Republic, p. 170

<sup>70</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez, La Junta de Defensa de Madrid, pp. 66-68, p. 77

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 77

The Council that Miaja appointed reflected, however, neither the exact proportions of government, nor of the Popular Front.<sup>72</sup> To observe the proportionality of the government it would have been necessary to have included representatives of the Basque and Catalan nationalists – an absurdity given that the Council's function was to operate in Madrid – and to have allocated the socialists and anarchists a greater number of delegates than the other parties – 4 apiece. Followed to its logical conclusion, the Izquierda Republicana should have had greater representation than the Unión Republicana and the tiny Syndicalist Party should have been left out altogether. To constitute the Council from members of the Popular Front rather than Government would mean the exclusion of the CNT which would not have been expedient. And yet the POUM, a signatory to the Popular Front and which arguably therefore had more right to be represented, was excluded. Political context is a significant factor here: although the POUM enjoyed a sizeable following in Cataluña, it was a minimal political force in Madrid. The political representation on the Council was ultimately designed to reflect the strength of the representative organisations in Madrid and this was a contributory factor to the POUM's exclusion, and the inclusion of Angel Pestaña's syndicalists, on account of their militia contribution.<sup>73</sup> It is unclear why the FAI never participated. Council minutes indicate the matter was discussed and the Council did agree to

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<sup>72</sup> The delegates were: General José Miaja – President; Fernando Frade (PSOE) – Secretary, deputy Maximos de Dios; Antonio Mije García (PCE) – War, deputy Isidoro Diéguez Dueñas; Santiago Carrillo Solares (JSU) – Public Order, deputy José Cazorla Maure; Amor Nuño Pérez (CNT) – War Industries, deputy Enriqu e Garc a P rez; Pablo Yag e Estever a (UGT) – Supply, deputy Luis Nieto de la Fuente; Jos  Carre o Espa a (Izquierda Republicana) – Communications and Transport, deputy Gerardo Saura Mery; Enrique Jim nez Gonz lez (Uni n Republicana) – Finance, deputy Luis Ruiz Huidobro; Franciso Caminero Rodr guez (Partido Sindicalista) – Civil Evacuation, deputy Antonio Prexes Costa; Mariano Garc a Cascales (Juventudes Libertarias) – Information and Liaison, deputy Antonio O ate. See Bolet n oficial de la junta de defensa de Madrid, 13 November 1936.

<sup>73</sup> Ar stegui and Mart nez La Junta de Defensa, pp. 80-81

the participation of the FAI without an increase to the number of posts. Mije, Carreño and Frade were appointed to approach the FAI with a concrete proposition, but the outcome of this is unknown.<sup>74</sup>

One of the criticisms directed at the Council is that the 'communist' affiliates occupied twice as many seats on the Council as any other ideological group, and that they held the majority of key posts. Thus they were able to direct the Council's policy using it to repress their political opponents within Madrid (most notably the anarchist movement and the POUM), and to challenge Largo Caballero's authority. This, Bolloten argues, was a major contributory factor in Largo's removal as premier in May 1937.<sup>75</sup> In an attempt to demonstrate communist dominance Burnett Bolloten claimed that both Miaja and Frade were members of the PCE, an assertion which has been contested.<sup>76</sup> But even if we include the deputies of the 4 supposedly Communist representatives, we still only have a total of 9 'communists' out of a total of 19 councillors. Furthermore, an examination of the minutes of the Council is enough to ascertain that votes were not routinely taken where a communist preponderance could be brought to bear, and that not all the councillors or their deputies were able to attend all of the meetings of the Council. Decisions could not be taken that were solely favourable to the communists, that is, other groups must have supported the 'communist' proposals.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, 11 November 1936; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez, La Junta de Defensa, p. 296

<sup>75</sup> Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War, pp. 296-300

<sup>76</sup> See Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 141 for a discussion of Bolloten's sources for this view.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 140 discusses the question in detail.

The Council clashed with Largo Caballero in Valencia and this is taken as evidence that the communists used the Council as a tool to undermine Largo. Undoubtedly the Council found itself at odds with the premier and there was a definite clash of personality between Largo and Miaja, exacerbated no doubt by Largo's implicit acknowledgment of Miaja's expendability in assigning him the city's defence. However, Bolloren has taken Largo's own memoirs at face value disregarding that they were an attempt to explain his own political demise, about which he was understandably bitter. He blamed the communists, when actually members of his own party had also actively sought his removal.<sup>78</sup>

The fact of the matter is that Largo never specified sufficiently the limits of authority of the Council. Only in the military terrain was it clear that the chief of the Council should be in constant contact with and subordinate to the chief of the Army of the Centre. In his memoirs Largo claims that the Defence Council of Madrid constituted itself in frank opposition to the government, in spite of the orders given. But other than the orders reserved for the Ministry of War, none were given. It would seem that the initial sessions held by the Council were characterised by confusion concerning its role. It also became apparent that Largo believed the Council should take no decisions without prior consultation.<sup>79</sup> Given the proximity of the city to the front line, the pressing needs of the front and of the civilian population, the erratic lines of communication and the pessimism of the government in believing that Madrid was certain to fall, it would have been virtually impossible and highly detrimental to both the military effort and the organisation of the civilian population for the Council to have

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of Largo's fall from power, see chapter four.

<sup>79</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, pp. 102-4

consulted Largo on every issue, even if it had been aware of this expectation.

The Council was not deliberately usurping the authority of the Republican government, although Largo chose to interpret it this way. Some commentators have ascribed to the Council a revolutionism which it simply did not possess, although groups such as the CNT and the POUM might have preferred such a stance.<sup>80</sup> In reality, the Council was a delegated authority, a prolongation of government, and its representatives accepted this. Moreover, such an interpretation is clearly supported by the Council's minutes.

Furthermore, the Defence Council's function as a truly *political* organisation only lasted for a month. It was during this time that the conflicts with Largo Caballero occurred, and any ambiguity in the limits to its authority were resolved with the restructuring of the Council in late November. Largo sent his cabinet minister Alvarez del Vayo as a government envoy to clarify the role of the Council and to set out its new form and responsibilities. This reconstruction of the Council altered its commissions and emphasised the Council's role as a consultative body with no real *political* authority other than that *delegated* by the central government in Valencia, which was reflected in its new title: the Delegated Defence Council of Madrid (*Junta Delegada de Defensa de Madrid*).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, pp. 127-33 for a discussion of how the different political groups in Madrid viewed the Junta and a discussion of the historiography on this subject.

<sup>81</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, pp. 90-92 The new structure of the Council was as follows: General José Miaja – President; Máximos de Dios (PSOE) – Secretary; Santiago Carrillo (JSU) – Public Order; Francisco Caminero (Partido Sindicalista) – the Front; Enrique Jimenez (UR) – Evacuation; Isidoro Diéguez (PCE) – Militias; Amor Nuño (CNT) – Transport; Lorenzo Iñigo (JL) – War Industries; Pablo Yagüe (UGT) – Supply; José Carreño España (IR) – Propaganda and Press. Pablo Yagüe was replaced by Luis Nieto de la Fuente, also of UGT on 23 December, José Cazorla also of JSU (and PCE) replaced Santiago Carrillo on 27 December and Manuel González Marín, also of CNT replaced Amor Nuño.

The exclusion of the POUM, the revolutionary dissident Communist Party which remained critical of both Soviet brands of Communism and of the Republican government's prosecution of the war, is often cited as evidence of the PCE's ability to achieve its goals on the Defence Council.<sup>82</sup> And in this area, and this area alone the PCE was able to bring Soviet prejudice to bear on the operations of the Council. The minutes of the meetings do not reveal the extent of this pressure, but outline that a letter was received from the POUM asking for membership of the Council, *and it was agreed not to reply*. The minutes provide no reason or any further details. We can speculate that the POUM in Madrid was such a peripheral group as to be considered unworthy of any special correspondence from the Council at this critical time. Importantly it was the Council as a whole which agreed to the exclusion.

The communist-held portfolios - War and later Militias - both at the Council's inception and its subsequent reconstitution, had a certain political importance in that they were both entrusted with the development of thinking around the creation of a new regular army, but in reality they had little practical function.<sup>83</sup>

Supply was also the remit of the Communist Party-affiliated UGT members throughout the Council's existence, and from its very inception this function was beset by problems. Its activities and the progress of these activities were closely bound up with the fortunes of the Evacuation and Transport functions. A problem in one of these areas often had an adverse effect on successful provisioning. Like the Transport function, the work of the Supply Commission was compounded by the existence of a plethora of organism working in the

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<sup>82</sup> Bolloren, The Spanish Civil War, p. 298

<sup>83</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 92

same arena; a legacy of the atomisation of power in Spain wrought by the attempted coup.<sup>84</sup>

In particular the supply function of the Council came into conflict with the National Commission of Provisioning (Comisión Nacional de Abastecimientos), a body created by Governmental decree on 3 October 1936 in an attempt to resolve the national problem of supply in Republican Spain. Problems arose because their respective functions had never been well-defined. It was significant that both emanated directly from government authority, and both comprised representatives of the political and trades-union organisations of Madrid. They often duplicated each others work, and even more importantly their existence did not presuppose the disappearance of the committees, cooperatives and cooperative shops that supplied their own affiliates. Until the beginning of December it seemed that the initiative was with the Supply Commission of the Defence Council, coinciding with the period when the Defence Council had the most political autonomy. However, in December there was a turning-point in the relations between the two bodies. The responsibility for provisioning was placed in the hands of the Provincial Commission by the Ministry of Commerce, and the Supply Delegation in general was limited to ratifying and fulfilling the orders emanating from the Provincial Commission.<sup>85</sup>

This is extremely significant in terms of supposed communist authority through the Defence Council and indeed in terms of the supposed authority of the

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<sup>84</sup> For a flavour of the problems encountered by the Transport Commission see Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 177, pp. 192-93, and Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, especially 23 November 1936; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 235

<sup>85</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, pp. 149-50



Defence Council itself. It would seem that in certain areas, at least, neither had the kind of influence that one would imagine necessary to exercise definitive control over the Madrid population. Furthermore, neither the Defence Council nor the Provincial Commission was able to curtail the provisioning of the population by other organisations/groups, and in reality the vast majority of the population obtained food by private or trade union initiative, or indeed, however they could.<sup>86</sup> Despite various dispositions aimed at strictly regulating the entry and distribution of goods this practice continued.<sup>87</sup> The Defence Council minutes reveal conflicts with the CNT because of the illegal entry of commodities and the existence of clandestine slaughterhouses in Madrid.<sup>88</sup>

One final point on the subject of supply relates to the use made of the Residents' Committees of Madrid. Conflict arose between the Defence Council and the Provincial Committee when the latter de-authorized the Residents Committees from involving themselves in the supply of goods, in a disposition published in the press on 27 January. It claimed that the Defence Council had not authorised these bodies to collect data on the inhabitants of the houses they controlled, despite an earlier disposition by the Supply Delegation to the contrary. In a similar vein, a few days later the Provincial Committee ordered the dissolution of the district committees which were, like the Residents' Committees, part of the same post-coup infrastructure and their replacement with Delegations of the Provincial Committee in the various districts. In theory at

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164

<sup>87</sup> *Boletín oficial de la junta de defensa de Madrid*, 16 & 23 January 1937.

<sup>88</sup> *Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid*, 13 & 19 February 1937, respectively; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, p. 401 & p. 418

least, the organisational structures born after the coup and dominated by political and syndical organisations were being supplanted.<sup>89</sup>

Contrary to the argument that it was the communists who reversed the revolution, it would appear that it was the central government under Largo Caballero that started this process.<sup>90</sup> This is further reinforced by the fact that the cooperatives, the most radical expression of anarcho-syndicalism, were suspended by the Provincial Commission, in spite of the Defence Council's interest in maintaining them.<sup>91</sup> Undoubtedly, the cooperatives and their shops were in reality only supplying to a privileged few and so harmed the communal interest and hindered control over the fair distribution of food, but it is interesting to note that the supposed bastion of anti-anarchist communism, the Defence Council, had championed the cause of these cooperatives.

### **The Public Order Commission**

Perhaps the single most controversial aspect of the Defence Council, and indeed of communist presence therein, was the activity of the Public Order Commission. Although nominally controlled by representatives from the JSU, by the time of the Defence Council's creation, the leadership of the JSU had aligned itself so closely with the PCE and the Third International that ostensibly the Public Order Commission was a communist-dominated function.

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<sup>89</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, pp. 151-52

<sup>90</sup> Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War, see especially Chapters 10, 11 and 12. A key argument in Bolloten's work is that the communists reversed the social revolution that was occurring in Spain.

<sup>91</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 170

The activity of the Public Order Commission has been attacked post-civil war by both the Left and the Right. On the Right, evidence gathered for the Causa General (General Cause), documented the guilt of members of the Commission in the *sacas* (literally the removal) of prisoners from the prisons in the period from 7 November to 4 December 1936. From these and other sources the Causa assigned general responsibility for murders in the republican zone to the 'criminal' Republican government, and indeed was designed to do so having been instituted in April 1940 in order to provide 'a definitive and complete account of the criminality that existed under Marxist rule.'<sup>92</sup> This piece of retrospective documentation formed part of the larger framework of Francoist post-war justification for the *pronunciamiento* and subsequent civil war, within which the victors attempted to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the legally elected Spanish republican government in power on 18 July 1936.

Although some arbitrary and sporadic removal of prisoners and unlawful executions had occurred after the militias had taken control of the prisons, these later *sacas* were characterised by their systematic, studied nature,<sup>93</sup> fuelling post-war accusations that the Republican government had authorised these executions. In contrast to the spontaneous *sacas* from prisons in Albacete and Alcalá de Henares by angry mobs in retribution for Nationalist air-raids, these Madrid *sacas* appear to have been calculated acts, and what is more appear to

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<sup>92</sup> This was the stated objective of the Causa General (General Cause) instituted by the Francoist Attorney-General on 26 April 1940. Before the war was even over, Franco's Interior Minister Ramon Serrano Suñer appointed the Bellón Commission to assemble the evidence needed to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the Spanish republican government in power on 18 July 1936. Julius Ruiz, *Franco's Justice: Repression in Madrid after the Spanish Civil War*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005), pp. 1-3, p. 68, p.108 See also Isidro Sánchez, Manuel Ortiz and David Ruiz (eds.) *España franquista: Causa General y actitudes sociales ante la dictadura*, (Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, 1993).

<sup>93</sup> Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, p. 85

have involved the Republican government (or at the very least its delegates). Of these Madrid *sacas*, the most important are those which involved the removal of prisoners from the Model prison (Carcel Modelo) on 7 and 8 November 1936, which ended in the massacre of some 1,200 prisoners in the villages of Paracuellos de Jarama and Torrejón de Ardoz, on the outskirts of the city of Madrid.<sup>94</sup> The extractions of prisoners were made with lists that had been compiled from files on prisoners held in Madrid, and from the files of right-wing political parties which had been seized after the coup, which were held at the General Department of Security (Dirección General de Seguridad). The lists accompanied with a notification bearing the letterhead of the DGS and occasionally that of the General Department of Security delegate from the Public Order Commission, Segundo Serrano Poncela. The reason offered for their transfer was that the prisoners were either going to be freed or transferred to another prison. Some prisoners were transported on municipal double decker buses, others, often when they were fewer of them, in lorries. They were accompanied by militia groups in cars, who had sometimes formed the firing squads. The majority of those were members of the Vigilance Militias. The victims were not ill-considered. They were carefully selected: some were military officials, others cadres of political formations (especially the Falange), some were intellectuals or prominent rightists. There were also some members of religious orders.<sup>95</sup>

Aside from the indisputable brutality of these acts, these *sacas* continue to merit particular attention (and controversy) both because of the large numbers of

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<sup>94</sup> The numbers are contested. I have used the estimates from sources consulted by Ian Gibson. Gibson, *Paracuellos*, pp. 115-119

<sup>95</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, p. 50, Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, pp. 86-87

prisoners involved, and because of the context in which they occurred. Unlike massacres which occurred in other parts of Republican Spain and which reflected a break-down in central government authority, the Paracuellos *sacas* occurred in Madrid where, as the seat of national government, central state authority was at its strongest.

The definitive allocation of responsibility for these atrocities has proved extremely difficult although a number of recent studies have made valuable contributions.<sup>96</sup> The major obstacle to a clear understanding of events is the unreliability of the sources relating to the massacres. Much of the evidence comes from the Causa General which in turn relied heavily on the court proceedings of the Francoist military tribunals established after the war which sought to find those guilty of 'blood crimes'. In the immediate post-war period in Madrid, a 'confession' of murder obtained by the Francoist secret police was enough to convince a military tribunal of the defendant's guilt and death sentences were common.<sup>97</sup>

While we cannot know for certain what actually occurred during this period, certain assumptions can be made. Several signed letters exist which implicate government-appointed representatives in the Department of Security or the prison services. However, the studies by both Ian Gibson and Javier Cervera acknowledge that there is little to suggest that the responsibility for the *sacas* lies with Manuel Muñoz Martínez, the head of the Department of Security, as he

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<sup>96</sup> Ian Gibson's Paracuellos: Cómo fue, is a balanced and comprehensive study. It pieces together a chronology of events from a variety of sources and draws reasonable conclusions from the available evidence; see also Javier Cervera, Madrid en Guerra

<sup>97</sup> Julius Ruiz, Franco's Justice, p. 3, p. 68, pp. 96-111

fled Madrid for Valencia on the afternoon of 6 November along with Angel Galarza, Minister of the Interior.<sup>98</sup> The first *saca* did not occur until the early hours of 7 November, and the only order which exists with Muñoz's signature (dated 7 November) is most likely a forgery. None of the orders used in the Model or Porlier prisons carried the signature of Muñoz. Proof of individual involvement in the *sacas* is hard to come by, but much of the available evidence points to communist involvement. Santiago Carrillo is implicated on account of his position as Public Order Councillor on the Defence Council. However, he did not officially take up this role until 7 November, although in practice he began work in the post on the afternoon of 6 November, and recalls agreeing then with Miaja on the necessity to begin the transfer of prisoners. Segundo Serrano Poncela as General Department of Security delegate for the Public Order Commission is also heavily implicated as his signature appears on many of the documents authorising the transfer and freedom of the prisoners used by the militiamen to remove prisoners from the prisons. A signature alone however, is not enough by itself to prove absolutely his involvement, especially as it too could be a forgery.<sup>99</sup> Carrillo also has seemed keen to implicate Serrano Poncela. In an interview with Gibson he alludes to Serrano's dismissal from his post at the end of November because of an abuse of power, largely related to incidents of petty theft, but with an implication of more serious misconduct which is never properly explained.<sup>100</sup> Given that Carrillo may have other motives for making this suggestion it should not be taken as proof.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, p. 114; Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, pp. 91-92

<sup>99</sup> Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, pp. 91-95

<sup>100</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, pp. 198-208 Interview by the author with Santiago Carrillo.

<sup>101</sup> Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 193, ft 237, Carrillo subsequently denounced Poncela. However, as Poncela became alienated from the JSU during war, Carrillo may have had a hidden agenda.

Although, the delegates who made up the Public Order Commission, were not officially appointed until 9 November,<sup>102</sup> it would appear that they began working on the night of 6-7 November and that furthermore, an investigation committee (consejo de investigación) within the DGS was created under the presidency of Serrano Poncela. Under Carrillo's leadership the Commission abolished all but one of the 'checas', so legitimating the cross-party body of the Comité Provincial de Investigación Pública (the Provincial Committee of Public Investigation), otherwise known as the Fomento *checa*. This had been created by Manuel Muñoz Martínez at the start of August 1936, and included all the political and syndical organisations of the Popular Front, and libertarian groups. Its purpose was to investigate the conduct of persons disaffected from the regime.<sup>103</sup> The CPIP was now absorbed by the investigation committee. Five members of its executive, Manuel Ramos Martínez (FAI), Manuel Rascon Ramirez (CNT), Antonio Molina Martínez (PCE), Félix Vega Saez (UGT) and Arturo García del Rosa (JSU) were joined by three communists appointed by Carrillo: Juan Alcántara Cristóbal, Ramon Torrecilla Guijarro, and Santiago Alvarez Santiago.<sup>104</sup> Both Ramon Torrecilla Guijarro and Arturo García de la Rosa have claimed subsequently that this body began work in the early hours of the 7 November.<sup>105</sup> Within this delegation the UGT, CNT, FAI and PCE were

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<sup>102</sup> They were Luis Rodríguez as Secretary, Alfredo Caballo as Radio Transmissions delegate, Fernando Claudín as Press Cabinet delegate, Federico Melchor as Security, Assault and Republican National Guard delegate, and Segundo Serrano Poncela as the General Department of Security delegate.

An article in Juventud on 10 November 1936 refers to the appointments made the previous day, but the Boletín Oficial del la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, 13 November 1936, refers to a disposition by Carrillo dated 8 November.

<sup>103</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 176

<sup>104</sup> Gibson, Paracuellos, p. 45; Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa pp. 260-69

<sup>105</sup> Gibson, Paracuellos, pp. 45-46. Torrecilla's declaration appears in the Causa General, but was corroborated by de la Rosa who the author interviewed in October 1982.

represented, suggesting that the libertarians worked alongside their socialist and communist counterparts. However, it was also the case that the PCE was able to establish hegemony within this group.

With the departure of Muñoz Martínez a vacuum was left in the Madrid DGS which was filled by the investigation committee.<sup>106</sup> Given, then, that the lists used to extract the prisoners were compiled from files held at the DGS, that the personnel of the CPIP would have had access to these files (and used them at times to uncover rightists),<sup>107</sup> and that from 7 November members of the CPIP were working at the DGS for the Public Order Commission, it seems plausible that these individuals played a part in the events that ensued. Ian Gibson has also drawn this conclusion. It seems most probable that the government had put into action plans for the evacuation of the 'fascist' prisoners before it left from Valencia, but the power vacuum in Madrid on 6-8 November left the prisoners in a vulnerable position, which was exploited by members of the CPIP/DGS who carried out the massacres.<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, it seems unlikely, given the massive expeditions of prisoners undertaken, that this was the work of either isolated individuals or a small committee acting for personal reasons or vengeance or so-called uncontrollables. These appear to have been planned and coordinated actions. It is possible that the three communists appointed by Carrillo, as representatives in the DGS for the prisons of Ventas, Porlier and San Antón were involved in

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99

<sup>107</sup> Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, p. 61

<sup>108</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, pp. 228-29



the selection of the prisoners.<sup>109</sup> But we should be cautious as much of the evidence that implicates PCE members in the *sacas* comes from the Causa General. Additionally, although the PCE appears to have endorsed their applications to join the DGS as policemen we do not know for how long they had been members of the Party, their previous backgrounds, nor if they were acting on the orders of their Party or professional superiors.<sup>110</sup> This again raises questions concerning the Party's composition during the civil war and the extent to which members were under the leadership's control. Furthermore, when we consider the difficulty experienced by the government itself when trying to leave Madrid, the confrontations between some of its members and anarchist patrols, we can only assume that at the very least these groups acquiesced in the removal of prisoners from the city, even if they had not been aware of the execution plans. It would appear therefore that such an undertaking had the connivance if not the participation of several political and syndical groups.

Some works on the subject have tried, somewhat unconvincingly to link the events at Paracuellos and Torrejón with the work of Soviet agents in Spain.<sup>111</sup> Carrillo himself intimated to Gibson that he thought that Soviet agents were ultimately responsible.<sup>112</sup> But given his known divergence from the USSR after

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53 Based on the testimony of Torrecilla in the Causa General Álvaro Marasa Barasa Andrés Urrésola Ochoa and Agapito Sainz were representatives in the DGS for the prisons of Ventas, Porlier and San Antón respectively.

<sup>110</sup> Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, p. 97

<sup>111</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, for further detail, especially, pp. 69-70, p 113, p. 127. There are a number of works which suggest NKVD involvement, but there is little concrete evidence to support such claims. See for example, the loosely autobiographical *Diario de la guerra española*, by the Russian writer Mikhail Koltsov (Akal, Madrid, 1979), or the book by the Daily Express correspondent in Madrid during the war, Sefton Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, (1961).

<sup>112</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, p. 232

1968,<sup>113</sup> this seems a little too convenient. In his interview with Gibson, Carrillo attempts a variety of explanations ranging from the actions of opportunistic militiamen in the two localities beyond the rule of law, to the hand of the NKVD. Interestingly enough he concludes with a justification of the events. It would seem that he believed at the time that those in positions of authority would not live beyond the next few hours, possibly days, let alone be required to face the consequences of certain actions years afterwards. This is no proof of guilt but it is relevant to events subsequent to 7 November.

Carrillo has claimed in an interview with Javier Cervera that he knew nothing of events until he was approached by the diplomat Felix Shlayer who brought him the news.<sup>114</sup> We do know that over the course of the next few days the events were known and discussed within government circles. On 10 November the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) cabinet minister Manuel de Irujo, wrote to Miaja's secretary asking for numbers involved in the massacre, details of who had authorised the removals and from which prisons.<sup>115</sup> It is likely that Irujo had been alerted to the news of a possible massacre by members of the PNV in Madrid who had dedicated themselves to saving Basque prisoners in danger.<sup>116</sup> Irujo's Catholicism may also have been a factor here given that priests were among the executed. He was also, along with Prieto, the only cabinet minister to vote consistently against implementing the death penalty. On 11 November at a meeting of the Defence Council the Councillor for Evacuation Francisco Caminero asked Carrillo if the Model prison had been evacuated, a question he

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<sup>113</sup> Gregorio Morán, Miseria y grandeza del PCE, 1939-1985, (Planeta, Barcelona, 1985), p. 440

<sup>114</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 101

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>116</sup> Gibson, Paracuellos, p. 122

thought to be very urgent. Carrillo replied that it had not, but added he had already taken measures to that end, to which Diéguez, deputy Councillor for War, proposed that the evacuations continue because the number of prisoners was a serious problem. To this Carrillo replied that he had been approached by the diplomatic corps who had expressed their concern over the situation in the prisons and for this reason he had suspended the evacuation. The deputy for War Industries proposed that the prisoners be transferred with maximum security and the discussion was concluded with a vote of confidence being taken in Carrillo to resolve the question.<sup>117</sup> This dialogue would suggest that the evacuations had already begun, and that there had been some serious questions over how they had been conducted.

Regardless of what has been claimed or alleged since that time, it is clear that ultimately it was Carrillo who bore official responsibility for the prisoners who met their deaths and that furthermore, despite being aware of abuses of authority at this point, he appears to have done little to halt the unlawful removal and execution of prisoners, which continued until the beginning of December, albeit on a much smaller scale. His attitude suggests a certain ambivalence to the fate of the prisoners and in many ways reflects the concerns and attitudes of many of those left in Madrid, who perceived very clearly the threat of the fifth column and the threat to their lives if the rebels should enter the city. Carrillo's main objective was that Franco should not be able to organise two or three army corps from his imprisoned sympathisers, and in this objective he

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<sup>117</sup> Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, 11 November 1936; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 295

succeeded.<sup>118</sup> However there is no evidence for his direct involvement, and furthermore, post-war he was not immediately associated with the massacres. It has been argued convincingly that Carrillo's association with the atrocities was emphasised only after he became general secretary of the PCE in exile, and it was the Franco dictatorship which raised the issue to prominence.<sup>119</sup>

Ultimately the massacres occurred within a context where violence had become widely employed for the administration of 'justice' and as a consequence seems to have been more generally accepted. The evidence for communist involvement is difficult to dismiss. However, whilst not trying to defend the indefensible it is important to contextualise what happened. The individuals involved were responding to an *extraordinary* set of circumstances in which ordinary people committed atrocities. One should also bear in mind the extreme youth of the council delegates; many of whom were barely into their twenties. Furthermore, the close cooperation of almost all political and syndical groups in the administration of justice and other state functions and the continuity between quasi-legal institutions such as the CPIP and the DGS, means that ultimately all actors on the Republican stage share collective responsibility for what occurred. The PCE, while undoubtedly culpable, became a convenient scapegoat for this episode and others, reflecting a post-war trend of blaming the communists for the Republic's ills.

The sacas ceased after the appointment of the CNT's Melchor Rodríguez as head of the Special Delegation of Prisons of Madrid of the General Direction of

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<sup>118</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 102, Carrillo is quoted when he was a councillor.

<sup>119</sup> Claudín, Santiago Carrillo, p. 49

Prisons by the Republican government in Valencia on 4 December,<sup>120</sup> reflecting both a clear assertion of central government authority and a determination on Rodríguez's part to gain control of the situation.

### **The Public Order Commission and the CNT**

The Public Order Commission has also drawn criticism from the left for allegedly facilitating communist dominance over police functions in Madrid, to the extent that the newly created secret police corps became a mere arm of the Soviet secret police.<sup>121</sup> Such assertions are highly tenuous and have been refuted by various scholars of note.<sup>122</sup> However, the Defence Council did inherit the serious problem of uncontrolled repression occurring in the streets of Madrid, and without the monopoly on coercive power, the Republican authorities' legitimacy was badly tarnished both within its territory and in the outside world. Recuperation of state authority required the disarming of the rearguard, the detection and neutralisation of the fifth column,<sup>123</sup> the regularisation of the

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<sup>120</sup> Gibson, Paracuellos, pp. 177-78 Rodríguez prohibited the removal of prisoners between the hours of 6pm and 8am, insisted that the orders were always to come from him either by telephone or by letter bearing his personal stamp and signature. If the authorities were in any doubt they could call him, and he would accompany the prisoners to a safe place, which he did on more than one occasion.

<sup>121</sup> Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War, p. 299 and Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Revolution, p.

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<sup>122</sup> Bolloten's main sources remain Walter Krivitsky and Alexander Orlov – who both defected to the west and had motive for making such claims. See Herbert Rutledge Southworth, 'The Grand Camouflage': Julián Gorkín, Burnett Bolloten and the Spanish Civil War', in The Republic Besieged, (eds.) Preston and Mackenzie, for a critique of some of Bolloten's sources. As discussed above Daniel Kowalsky has refuted the existence of vast numbers of Soviet personnel in Spain, arguing for a relatively weak and haphazard role played by the Soviet Union in the war.

<sup>123</sup> The term 'fifth column' has its origins in the Spanish Civil war in the weeks prior to the assault on Madrid. It is usually attributed to General Mola, who at the start of October, believing that the capture of Madrid was imminent, claimed that the capital would fall by the actions of the four columns of Varela that were approaching the city and the activities of the fifth that could already be found inside.

judicial apparatus and the creation of a new police force, subject to the new established power.<sup>124</sup>

The JSU's responsibility for the Public Order portfolio required the organisation to take on this recuperation of state authority on behalf of the government, bringing it into conflict with the members of the CNT and FAI, and partly explaining the origins of allegations of repression. In pursuit of the fifth column the PCE and the JSU would be criticised for their over-zealous persecution of CNT members. While the communist movement as a whole became obsessed with infiltrators and spies during this period, Madrid's proximity to the front line, and its strategic importance meant that the presence of the fifth column was nevertheless a real concern for those involved in the defence of Madrid and heavily influenced communist activity in official capacities in the autumn and winter of 1936, and beyond.

With the armed forces and civil guard in disarray as a result of the military coup and subsequent outbreak of civil war, the Republican government had not known who it could trust. On 31 August 1936 the Giral government took the first steps towards restructuring the armed forces with the promulgation of a decree for the purging and reorganisation of the Civil Guard, henceforth to be known as the National Republican Guard. Under the Largo Caballero government thousands were recruited for this new corps and the same was true of the Assault Guards. Steps were taken to bring the independent squads and patrols of working-class organisations under government control. A decree of 17

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<sup>124</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez, La Junta de Defensa, p. 228 and repeated in Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 74 with a slightly different emphasis.

September incorporated them into the Vigilance Militias under the authority of the socialist Minister of the Interior, Angel Galarza. They were to collaborate with official police forces in the maintenance of internal order. All militiamen performing police functions who did not belong to the new corps were to be regarded as 'disaffected elements', while its members were given priority if they wished to enrol in the regular police forces. Members of the communist, socialist and republican parties were quick to avail themselves of the opportunity to enter the official police corps, but the anarcho-syndicalists held back and in many places clung tenaciously to their own police squads and patrols in defiance of the government.<sup>125</sup> In these first few months of the conflict there were 1,909 applications to join the police of the General Department of Security and not a single one was from a CNT member.<sup>126</sup> Undoubtedly there were ideological and cultural reasons why anarchists would find it anathema to join the police forces but increasingly they would find themselves on the wrong side of the forces of law and order.

The Public Order Commission did much to restore faith in the Republic and greatly facilitated the government's monopoly on legitimate violence. On 9 November 1936 the Public Order Commission announced a twenty-four hour amnesty during which all weapons must be handed in to the police stations of the General Department of Security. After the twenty-four hours had elapsed, all persons carrying arms were to be considered disaffected from the regime and were to be judged in accordance with the laws of war.<sup>127</sup> The interior vigilance

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<sup>125</sup> Bolloten, The Spanish Revolution, pp. 204-06

<sup>126</sup> Cervera, Madrid en Guerra, p. 70

<sup>127</sup> Mundo Obrero, 10 November 1936 Excepted in the disposition were the regular forces dependant on the Public Order Commission, or on the War Commission, the directors of

of the capital and its approach roads were exclusively the charge of the forces organised by this commission. The political and syndical organisations were authorised to establish vigilance posts in the localities which they occupied, but not outside these localities.<sup>128</sup> Miaja had asked Carrillo as Councillor for Public Order to bring about the immediate elimination of assassinations, and Carrillo had dealt with his request by bringing the Party police under the control of the Commission for Public Order. The numbers of illegal deaths dropped dramatically from this point.<sup>129</sup>

The Defence Council earned great prestige for itself among *madriños*, precisely because of its progress in the arena of public order.<sup>130</sup> Santiago Carrillo has explained that his Commission was able to achieve what the government had hitherto struggled to do, because of the proximity of the rebels to the city. Many who had been involved in the administration of 'revolutionary justice' left Madrid, fearing the 'justice' of the enemy.<sup>131</sup>

However, as we have seen, anarchist groups tended not to sign up for the newly created security and police forces. Furthermore, they were most resistant to the imposition of these forces and their own consequent removal from posts of vigilance. Despite the earlier decree, groups associated with the anarcho-syndicalist federation continued to operate at the margins of authority and this issue came to a head with the shooting of the Council's Supply delegate, the

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syndical or political organisation and citizens mobilised with the special authorisation if the Commission.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Cervera, *Madrid en Guerra*, p. 74

<sup>130</sup> Zugazagoitia, *Guerra y Vicisitudes*, p. 231

<sup>131</sup> Gibson, *Paracuellos*, p. 194



UGT's Pablo Yagüe on 23 December 1936 when he was travelling along the road to Aragon on official business.<sup>132</sup> Contemporary communist and anarchist accounts of the incident varied dramatically and a ferocious war of words in their respective press organs ensued.<sup>133</sup> What seems certain was that Yagüe and his convoy were attacked by a group of soldiers from an anarchist militia at one of the checkpoints on the road to Aragon.<sup>134</sup>

The consensus of the Council appeared to be that this group was probably only loosely connected to the anarchist movement, and in no way had this action been sanctioned or approved by the CNT leadership. But the CNT incurred the wrath of many, including the PCE and general Miaja, by harbouring the perpetrators in a libertarian *ateneo* (cultural association). Carrillo had ordered the detention of those involved but when the police arrived, members of the *ateneo* refused to hand over the assailants saying that they were under the safeguard of the regional committee of the CNT.<sup>135</sup> The Communist press and its representatives on the Council called for the death penalty, while the anarchist movement demanded absolution from all blame for their coreligionists. The anarcho-syndicalist organ *CNT* even went as far as to claim that whatever the outcome of the Popular Tribunal (by which the accused would be tried) they would disregard it and set free the militiamen. Given this blatant disregard for due process, Miaja suspended the newspaper, moving in tanks and troops to

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<sup>132</sup> *Juventud*, 24 December 1936

<sup>133</sup> Zugazagoitia, *Guerra y Vicisitudes*, pp. 231-32

<sup>134</sup> *Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid*, 23 December 1936; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, p. 343

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.344

the street where it was published when the anarchists threatened to usurp his authority.<sup>136</sup>

This episode had significant repercussions in the Public Order arena: In the first instance it allowed Cazorla (who had replaced Carrillo as delegate for Public Order) and the Defence Council to finish definitively the task of replacing politically-oriented Vigilance Militias with official security forces. On 27 December 1936 an edict was published by the Defence Council which entrusted the task of vigilance exclusively to the security and assault forces. From 3pm on the same day all control and vigilance guards on the access roads to the capital were to be retired. It was categorically prohibited to circulate arms in the interior of Madrid and there were to be no more control or vigilance guards for the protection of buildings that had not been expressly authorized by the general staff of the defence forces or by the General Department of Security. Any groups who assumed such functions without official authorisation were to be considered rebels and subjected to the corresponding sanctions of the military code of justice.<sup>137</sup> This edict was posted throughout Madrid. Some groups, mostly notably the guards at the Puente de Toledo and the Europa Cinema continued to resist authority<sup>138</sup> but ultimately these isolated groups could be brought under control.

It has often been argued that the new police function was used to persecute members of the CNT. The fact of the matter was that CNT militias had

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<sup>136</sup> Zugazagoitia, Guerra y Vicisitudes, p. 232

<sup>137</sup> Milicia Popular, 27 December 1936

<sup>138</sup> Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, 30 December 1936; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 351

purposefully resisted entering the ranks of the security forces when the opportunity had availed itself. Furthermore, it is possible that many of the policemen involved in the persecution of CNT members would have been those that had dealt with the CNT before the war. They might not necessarily be new policemen, but many were new Communist Party members, having acquired their membership cards after 18 July 1936.<sup>139</sup> These men would have been attracted to the rigidity and discipline of the Party, and the political moderation it espoused. There were cases of illegal detention and the extortion of funds by individuals who claimed libertarian affiliation and such incidences were used as justification for harsh measures against such individuals and anarchist sympathisers in general.<sup>140</sup> Marín, the CNT representative on the Council himself admitted that the anti-authoritarian attitudes of many of its supporters could not be changed overnight,<sup>141</sup> and this indeed is the crux of the whole Public Order issue.

The Civil War laid bare numerous contradictions at the heart of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, notably the problematic relationship between the individual and collective responsibilities of the anarchist militant and an inability to develop an adequate strategy for the social transformation which the movement aspired to achieve.<sup>142</sup> A myriad of historical, political and personal ties bound extremist and violent individuals to the CNT-FAI leadership in the 1930s. They were part of the 'libertarian family' and as such they brought

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<sup>139</sup> Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p.195

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196, see also *Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid*, 15 April 1937; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, p. 448

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196 and *Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid*, 19 February 1937; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez *La Junta de Defensa*, p. 416

<sup>142</sup> Chris Eahlam, 'From the summit to the abyss': The Contradictions of Individualism and Collectivism in Spanish Anarchism' in *The Republic Besieged*, p. 161

growing embarrassment to the CNT-FAI leadership. The increasing realisation that individualistic violence might corrupt militants and compromise the movement led to an internal debate on the question of internal discipline and the need to subjugate the individual will to the exigencies of the organisation. Such concerns merged with anxieties that the relatively unsupervised expansion of the libertarian movement had allowed 'undesirable elements' and provocateurs to enter the FAI. Other libertarians feared that criminals who sought to exploit anarchist ideology as a cloak for their traditional law-breaking might be attracted to the movement.<sup>143</sup> But with the outbreak of Civil War came the realisation that the problem of internal control within the movement had not been resolved. During the war the del Rosal column in Cuenca and the Valencia-based Iron column (Columna de Hierro) both recruited from the ex-inmates of the San Miguel de los Reyes prison. This was the inevitable result of the simplistic construction of 'the prisoner' as always and everywhere a fully-fledged comrade-in-arms retained by some anarchist sectors – particularly in the FAI.<sup>144</sup>

The belief of CNT-FAI that revolution and authority were incompatible only served to worsen relations between the libertarian movement and the defenders of Republican bourgeois democracy. The movement had been able to carry a revolution of sorts to the factories and fields of Republican Spain as part of their collectivisation initiatives, but they had no *political* alternative to the state power and authority that they wished to dismantle,<sup>145</sup> and moreover, this situation had created and sustained the actions of the uncontrollables. The leadership soon

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-155

<sup>144</sup> Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 88

<sup>145</sup> Eahlam, "From the summit to the abyss" pp. 153-56

realised that the individualistic acts of violence or pillage were having a damaging effect on the movement as a whole but given the broad and fragmented nature of the libertarian movement, even when the leadership came to accept a role within the Republican government, they were unable to reign in the undesirable elements, in part because they had never been under their control.

Both the loose nature of the 'libertarian family' and the leadership's inability to bring to heel the uncontrolled elements, allowed not only the PCE, but all who supported the defence of the beleaguered Republic an opportunity to curtail the revolutionary aspirations of the CNT on the pretext of eliminating the fifth column, and so further strengthen the authority of the Republican state. Importantly, this was not a Moscow-inspired plot to reverse a revolution that it did not control, but was driven by a real desire to reinstate the rule of law and to finish with arbitrary justice. Undoubtedly the PCE was hostile to the CNT's attempts to transform society, but this has more foundation in the desire to present a stable bourgeois democracy to the outside world than in any attempt to create a Soviet-style democracy obedient to the vacillations of Moscow. It also represented the continuation of pre-Popular Front communist ideology: the PCE was unable to recognise as authentic any revolution that it did not lead. That the PCE succeeded in reinstating government authority in Madrid through its Public Order function would suggest that organisation played a key role in the state building project undertaken during the course of the civil war, and that the majority of the political and syndical organisations in Madrid (including the CNT), and its citizens were sympathetic to its aims. The conflict between the

Public Order Commission and the CNT patrols also undoubtedly derived from communist ideas concerning unity. At the heart of its ideas concerning both political unity and the restitution of the state's monopoly of coercion was a strong central state which could not tolerate alternative concepts of society and governance as practised by elements of the libertarian movement. Increasingly unity was becoming associated with political unanimity, which would provoke inter-organisational rivalry between communists and other political and syndical groups.

The recruitment policies of the libertarian movement (which are largely beyond the scope of this study) and its reputation as a broad church also made it an obvious target for the PCE and the Defence Council in its war against the fifth column. Isolated cases of enemy infiltration provided justification for firm measures against the CNT. But this also highlights an issue which preoccupied all the Popular Front organisations. The PCE itself was extremely keen to prevent the permeation of enemy agents into its ranks,<sup>146</sup> and its persecution of the CNT on these grounds is as reflective of its fears for its own organisation as it is of its fear for or of others. This concern was coupled with a contradictory desire among most of the organisations within the Republican zone to attract new members, for the greater the membership, the greater the political and social influence. Additionally, many of the previously unaffiliated wanted to join the ranks of an organisation or party as means of demonstrating loyalty to the Republic, or, as demonstrated earlier, to obtain foodstuffs. A party card afforded some protection from arbitrary arrest, or death, and as the PCE was

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<sup>146</sup> Mundo Obrero, 7 April 1937 See further chapter four below.

seen to take firm measures against such acts, it is understandable that its membership should increase dramatically in Madrid through those seeking to protect themselves from libertarian excesses. The middle classes now made up about 10 per cent of Party membership in the capital and its province, although workers still featured prominently, accounting for half of the province's militants, and agricultural labourers represented more than one quarter of members. Membership reports of the wartime PCE put the number of affiliates in Madrid at 3,450 in March 1936, at 21,000 in December 1936, and at 40,000 in March 1937. Of these 40,000, 20,000 were workers, 12,000 were agricultural labourers, 3,200 were peasants and 4,000 were from the middle class. Women and intellectual members were more numerous but still only represented a small fraction of the total, numbering 1,500 and 800 respectively. Of the Madrid total however, a staggering 30,000 had been mobilised.<sup>147</sup> At least some of these new members had joined for personal advancement: Michael Seidman has suggested that many people joined organisations post-18 July for individualistic motives for example to keep a job, or to avoid the police who were liable to take measures against those not affiliated with a Popular Front organisation.<sup>148</sup>

It was cases of infiltration which led to the downwards spiral in relations between the CNT and PCE both within the Defence Council and outside it. The last ever Defence Council meeting on 15 April witnessed a heated exchange.<sup>149</sup> The tension between the two organisations had started with the shooting of

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<sup>147</sup> AHPCE, Carpeta 17 'Militantes del Partido en marzo de 1936'; 'Militantes del Partido en 31 de diciembre de 1936'; Carpeta 18 'Fuerza numérica del Partido y composición social en primero de marzo de 1937'.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Seidman, 'Individualisms in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War' *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (March 1996), p. 64

<sup>149</sup> Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 194-95 neatly summarises this debate.

Pablo Yagüe and was exacerbated by CNT allegations of mistreatment of its own members in clandestine, ostensibly communist prisons,<sup>150</sup> and by the discovery of Nationalist infiltration of the War Ministry and the CNT, the most notorious being the case of Alfonso López de Letona. This particular case did nothing for the credibility of the CNT as they had continued to defend the accused despite claims that this member of the Popular Army had been a member of the monarchist party Renovación Española, and had a dubious past as a professional thief and member of the Tercio (Foreign Legion). There was also evidence to suggest that he had acted along with others as a liaison agent, meeting frequently with rightists and visiting embassies known to be hostile to the Republic.<sup>151</sup> At the same meeting allegations against abuses by Cazorla's police force were also taken seriously, and the Council created a commission (which excluded CNT, PCE and JSU representation) to investigate.<sup>152</sup> The escalation of the situation, with its concurrent war of words in the press, in which both sides flagrantly flouted the Republic's censorship rules, ultimately also damaged the credibility of the Council. Although Largo Caballero gave no concrete reason for his decision to immediately disband the Council, this political and organisational rivalry was undoubtedly a contributory factor.

Cazorla was certainly heavy-handed, even politically motivated in his approach to the CNT, but the justification for a hard-line approach is not easy to dismiss. However, the tough action taken against anarchists and other unofficial vigilance groups was supported by all the political organisations of the Popular

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<sup>150</sup> Actas de la Junta de Defensa de Madrid, 15 April 1937; reproduced in Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 441

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 447

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 454



Front represented on the Council (the anarcho-syndicalist movement did not actually form part of the Popular Front), indicating that communist hegemony in Public Order relied on the acquiescence if not the active support of the major political forces in Madrid. Furthermore, communist dominance of Public Order and policing was in reality quite tenuous. The Consejo de Investigación within the DGS was dissolved and a Provincial Committee of Security for Madrid within the DGS under the presidency of Cazorla was created at the end of January 1937. The new committee was composed of one of each of the following organisations: IR, UR, UGT, CNT, PCE, Agrupación Socialista Madrileña and the Federación Local de Grupos Anarquistas.<sup>153</sup> Such developments reflected the consolidation of Republican authority through the creation of new institutions, rather than communist domination per se and suggest that both supposed communist hegemony and anarchist persecution were part of a more complex set of relations which related to the reestablishment of state authority.

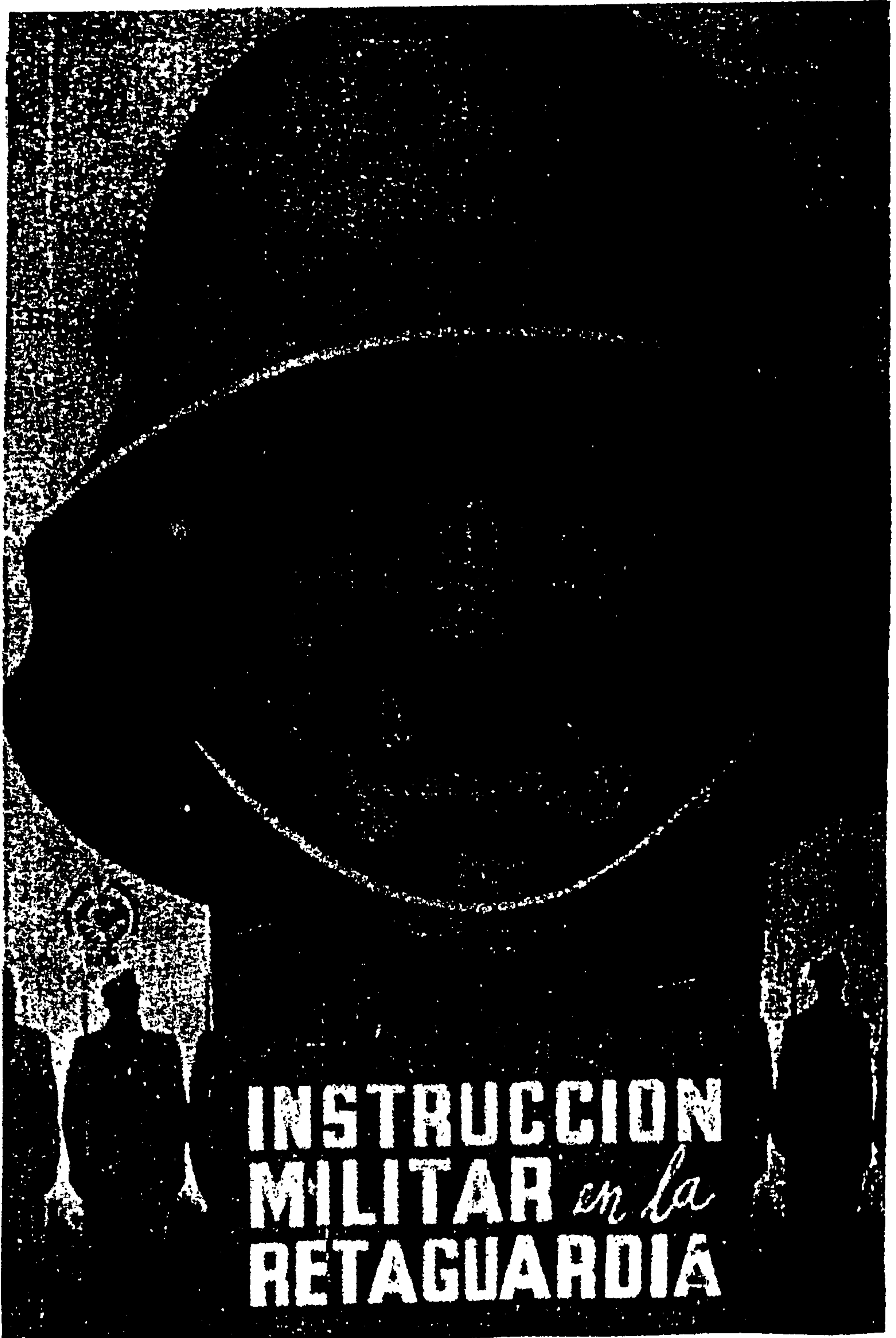
The Council as a whole had fulfilled a vital function at a critical time for the Republic. In particular, the communist-dominated Public Order Commission had made a significant contribution to the recuperation of power for the Republican government. The disbanding of the Defence Council and its replacement by the traditional civic authority of the *ayuntamiento* (town hall) was a further consequence of the reassertion of the central state.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, this restitution of Republican institutions occurred at the same time in many parts of Republican Spain. The PCE's competence as a military organiser, enhanced by

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<sup>153</sup> Aróstegui and Martínez La Junta de Defensa, p. 233

<sup>154</sup> See for example El Sol, 25 April 1937 on the disbanding of the Council and the formation of the new Town Hall administration.

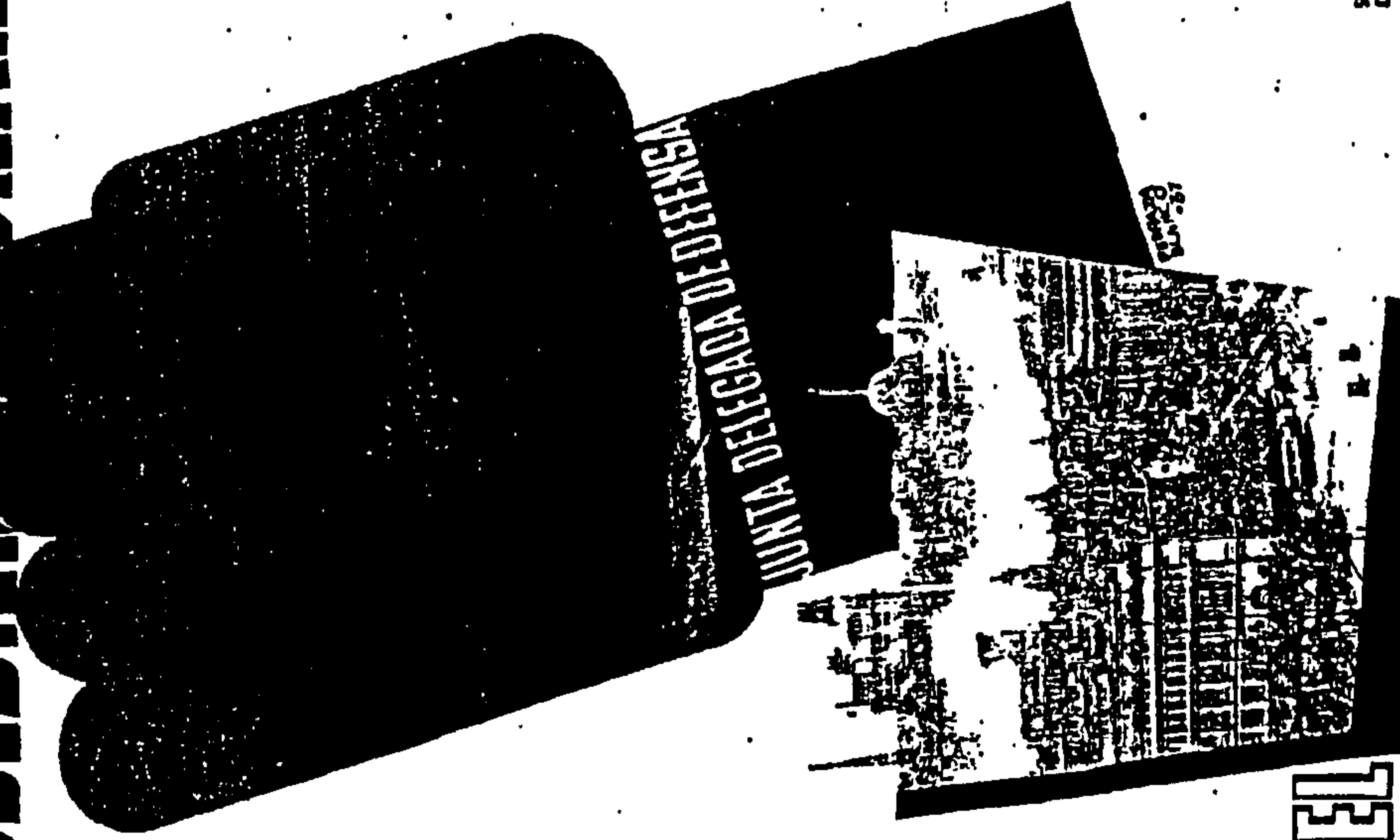
the appearance of Soviet tanks and aeroplanes, was successfully transferred to civilian mobilisation at the critical moment of Madrid's defence. Witnessing first hand heroic resistance against all odds, the PCE especially would use the symbolism of Madrid to encourage unity around the common objective of defending the Republic and support for its policy of resistance to the end. Its improvised yet courageous decision to remain in the city earned the Party respect from Madrid's citizens, while its tough line on public order and the rule of law assisted the return of traditional forms of governance, at the expense of more revolutionary forms of organisation. Its successes also translated into increased membership and a prominent position within the city's social and political spheres. However, its diverse and numerous membership, always a cause for concern among its leaders, was becoming increasingly unmanageable. The Party's close association with a policy of resistance would bring it greater influence in the short-term, but ultimately would also sow the seeds of its demise. The PCE's experience in the defence of Madrid would shape its actions throughout the remainder of the conflict.



1 PCE poster on military instruction in the rearguard (anon)

Source: Carmen Grimau, El Cartel Republicano en la Guerra Civil (Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid, 1979), p. 70

**LA OBEDIENCIA UNANIME**

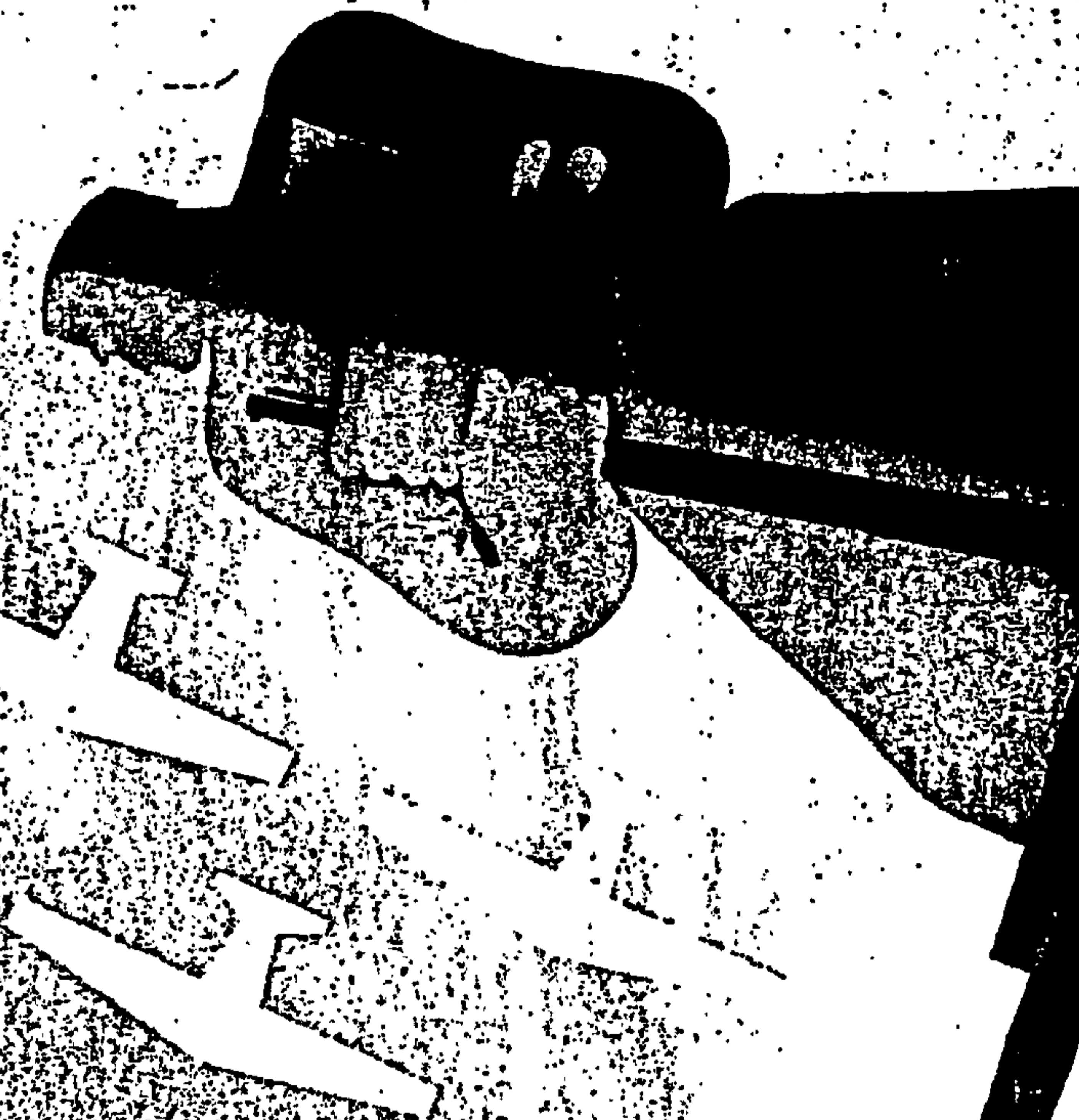


**ESEL**

**TRIBUNAL**

SECRETARIA DE DEFENSA  
CARTEL N.º 100

**UN EJERCITO REGULAR Y...**

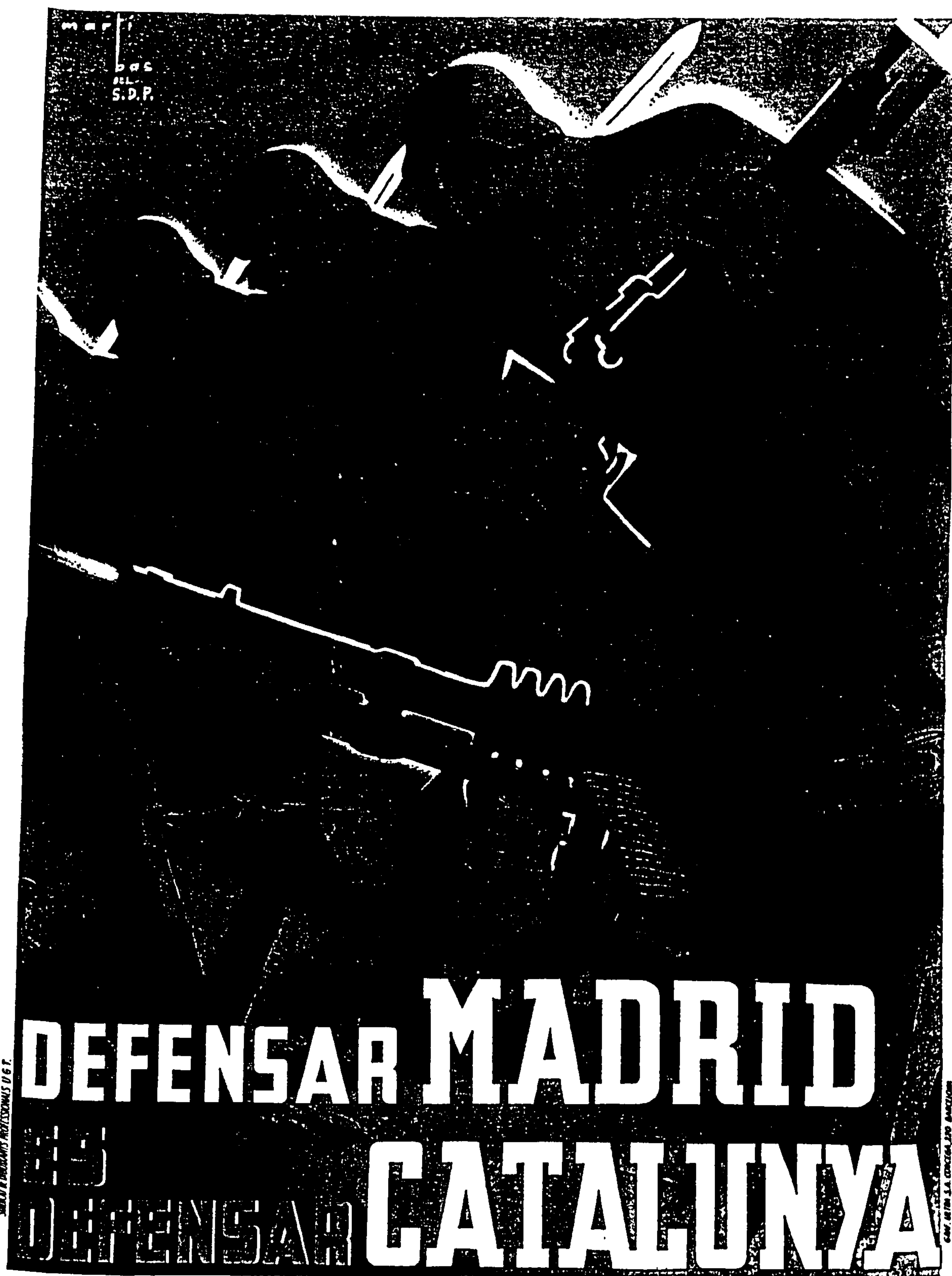


**MANDO UNICO**

*es la victoria*

2 (a) PCE poster 'Unanimous obedience is triumph' (Pedraza Blanco)

(b) PCE poster 'Mando Único' (Pedraza Blanco)



3 UGT poster 'To defend Madrid is to defend Cataluña' (Martí Bas)

Source: Jordi and Arnau Carulla, La Guerra Civil en 2000 cartells, vol. I (Postermil, Barcelona, 1997), p. 478



**SOLDADO: ESTIMA COMO UN TESORO EL  
ARMA QUE LA PATRIA HA PUESTO EN TUS  
MANOS PARA QUE DEFIENDAS SU SUELO  
POR LA INDEPENDENCIA DE ESPAÑA**

4 Political Commissariat poster 'For the independence of Spain' (Renau)

Source: Miravittles [et al], Carteles de la República y de la Guerra Civil, p. 188



5 Madrid Defence Council poster 'First we must win the war' (anon)

Source: Grimau, El Cartel Republicano, p. 113

# ★ ACADEMIA DE ★ CAPACITACION I

## PARA CABOS Y SARGENTOS

## 90 BRIGADA MIXTA



# ¡QUIERAS! ¡QUIERAS!



EN ELAS ESTA LA GARANTIA  
DEL PAN, LA TIERRA, LA LIBERTAD Y LA  
INDEPENDENCIA PARA NUESTRO PUEBLO



6 (a) Political Commissariat poster 'Training Academy' (Cañete)  
6 (b) Political Commissariat poster 'Care of Arms' (anon)



BELTRAN

**¡DISCIPLINA!  
MANDO ÚNICO**



**es el lema  
DE LA VICTORIA**

7 Izquierda republicana poster 'Mando Único' (Beltrán)

Source: Miravittles [et al], Carteles, p. 175



TODAS LAS MILICIAS FUNDIDAS EN EL  
**EJERCITO**  
**POPULAR**

8 Madrid Defence Council poster 'Popular Army' (Melendreras)

Source: Miravittles [et al], Carteles, p. 185



DE MADRID  
SECRETARÍA  
DE  
PROPAGANDA



# ¡ JOVENES !

*EL EJERCITO POPULAR OS ESPERA!*

**ALISTAOS EN LOS BATALLONES  
DE LAS JUVENTUDES**

CONTROL  
U.G.T.  
LIT. MARTIN

BARDASANO

9 JSU enlistment poster (Bardasano)

Source: Carulla ,La Guerra Civil en 2000 cartells, p. 332

consigna

nº 1

U.G.T.

P.S.U.



que has fet per la victòria?

ENTITAT DEL SINDICAT DE DIBUJANTS PROFESSIONALS U.G.T.

GRAF. LIT. S. A. - BARCELONA 200 - BARCELONA

10 UGT/PSUC poster 'What have you done for victory?' (anon)

Source: Miravittles [et al], Carteles, p. 169



11 Russian civil war poster 'Have you enlisted as a volunteer?' (D.Moor)

Source: Grimau, El Cartel Republicano, p. 123



12 Poster 'Sailors of Kronstadt' (Renau)

Source: Grimau, El Cartel Republicano, p. 137



14 (a) PCE Popular Front poster (Cantos)

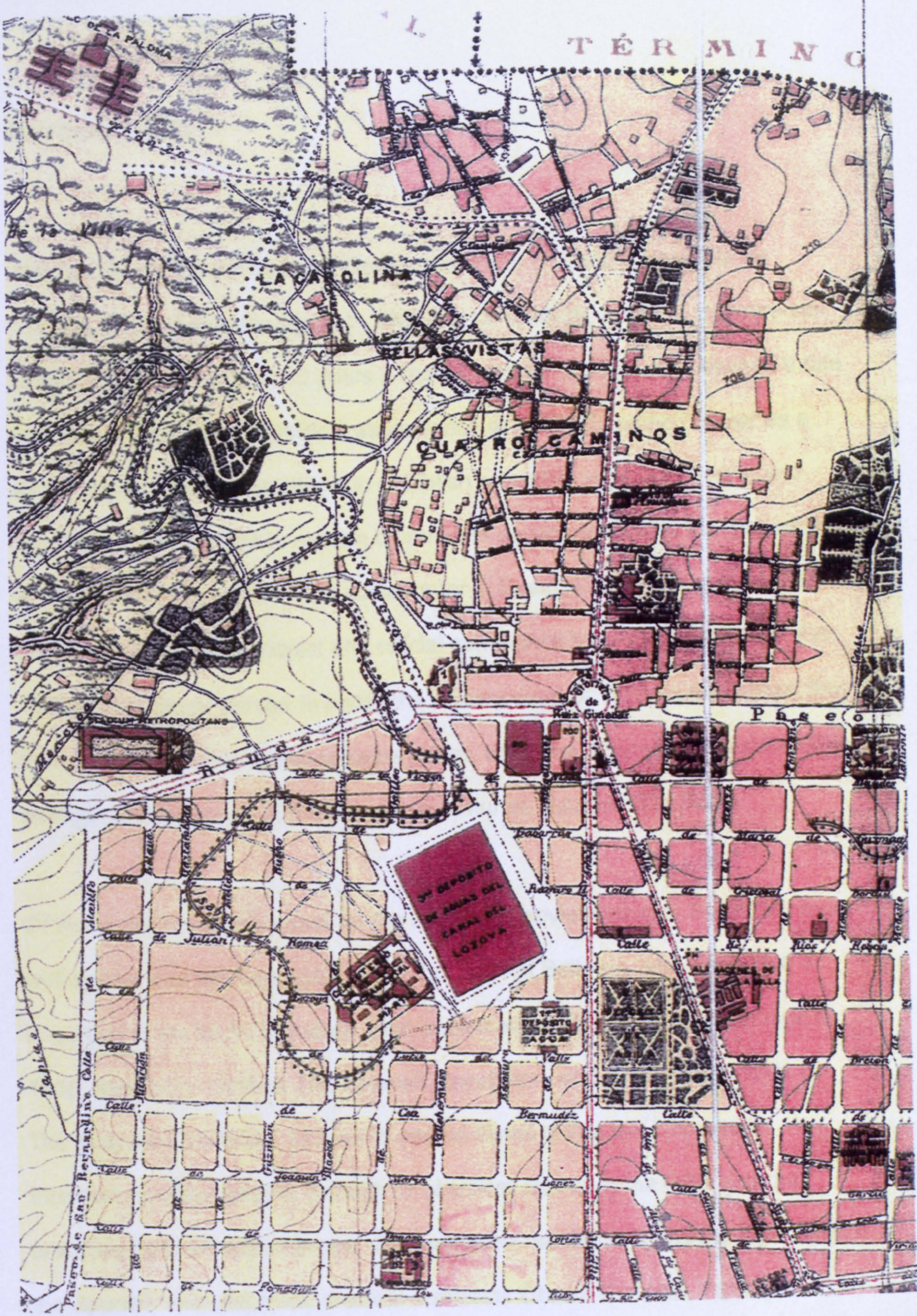
(b) PCE Popular Front poster (Bardasano)





3 · Province of Madrid





4 District of Cuatro Caminos