

# “MOBILIZING ALL OUR FORCES”<sup>1</sup>: COMINTERN OPERATIONS IN SPAIN 1923-1936

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper demonstrates that the adaptability of communist slogans and tactics before and after the Popular Front period never changed the central aim of the Comintern in Spain: To turn what they saw as an ongoing bourgeois-democratic revolution into a Communist-controlled proletarian revolution through the armed seizure of power. The standard Comintern playbook for achieving this in Spain, as it was elsewhere, is reflected in the sections of this paper: Work in the non-communist unions and among cultural influencers; pursuit of revolutionary agitation with maximum sensitivity to local conditions, training for armed insurrection and work in the army, and deployment of anti-fascist and popular fronts to achieve merger of the unions and youth sections under communist control. This paper completes a missing link in the literature by treating the early transition period to the Popular Front, never before fully covered.

**KEY WORDS:** Comintern – Spanish Second Republic – PCE – PSOE

## “MOVILIZANDO A TODAS NUESTRAS FUERZAS”: OPERACIONES DE LA COMINTERN EN ESPAÑA 1923-1936

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo demuestra que la adaptabilidad de las consignas y tácticas comunistas antes y después del período del Frente Popular no cambió el objetivo central de la Comintern en España: convertir lo que consideraban una revolución democrático-burguesa en curso en una revolución proletaria controlada

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<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from Ercoli's (Comintern Secretary Palmiro Togliatti) triumphant speech to the Executive Committee of the Comintern, ECCI, on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1936. He warns the Comintern sections not to suggest the broad masses cannot be mobilized and adds, “No comrades. We have achieved the united front in France and Spain. A popular front for peace can only be created by mobilizing all our forces”. Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 2, D. 222, L. 129-138, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/91242>

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*Gustavo Martín Asensio. Ph.D. por la Universidad de Surrey, UK en diciembre 1999 en filología clásica. Su tesis, un estudio lingüístico del texto griego de los Hechos de los Apóstoles, se publicó en el Reino Unido en 2000. Publicó su primer estudio sobre la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil Española en 2020, “Puros Canarios en la Revolución. Eduardo Sanjuan Castro, un Activista Libertario en la España de los Años 30” en Revista de Historia Canaria, 202 (2020).*

por los comunistas a través de la toma armada del poder. El manual estándar de la Comintern para lograr este objetivo en España, al igual que en otros países, se refleja en las secciones de este documento: “Trabajo” comunista en los sindicatos reformistas y entre intelectuales, agitación revolucionaria con máxima sensibilidad a las particularidades locales, entrenamiento para la insurrección armada y trabajo en el ejército, y despliegue de frentes antifascistas y populares para lograr la fusión de los sindicatos y las secciones juveniles bajo control comunista. Este artículo completa un eslabón perdido en la literatura al tratar el período de transición temprana al Frente Popular, nunca antes cubierto por completo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Comintern – Segunda República – PSOE – PCE

## INTRODUCTION

Of the most debated topics in Comintern historiography few generate more ink than the question of the degree of subservience of local sections to Moscow, especially in the Third Period and in that of the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Spanish section, a significant consensus exists that it was, in fact, a paradigm of progressive Stalinization under tight supervision from the center. The consensus extends also to the fact that Spain was the country, together with France, in which the theses of the VII Congress were most thoroughly applied.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This is the “center-periphery” debate and that over the process of Stalinization of the various national CP’s. See Norman LAPORTE, Kevin MORGAN and Matthew WORLEY, “Introduction: Stalinization and Communist Historiography” in Norman LAPORTE, Kevin MORGAN and Matthew WORLEY (ed.), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: perspectives on Stalinization, 1917-1953*, Basingstoke: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2008, p. 1-21; see also Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, Introduction’ in their edited volume, Tim REES and Andrew THORPE (ed.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919-43*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 10 who argue, writing a few years after the opening of the Soviet archives, that “the availability of the material does not necessarily lead to the closure of the debate...”; also McDermott and Agnew, “Introduction” in Kevin MCDERMOTT and Jeremy AGNEW, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin*, London: MacMillan, 1996, p. xxiii-xxiv, presenting Carr and Claudin as best representatives of the “relative autonomy” and total subordination poles respectively. Transnational approaches have attempted to steer the debate into a new direction and force us to take account of the international leadership of the ECCI. See Oleksa DRACHEWYCH, “The Communist Transnational? Transnational studies and the history of the Comintern”, *History Compass*, 17 (2/2019), p. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Kevin MCDERMOTT and Jeremy AGNEW, *The Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 134; Tim REES, “The Good Bolsheviks: The Spanish Communist Party and the Third Period” in Matthew WORLEY (ed.), *In Search for Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004, p. 175-177. Togliatti: “...en ningún otro país han tenido tan amplia y profunda repercusión como en España las decisiones del VII Congreso...también los socialistas han leído y comentado...” Palmiro TOGLIATTI, *Escritos Sobre la Guerra de España*, Barcelona: Crítica, 1980, p. 47; Alba: “En España las repercusiones del VII Congreso fueron inmediatas y considerables.” Víctor ALBA, *El Partido Comunista en España: ensayo de interpretación histórica*, Barcelona: Planeta, 1979, p. 160. See also Hermann Weber’s helpful Stalinization model, according to which the Spanish party would appear

Elorza and Bizcarrondo<sup>4</sup> went a long way, on the basis of then newly available Soviet archival material, toward clarifying the extent and varying degrees of success of the Comintern’s activity in Spain from the 1920’s to the end of the Spanish Civil War. Their treatment of the period of 1931 to 1936 leaves little doubt about the socio-political weight achieved in Spain by the Comintern’s fully funded network of front organizations, fellow travelers, films, publishing, and a PCE closely managed by more Comintern representatives than is usually acknowledged. Other historians have argued that the influence of the Comintern and its Spanish section in Spain until the Spanish Civil War was proportional only to the PCE membership, and therefore, it “played merely a peripheral role”<sup>5</sup>, “lacked any real influence”<sup>6</sup> or was “casi insignificante”<sup>7</sup>. Following from this assumption, any hypothesis of substantial, especially subversive Comintern influence in Spain prior to the outbreak of civil war is dismissed as the product of 1936 right wing communist plot mythology. The influence of Herbert Southworth in this school of thought is substantial.<sup>8</sup> Southworth submitted his final manuscript of *Conspiracy* the same year Elorza and Bizcarrondo’s published their volume, which excuses Southworth for not having taken their findings into account. Southworth would have benefited from a survey of the material in the Soviet archives, however, as he spent 128 pages summarizing his decades-long work of discrediting four poorly crafted

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to have been highly Stalinized after the elimination of the Bullejos leadership. See the helpful discussion in Norman LAPORTE, Kevin MORGAN and Matthew WORLEY, “Introduction...”, *op. cit.*, p. 4-7. More on this throughout this paper.

4 Antonio ELORZA and Marta BIZCARRONDO, *Queridos Camaradas: la internacional Comunista y España 1919-1939*, Barcelona: Planeta, 1999.

5 Paul PRESTON, “The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain” in Helen GRAHAM and Paul PRESTON (ed.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, London: McMillan, 1987, p. 84. In the same volume Graham argues that the PCE was “numerically so slight as to be politically negligible”, Helen GRAHAM, “The Spanish Popular Front and the Civil War”, p. 107.

6 Santos JULIÁ, “The Origins and Nature of the Spanish Popular Front” in Martin S. ALEXANDER and Helen GRAHAM (ed.), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts. Comparative Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 26.

7 Hugo GARCÍA, “Historia de un mito político: el peligro comunista en el discurso de las derechas españolas (1918-1936)”, *Historia Social*, 51 (2005), p. 19.

8 Herbert R. SOUTHWORTH, *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War. The brainwashing of Francisco Franco*, London: Routledge, 2002. Southworth was open about his ideological commitment to the Popular Front in Spain, less so about his salaried work for Juan Negrín during and after the Civil War. The book comes with a Paul Preston prologue. Among Spanish historians the influence of Southworth has been significant, especially Ángel Viñas, see Viñas’ website <https://www.angelvinas.es/?tag=fascismo&paged=3>, Hugo García who quotes Southworth repeatedly, see above; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, “Los discursos catastrofistas de los líderes de la derecha y la difusión del mito del «golpe de Estado comunista»”, *El Argonauta Español*, 13 (2016), available online <https://journals.openedition.org/argonauta/2412> See also Boris VOLODARSKY, *El caso Orlov. Los servicios secretos soviéticos en la Guerra Civil de España*, Barcelona: Crítica, 2013, openly indebted to both Viñas and Preston for his understanding of the Second Republic, lapsing often into the language of class war.

francoist “documents”. The “documents” claimed to prove a communist plot to bring about armed insurrection had existed Spain in the spring of 1936. These documents, Southworth explained, served a fundamentally apologetic purpose for the military insurrection of July 17, 1936. The text on these four sheets of paper claimed that a Communist plot was in place in the spring of 1936 to infiltrate and neutralize the Spanish army, bring about a left-wing armed insurrection against the Popular Front Government, and establish soviets in Spain. The documents also claimed a meeting had been held in Valencia involving Comintern emissaries, French Communist Party leaders and Spanish communists to prepare armed insurrection. The 17<sup>th</sup> of July military uprising had become necessary, thus went the logic of those who penned the pamphlet, in order to preempt the Communist plot. Having painstakingly demolished any claim to the authenticity of the documents, Southworth argued the discussion of what led to the Spanish Civil War could proceed to the, in his view, correct parameters of global class warfare.

This paper is part of a forthcoming volume on Comintern operations in Spain prior to the outbreak of civil war in Spain in July 1936. It details and analyzes a number of Comintern documents, mainly reports and communications between the Comintern and the Spanish section, most of which were not discussed in Elorza and Bizcarrondo. The archival material, residing mainly at the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and at the National Archives (TNA), details what the Comintern saw as its semi-legal and illegal operations in Spain, especially from 1931 to early 1936. The COVID pandemic has forced us to rely primarily, though not exclusively, on three substantial electronic repositories of the RGASPI material<sup>9</sup>, which now contain a vast majority of the relevant documentation related to the Roman Secretariat of the Executive Commission of the Communist International (ECCI), the Spanish Commission, the Ercoli and Manuilsky Secretariats, and the Spanish party, among others. The picture that emerges is that of the fundamentally sub-

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<sup>9</sup> For this chapter first and foremost The Russian Historical Society’s collection of documents classified under the heading of “Comintern and the Spanish Civil War”, which contains numerous materials dated from 1923 to July 1936, as well as war-time documents. The collection entitled “Comintern and the Idea of World Revolution” includes 1,029 files. A total of 2,850 documents, most of them containing multiple pages, are classified as Comintern documents, most of them with originals held at RGASPI. <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/indexes/values/16835> Additionally, we have consulted the large online collection of the Federal Archival Agency of the Russian Federation, Documents of the Soviet Era, which contains much of Fond 495 of the Comintern material held by RGASPI, that is, the organizations and institutions of the Comintern <http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/> The digitization and classification work for this repository was carried out with the cooperation of the International Committee for the Computerization of the Comintern (INCOMKA). Lastly, the substantial documentation hosted by the Portail Archives Numériques et Données de la Recherche (PANDOR), containing over half a million pages of documentation including the Roman Secretariat material to which belonged both the French and Spanish Comintern sections.

versive, revolutionary and insurrectional objectives of the Comintern in Spain which remained unchanged after the implementation of the theses of the VII Comintern Congress.

I discuss my thesis in relation to the the debate over the nature of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930's elsewhere, and that lengthy discussion cannot be reproduced here. Suffice it to say that multiple volumes and journal articles published over the past thirty years, leveraging in most cases extensive archival documentation, have brought into question the traditional notion of a sincere Soviet commitment to “collective security” from the late 1920s to 1941.<sup>10</sup> Among the most ardent defenders of that view, especially in relation to Spain was David T. Cattell. In the preface to his volume, however, he was careful to admit that “the refusal to abandon, even for the moment, their goal of subversion and world domination worked to undermine the Soviet goal of a popular front and collective security with England and France against the «Fascist» aggressors.”<sup>11</sup> As we will see below, the Comintern's VII Congress, often assumed to have marked the official Soviet turn away from the promotion of worldwide revolution, was merely a carefully staged change of tactics that hid from public view the continuation of the Leninist pursuit of world-wide communist conquest.

In the course of our discussion, we will remind our readers of a hermeneutical principle that must be kept in mind when attempting to understand public Comintern texts. Those who emphasize the progressive Stalinization of the Comintern, do not always take into account one fundamental Leninist

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10 For example, Jiri HOCHMAN, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1984. Among the earliest rebuttals of the idea of a sincere soviet collective security policy in the period which would have brought about a turn away from the promotion of world revolution is Ivan PFAFF, “Stalins Strategie der Sowjetisierung Mitteleuropas 1935-1938. Das Beispiel Tschechoslowakei”, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 38 (4/1990), p. 543-587, especially his discussion of the true content and orientation of the VII Congress of the Comintern, p. 547-548. For the sceptical perspective on Soviet collective security policy see also Stanley G. PAYNE, “Soviet Anti-Fascism: Theory and Practice, 1921-1945”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 4 (2/2003), p. 1-62; James HARRIS, “Encircled by Enemies: Stalin's Perceptions of the Capitalist World, 1918-1941”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30 (3/2007), p. 513-545; Teddy J. ULDRICKS, “Soviet Security Policy in the 1930's” in Gabriel GORODETSKY (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1991. A Retrospective*, New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 65-74; Stephen KOTKIN, *Stalin vol. I. Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928*, New York: Penguin Press, 2014; Stephen KOTKIN, *Stalin vol. II. Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941*, New York: Penguin Press, 2017; Alfred J. RIEBER, *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, especially his treatment of the constant conflict between Litvinov's push for collective action against fascism and Stalin's consistently doctrinaire and neutral stance in p. 153-161. Most recently Jonathan HASLAM, *The Spectre of War. International Communism and the Origins of World War II*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, p. 1-13 and Sean MCMEEKIN, *Stalin's War. A new History of World War II*, New York: Basic Books, 2021.

11 David T. CATTELL, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957, p. V.

tenet, fully digested by the Soviet and Comintern leadership and which often inspired its policies. That principle is simply this: while Soviet communism is inflexible as to its fundamental principles and revolutionary aim, it is completely pragmatic and adaptive as to slogans and tactics on the basis of local needs and specific situations in time. Thus, the Central European Lander Secretariat of the ECCI, in a January 1930 letter to the German party writes “It is important, as Lenin loved to express, to listen to the core slogans of the masses and then make them the driving force of the revolution.”<sup>12</sup> The leaders of the Spanish party were always urged not to ignore this principle, and this led to regular reprimands from la Casa. Thus Stepanov, in a speech at the political secretariat of the ECCI on the situation in Spain in February 1933 writes: “The main task of the Spanish party is to find out where the masses are going, in which direction they are going”<sup>13</sup> so as to deploy tactics on that basis. I believe the communications between the Comintern and its Spanish party from 1931 through early 1936 will make this abundantly clear. The material we have studied demonstrates that the adaptability of slogans and tactics never changed the central aim of the Comintern in Spain: To turn what they saw as an ongoing bourgeois-democratic revolution into a Communist-controlled proletarian revolution through the armed seizure of power. The standard Comintern playbook to achieve this is in Spain, as it was elsewhere, is reflected in the sections of this paper: Work in the non-communist unions and among cultural influencers; pursuit of revolutionary agitation with maximum sensitivity to local conditions, training for armed insurrection and work in the army, and deployment of anti-fascist and popular fronts to achieve merger of the unions and youth sections under communist control.

## MOSCOW GOLD FOR MOSCOW’S WORK: SETTING UP COMINTERN OPERATIONS IN SPAIN

Thorough financial and political dependence of the Spanish section on the Comintern is evident from the earliest archival materials of the correspondence between the Spanish section and la Casa. Financial dependence establishes political dependence, and the level of accountability imposed by the Comin-

12 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 4, D. 10, L. 28-32, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101357#mode/inspect/page/6/zoom/4> Such a skill, was considered essential to the role of the communist agitator. Thus a *Pravda* editorial from April 7<sup>th</sup> 1935: “You must understand and study people, what concerns them, what they are interested in...to find paths to their emotions...and convince them...” “Agitation – A Great Craft”, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/91034>

13 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 3, D. 360, L. 8-10, 34-35, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101374#mode/inspect/page/3/zoom/4>



tern already in the 1920's becomes standardized throughout the period of our study. On August 17<sup>th</sup> 1923, just before the establishment of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, Osip Pyatnitsky writes to the executive Committee of the Spanish Party, in response to their request for 5,000 Pts.<sup>14</sup> Pyatnitsky, head of the OMS<sup>15</sup>, the secretive branch of the Comintern responsible for subversive operations and covert financing of the sections, demands to be given a full accounting of expenses to date. Our representative who attended your congress, writes Pyatnitsky, has asked for 5,000 Pts. to be allocated for travel to industrial centers for propaganda and agitation. Before considering this, he continues, we ask you to inform us what you have received thus far in 1923, how you spent these funds, and what your expected needs are until the end of 1923. Pyatnitsky also asks for specific details on funds that were sent for a publica-

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14 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 19, D. 97, L. 1, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101991>

15 The OMS, International Relations Department, was headed by Pyatnitsky from 1921 to 1924, who was later promoted to Head of the ECCI Organizational Bureau, of which the OMS was a part. Few ECCI departments achieved more for international communism, and none suffered more in the 1936 purges. See especially Vladimir PYATNITSKY (Osip Pyatnitsky's son), *Osip Pjatinickij i Komintern na vesah istorii*, Minsk: Charbest, 2004, p. 173-208; who used his father's RCKHIDNI file as well as an abundance of materials from his father's papers and interviews with some of his colleagues. Conflicting references to both Pyatnitsky and Abramov as heads of OMS in the 1920s and 1930s exist. The OMS in Germany and Western Europe was headed by Alexander ("Jacob") Mirov-Abramov, from 1921 to 1930, and Huber affirms Abramov was actually overall OMS head from 1926 to 1935, remaining as deputy one more year. See W. G. KRIVITSKY, *In Stalin's Secret Service*, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939, p. 54-55 who knew Abramov personally; see also the Abramov file at The National Archives, KV 2/2957, available online <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11497091>, with many details of OMS operations in Spain 1934-36, see below. The most complete and accurate treatment probably in Peter HUBER, "The Cadre Department, the OMS and the Dimitrov and Manuil'sky Secretariats During the Phase of the Terror" in Mikhail NARINSKY and Jürgen ROJHAN (ed.), *Centre and Periphery. The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents*, Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1996, p. 122-152, esp. p. 149 with a valuable appendix detailing the OMS leaders and deputies; Branko LAZITCH and Milorad M. DRACHKOVITCH, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986; Barton WHALEY, *Soviet clandestine communication nets: notes for a history of the structures of the intelligence services of the USSR*, Cambridge (Mass.): Center for International Studies MIT, 1969; Tim REES and Andrew THORPE (ed.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919-43*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 55; Kevin MCDERMOTT and Jeremy AGNEW, *The Comintern...*, op. cit., p. 22. The OMS was operative in Spain throughout the period of our study, its representative in early 1936 being "Raul" / Raoul, that is, Carlo Codevilla, who transported funds to Spain as a courier and dealt with coded communications, among other tasks, reporting to Abramov. See The National Archives, KV 2/2957. See also Margaret Buber-Neumann's account of her January 1933 visit with Abramov in Moscow in which he commissioned her and Neumann to become active participants in "le jeu occulte du communisme international" in Berlin and Spain. Margaret BUBER-NEUMANN, *La Révolution Mondiale. L'histoire du Komintern (1919-1943) racontée par l'un de ses principaux témoins*, Paris: Casterman, 1971, p. 314-331. The archival material of the OMS is located in RGASPI, fund 495, inventory 23, and remains classified to this day. Osip Pyatnitsky's file is RGASPI 495.19, and it is declassified in part.

tion or publishing enterprise:<sup>16</sup> How was the publication organized and what was published thus far?. “Our representative” is a reference to Jules Humbert Droz, leading Comintern emissary to Spain in those years. Bullejos describes the efforts the party was engaged in in 1923 to win over the libertarian masses and to unify the party, still plagued by factional dissention, as well as Humbert Droz’s authoritarian ways.<sup>17</sup>

Financing for the Spanish section is further detailed in the December 1924 minutes of the meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPR(b),<sup>18</sup> with the approval of the ECCI budget and that of individual sections. With Molotov and Pyatnitsky present, the meeting approved the 1925 ECCI budget of 4.1 million rubles presented by the appropriations committee. Of this amount, 10,000 gold rubles was allocated to the Spanish party, double the amount for Ireland and ten times the amount of Portugal, but one third of the Romania section. The French section received 600,000 gold rubles. From time to time, unplanned for activities or emergencies arose which required additional funding. In a telegram<sup>19</sup> sent on the 19th November 1927 Kruglov (“Noel”), located in Berlin, asks Abramov for urgent explanations to a request for 25,000 French Francs made by the Spanish section: Is this for travel?, asks Kruglov. Alexander Abramov Mirov (see note 12 above) was at this time the OMS resident in Berlin, with OMS responsibility over Western Europe, especially over the correct management of Comintern funds. According to the administrative notes handwritten on the document, both Abramov and Pyatnitsky read this telegram.

Once the Second Republic was established in Spain on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1931, the Comintern began to focus on its Spanish section and allocated to it more personnel and funding. The Comintern understood the regime change in Madrid as the inauguration of a bourgeois-democratic revolutionary period that would lead necessarily to proletarian-socialist revolution, a perspective shared by many in the socialist camp.<sup>20</sup> Consistently with that vision, the center in-

<sup>16</sup> *izdatel'stvo* can also be rendered publishing house. The PCE organ, *La Antorcha*, was already being published since 1922.

<sup>17</sup> José BULLEJOS, *La Comintern en España: recuerdos de mi vida*, México: Impresiones Modernas, 1972, p. 44-47. The works of communist dissidents need to be treated with skepticism, naturally, though never merely dismissed. In the present work, Bullejos merely confirms what we are establishing from the archival documentation, period press and other sources. See also Víctor ALBA, *El Partido...*, *op. cit.*, p. 86-87, who cites further documentation on the dissatisfaction the Comintern felt in relation to this congress, taken from Colomer’s extensive original documents collection. See Eduardo COMÍN COLOMER, *Historia del Partido Comunista de España*, Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1965, p. 137-138.

<sup>18</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 17, Op. 162, D. 2, L. 53, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/100282>

<sup>19</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 19, D. 97, L. 74, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101996>

<sup>20</sup> This was the understanding shared by much of the Socialist union UGT, the youth branch FJS and even among the leadership of PSOE. See for example *El Socialista*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1931 referring repeatedly in



tensified its investment and operations in the country. Starting in October 1931, we see a number of detailed Comintern communications to the Spanish party with itemized expense reports and associated instructions. An October 5<sup>th</sup> 1931 communication<sup>21</sup>, for example, details the budget for the setting up of a live-in base, including a 525 pesetas security deposit for three months paid on July 15<sup>th</sup> which is to be refunded, rent from July 15<sup>th</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> at 272,50 pts., electricity bill at 1,35, ashtrays, half a dozen candles and paper for 5,25, bed linen at 100 pts., furniture cost plus transportation at 1,030 pts., and even various kitchen items bought by Maria. This is likely a reference to Tina Modotti, aka “Maria”<sup>22</sup> one of the Comintern emissaries in Spain at this time, romantically involved with the Comintern’s leading man in Spain at the time, Victorio Codovilla. Maria was working for Stasova, the head of MOPR (International Red Aid in its Russian acronym, SRI in Spanish) but was officially in Spain first as a journalist and later as a representative of the Soviet Ministry of Natural Resources.

For the March through November 1931 period, two additional documents<sup>23</sup> detail salaries and operational expenses. For example, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 300 pts. were spent by Navarro for a rally with the unemployed. This is a reference to Barcelona-based PCE leader Francisco del Barrio Navarro, who did indeed work in agitprop among the unemployed before travelling to the Soviet Union. We also find a reference to the well above average<sup>24</sup> 350 pts monthly salary of (Jesús) Larrañaga (Laran’yagui in the text), and 400 pts. for Roldán’s salary,

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the leading editorial to the events of the 14<sup>th</sup> of April as “el triunfo de la revolución”, “el hecho histórico de la revolución”, etc. On PSOE’s Marxist foundations and the mismatch between them and Spanish society see Paul HEYWOOD, *Marxism and the Failure of Organized Socialism in Spain 1879-1936*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 122.

21 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 534, Op. 8, D. 199, L. 12, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102007>

22 On Tina Modotti see Brigitte STUDER, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, p. 2, 77; Letizia ARGENTERI, *Tina Modotti: between Art and Revolution*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 158-159, though the author confuses Comintern names and aliases at various points. The Tina Modotti files at Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) are: RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 221, D. 1605; RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 241, D. 40; and RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 270, D. 2128.

23 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 534, Op. 8, D. 199, L. 28-29, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102008> and Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 534, Op. 8, D. 199, L. 102, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102009>

24 Average daily salary (jornal) for agriculture in 1931 was about 3.50 pesetas or 105 pesetas monthly, and for metal workers 7 Pesetas for a second-year apprentice, or 210 pesetas monthly, and between 5 and 6 Pesetas for cable car workers in Madrid. See Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Madrid, 1934. *Estadística de las Huelgas, Memoria Correspondiente a los Años 1930 y 1931*. “Actos de propaganda. Los obreros del transporte en la Casa Del Pueblo”, *Transporte*, Año VI Número 61 (January 1931), p. 14.

probably in reference to Manuel Roldán Jimenez.<sup>25</sup> Roldán was a former CNT gunman who joined the PCE and was one of the leaders of the Unión Local de Sindicatos, with a majority of its members from the PCE, but including also anarchist and socialist membership. Roldán was later expelled from the PCE and joined PSOE in 1936. A further 600 pts. were allocated to Roldán for the administration of Unión Sindical, in reference to the Sevilla-based Unión Local de Sindicatos. 400 pts., plus a per diem travel stipend of 100 pts. was also given to (Ramón) Mendoza.

Particularly interesting is the reference to 500 pts allocated to (Lucio) “Santiago” for “work among the railways”. This is an example of what the Comintern understood, and constantly stressed to its sections by “work among the unions”. This work did not have as its aim mere collaboration but, rather, agitation and infiltration of non-Communist unions in order to control them. The Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario was one of the jewels on the crown of the socialist UGT. Its leadership understood how crucial it was for them to invest in the protection of the union against the intrusion of communists, efforts which led to the identification and expulsion of Lucio Santiago and other communist infiltrators in 1931, probably shortly after he incurred in the 500 pts expense.<sup>26</sup> Often, “work among the unions” yielded far more positive results. In their confidential reports to la Casa, PCE leaders and Comintern representatives detailed the successful infiltration of non-Communist unions, especially those associated with UGT. These unions were strong in critical sectors of the Spanish economy, and communist influence, if not outright control, of strike committees and other decision bodies was essential to the Comintern’s revolutionary aims.<sup>27</sup> For example, in a secret September 5<sup>th</sup> 1934 report on

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25 On the Unión Local de Sindicatos, its association with PCE and SRI (Spanish delegation of the Comintern’s International Red Aid (MOPR) see Manuel Ángel CALVO CALVO, *Crímenes sociales y pistolero en la Sevilla de 1932: entre la reacción y la revolución*, Sevilla: VIII Congreso de la Asociación de Historiadores de la Comunicación, 2006, available online <https://idus.us.es/handle/11441/61261> On Manuel Roldán, see a well-researched Andalusian blog with multiple stories from the local press in the 1920’s and 30’s; Antonio GÓMEZ PÉREZ, *Manuel Roldán Jiménez, el agitador político*, available online at *Doña Mencía*, <http://donamencia.blogspot.com/2010/10/manuel-roldan-jimenez-el-agitador.html>

26 See Antonio PLAZA PLAZA, *El Sindicalismo Ferroviario Anarquista en España hasta la Guerra Civil. De los Sindicatos únicos a la Federación Nacional de la Industria Ferroviaria (1919-1936)*, Vitoria-Gasteiz: VI Congreso de Historia Ferroviaria, 2012, p. 12, available online <http://www.docutren.com/HistoriaFerroviaria/Vitoria2012/pdf/7390.pdf>

27 See Bullejos’ report to the ECCI in which he mentions increasing numbers of strikes as a success metric. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 144, L. 230-247, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102017> This is a classic example of how Communist influence in Spain was not merely a matter of PCE membership. Similarly, discussing the French Popular Front and the PCF’s key role in it, Levy writes: “(PCF-inspired intense strike activities) had produced very little in the way of formal trade union or party membership but they did help to create a mood of militancy with an explosive potential.” David LEVY, “The French Popular Front, 1936-1937” in Helen GRAHAM and Paul PRESTON (ed.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, London: McMillan, 1987, p. 69.

the situation in Spain, the leadership reports successful penetration of the top leadership of multiple trade unions, most associated with UGT, including the top unions of metalworkers and transport.<sup>28</sup> The party believed these efforts to have been a success, and by late 1934 claimed 200,000 unionists under its influence.<sup>29</sup> Solid control of the leadership of socialist unions also enabled the communist infiltrators to avoid expulsion once they were found out, and an example of a union of metal workers in Trubia, Asturias is provided in the same document. Infiltration of socialist and anarchist unions also enabled recruitment for the PCE. In an openly critical letter to the Spanish section dated January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1933, Stepanov<sup>30</sup> writes that current recruitment in the unions is carried out by PCE personnel as members of the unions and not as agitators, with a focus on quantity, rather than quality. Even so, Stepanov continues, recruitment must be extended via MOPR (Red Aid in Spain, Socorro Rojo Internacional)<sup>31</sup>, and other Comintern mass organizations such as Friends of the Soviet Union (Amigos de la Unión Soviética)<sup>32</sup>, which boasted 20,100 members in 1935,<sup>33</sup> second only to France, theater, film and sports groups, etc., all increasingly present in Spain in the early 1930's. As we shall see below, one of the most successful moves of the Comintern and its Spanish

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28 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 144, L. 230-247, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102017> Bullejos also wrote openly about the PCE programs for infiltrating the UGT and CNT unions: “Se fundaron los grupos sindicales dentro de los sindicatos de la Unión General de Trabajadores...” (emphasis mine); José BULLEJOS, *La Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

29 Data taken from the Communist International periodical of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1934, cited in Jonathan HASLAM, “The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934-1935”, *The Historical Journal*, 22 (3/1979), p. 685.

30 Stepanov was the pseudonym of Stoyán Miniéevich Mínev, known in Spain as Moreno. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 214, L. 21-25, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102014>

31 Indicative of the progressive penetration of Socorro Rojo Internacional (International Red Aid) throughout Spain is the growing number of references to it in the press from 1931 to mid-1936, with the first half of 1936 having the greatest number of references. References to “Socorro Rojo” in the press in 1933 were 98, 101 in 1934, 192 in 1935 and 169 from January 1<sup>st</sup> to July 17<sup>th</sup> 1936. Many of its activities were costly events involving dances, concerts, transport and, especially, travel to the Soviet Union for selected members of UGT, PSOE, and fellow traveling intellectuals who spread far and wide their praises of the Soviet Union in highly popular series of articles such as Nelken’s or Sender’s. SRI funding in Spain exploded in late 1934 with outstanding results for the Comintern and its Spanish section, see below.

32 Amigos de la Unión Soviética was founded by leading cultural influencers in Spain with Comintern funding and masterful management, with outstanding results. AuS achieved seven thousand members nationally in a few months, most of them non-PCE members, and by mid-1936 it had chapters in over 30 cities. See Daniel KOWALSKY, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, New York: Columbia University Press, Gutenberg-e, 2004, chapter 6 “Soviet-Spanish Cultural Relations Prior to the Civil War”, available online <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kod01/frames/fkod09.html>

33 See detailed report in Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 20, D. 898.

section in their efforts to control the unions was the recruitment of UGT for the Anti-Fascist Front. The Anti-Fascist Front membership and political platform was later used by the Comintern for the launch of the first version of the Spanish Popular Front concept in early 1935. After signing the socialists on to this early Popular Front platform, Cominternian extraordinaire Hugo Eberlein would report back to Moscow that the UGT sees no further obstacles to the full merger (see below on this). The eventual merger of the unions in 1935 was the conclusion of a long process of infiltration and control that, in the words of Victor Alba, “cualquiera que conozca los métodos de acción comunista podía prever”.<sup>34</sup> Though PCE membership numbers mattered both in Madrid and in Moscow, these documents illustrate that the Comintern was, already in 1931, investing in a large network of cultural and political influence and infiltration that extended well beyond its official party membership. Thus Bullejos: “The constant increase of the Communist Party’s influenced was not only manifested in the growth of its members, but also in the conquest of large numbers of sympathizers...which we grouped in the so-called auxiliary organizations. Red Aid was the most important of these.”<sup>35</sup>

Socorro Rojo did become one of the most popular organizations in Spain, certainly by early 1935 when its distribution of over a million francs to the participants in the October 1934 insurrection achieved their intended purpose of “deeply penetrating and conquering the socialist masses for the PCE.”<sup>36</sup> Red Aid had become a “serpent’s embrace” and the merger of the unions and youth organizations was soon to follow.

The spread of the Comintern’s far-reaching network of influence required the set-up and financing of a legal as well as a semi and illegal apparatus in each country, and Spain was no different. In a letter dated July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1933,<sup>37</sup> the Central Committee of the PCE was instructed to carry out a restructuring which involved a leader and a treasurer who would distribute funds to a paid illegal apparatus secretariat. Publishing was to have both a legal and an illegal section, and other illegal activities were to be mass agitprop campaigns, and “work in

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<sup>34</sup> Victor ALBA, *El Partido...*, *op. cit.*, p. 161. See also Alba’s description of the PCE’s infiltration of the socialist youth, which in the run-up to the creation of the joint JSU, counted on the active support of Margarita Nelken, who helped the Valencian communists “penetrar en las Juventudes Socialistas”, a scheme denounced by Gorkin; Víctor ALBA, *El Partido...*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>35</sup> José BULLEJOS, *La Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 157-158, also 155-156. A number of historians of the Second Republic assume mistakenly that PCE / Comintern influence in our period was directly proportionate to the numbers of PCE members (“afiliados”). See Santos JULIÁ, “The Origins and Nature of the Spanish Popular Front” in Martin S. ALEXANDER and Helen GRAHAM (ed.), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts. Comparative Perspectives*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> Antonio ELORZA and Marta BIZCARRONDO, *Queridos Camaradas...*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>37</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 215, L. 132-133, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102015>

the army” (see on this section III below). The activities of the PCE and front organizations in 1933 were going to require substantial funding, and the OMS sent Margarete Buber to deliver personally “a considerable sum of dollars” to the new leaders José Díaz and Vicente Uribe, while her husband Heinz Neumann was already operating in Spain as “Octavio”.<sup>38</sup> The new organization and the joint focus on legal and illegal agitprop activities evidence the fundamental revolutionary orientation the Comintern wished its Spanish section to maintain. This orientation matched and was based on their perception of the readiness of the Spanish proletariat to move on from the current democratic bourgeois revolution.

### “REVOLUTION IN OUR GUTS”: CAPTURING THE PASSIONS OF THE SPANISH PROLETARIAT

Bullejos wrote about the period just before and after the arrival of the Second Republic, that “Nunca habían sido cordiales las relaciones entre los delegados de la Comintern y nosotros, pues no coincidíamos en la apreciación de los problemas políticos nacionales y de la táctica que había que aplicar”.<sup>39</sup> Much of the narrative that follows reads like a poorly veiled attempt at self-justification by Bullejos. From a Comintern perspective, the RGASPI documentation reveals the extent to which the Spanish leadership under Bullejos had failed to understand and apply the most fundamental elements of Communist agitprop and was bound by what Manuilsky would call, speaking in 1934, “a mechanical understanding of bolshevization”. The generous flow of Moscow gold and brain power into Spain, which increased progressively since 1931, enabled the center to make the necessary changes that would turn Spain into a Comintern showcase in early 1936.

The PCE leadership and the Comintern did see eye-to-eye on a number of points throughout the period of our study. Among them was the fact that, with the advent of the Second Republic, Spain had entered a revolutionary path. In his May 19<sup>th</sup> 1931 address to the ECCI’s Political Secretariat in Moscow,<sup>40</sup> Bullejos explained that Spain was now in a bourgeois-democratic revolutionary phase and would be led to a proletarian socialist revolution “in soviet form”. Bullejos engaged in the expected self-criticism of past performance and

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38 Margaret BUBER-NEUMANN, *La Révolution...*, *op. cit.*, p. 318. Elorza and Bizcarrondo mistakenly identify “Octavio” as Purmann, Antonio ELORZA and Marta BIZCARRONDO, *Queridos Camaradas...*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

39 José BULLEJOS, *La Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

40 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI, F. 495, Op. 3, D. 262, L. 8-9, 13-15, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101366> See also José BULLEJOS, *La Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 130-135.

mentioned openly that the party was divided in its understanding of the two revolutionary phases. That Spain was ripe for revolution, however, was hardly questioned by the Comintern leadership in the period of our study. In a passionate speech to the ECCI on April 17<sup>th</sup> 1932,<sup>41</sup> Dmitry Manuilsky reflected on the negative consequences of being too attached to formulas, and the urgent need, when preparing revolutionary slogans and actions, of considering carefully the current conditions in each country. Manuilsky was agitated and “ready to start using swear words, which I rarely do”, he continued, when he considered the inadequate slogans used at the recent French union conference. “The revolutionary path out of the (capitalist) crisis is in our guts”, he affirmed, but, following the guidelines of the XI plenum, the details had to be worked out on the basis of the concrete situation of each country. He added: “We cannot say that a revolutionary crisis has gripped the capitalist world in every country...but undoubtedly (in) China it has, (in) Spain it has” (No, nyesomnyenno, Kitay da, Ispaniya da). Nearly a year later, Stepanov addresses the Political Secretariat of the ECCI<sup>42</sup> on the situation in Spain and discussed the revolutionary mindset of the peasants and factory workers, and expressed his belief that a revolutionary seizure of power was close. What was needed was to understand where the masses are going and to draw them away from the reformist and anarchist parties.

The Comintern’s revolutionary orientation in Spain did not change throughout the period of our study. Contrary to long-held opinion, the VII Congress of the Comintern and the new tactics based on the united front from above and popular front did not change the Comintern’s assessment that Spain was already ripe for revolution. Nor did they change the ECCI’s fundamental belief in proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as being the *raison d’être* of the Comintern and the CPR(b). It is surprising to read scholarly work<sup>43</sup> that takes some of the published Comintern documents from this period at face value, drawing conclusions on that basis. Such superficial readings fail to understand the nature of slogans and agitprop and the unchanging underlying revolutionary objectives the Comintern required all its sections to pursue, though

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41 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 170, D. 5, L. 53-57, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101371>

42 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 3, D. 360, L. 8-10, 34-35, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101374>

43 Thus for example González Calleja, “Los Discursos”, following Southworth and Viñas, who takes some Comintern public documents at face value and argues that the Comintern after the VII Congress “could not be further away” from promoting insurreccional actions. He also argues the socialist Jiménez de Asúa could not have been supportive of soviet inspired insurrection since he was a part of the socialist centrist faction. See below on Jiménez de Asúa.



adjusted to the particular situation of each nation. The work of the ECCI's preparatory commission in discussing the agenda for the VII Congress makes this point abundantly clear. In a June 14<sup>th</sup> 1934 meeting<sup>44</sup> Manuilsky engaged in self-criticism in the name of the ECCI and asked how it was possible that the fascists, in reference to the German NSDAP, had managed to draw the discontent of the masses into their own political format, and not the Communists. The answer he suggested was that the slogans held during the Third Period, though correct in most cases, were too abstract, too theoretical and divorced from the concrete experience and demands of the proletariat. Additionally, the leaders had held a mechanical understanding of bolshevization, that is, an inability to consider specific phases and flexible tactics as effective means to that end. He then discusses the new tactic of the united front, and illustrates it with an example from Spain: “Let's say there is a crook in Spain, Largo Caballero, who will put forward the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat”. Our colleagues in Spain, he continues, will say to him, you are a crook and a swindler, and we know that he is. But the large masses, the socialist and anarchist masses don't have full clarity on this. Therefore, Manuilsky concludes, from a standpoint of exposure, we will make the united front our wide appeal to the masses, the united front will be a tool for exposure (*orudiem razoblacheniya*). In Marxist lingo, this phrase refers to the instrument one uses to expose, to reveal the inconsistencies of bourgeois capitalism. The concern with this dialectical tactic, he adds mentioning France as an example, is that the Comintern may end up strengthening the socialists as a result. He concludes by suggesting relevant slogans, such as the fight against fascism and war. On a further preparatory discussion led by Pyatnitsky on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1934,<sup>45</sup> Pyatnitsky and his audience agree that Spain is among those countries in which the powder keg of revolution is about to ignite into insurrection, even if Spain does not play as big a role as other countries. Naturally, there were multiple follow-ups to this discussion from Kun, Pyatnitsky and others, but space forces me to jump to the summary of one of the final drafts of the resolution on soviet power. Dated July 21<sup>st</sup> 1935, with most delegates already in Moscow, is the final draft of the resolution on the Report of Comrade Dimitrov, For Soviet Power. This text is crystal clear: “The goal of our struggle against fascism is not to restore bourgeois democracy, but to win Soviet power”. The final draft of this key resolution further stated that one can be an anti-fascist

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44 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 494, Op. 1, D. 1, L. 5-14, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101383> Kuusinen chaired this preparatory commission made up of 17 members including Manuilsky, Ercoli (Togliatti), Pyatnitsky, Kun, etc.

45 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 494, Op. 1, D. 3, L. 191-192, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101386>

and not pursue soviet power, and the Comintern will now pursue a united front with such anti-fascists. However, only a consistent (capitalized in the Russian text) anti-fascist is ready to fight for soviet power and pull out the root of fascism, which is bourgeois democracy. The leaders of the majority socialist faction, including the key Madrid socialist federation FSM, the UGT union and the youth, shared this perspective, especially after their 1933 electoral loss.<sup>46</sup>

The victory of the Popular Front in February 1936 represented for the Comintern in revolutionary terms not a point of arrival but merely a further stage in the development of its revolutionary policy. Victorio Codovilla, writing in September 1936, had this to say about the Popular Front victory in February 1936 and its impact in the country in the following months: “It became clear to everyone that (the Popular Front Government) threatened the privileges of large landowners, military cliques, the church, etc...everything that represents the Spain that should have been destroyed and was not destroyed on April 14<sup>th</sup> (1931)”.<sup>47</sup> Once trade union and youth organizations had been brought under single Communist control, all that remained was full absorption of the socialist party and as much of the CNT membership as possible to create a single, united proletarian party that would complete the revolution. Until then, maximum care had to be exercised in the correct employment of tactics and the avoidance of maximalist positions before all the requirements were in place. Fundamentally, in the words of Stalin often quoted by the ECCI, “the revolution does not happen by itself” and requires the wise and measured deployment of the full resources of international communism. For the Comintern, as we shall see, preparing for revolution involved necessarily armed insurrectional training and infiltration of the bourgeois armed forces.

## THE IRON FIST OF REVOLUTION: PREPARING ARMED INSURRECTION

As early as 1931, members of the Spanish section were attending armed insurrection and weapons training at joint Comintern and military intelligence schools in Moscow. In a February 13<sup>th</sup> 1933<sup>48</sup> memorandum to the ECCI, the ECCI’s referent of the organizational department addressed the status of

<sup>46</sup> See for example the final section of Caballero’s speech to the socialist summer school, published in *El Socialista* 13<sup>th</sup> August 1933. See also the many references in José Manuel MACARRO VERA, “The Socialists and Revolution” in Manuel ÁLVAREZ TARDÍO and Fernando DEL REY REGUILLO (ed.), *The Spanish Second Republic revisited. From democratic hopes to Civil War (1931-1936)*, Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012, p. 40-57.

<sup>47</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 20, D. 270, L. 13-51, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102028>

<sup>48</sup> Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 25, D. 1349, L. 1-6, 9-10, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101376>

military insurrectional training in the years 1931-1933. His name was Karol Sverchevsky, who signs using his alias “Walter”, a Pole with a long career in the Red Army, including the general staff. He would later be known in Spain as “General Walter” during the Spanish Civil War. Sverchevsky’s report provides a number of lessons learned with a view to improving the quality of students, curriculum and results. The document mentions that three students from Spain attended these special courses from 1931-33, and a note on the margin added by Sverchevsky in 1936 mentions an additional 11 Spanish students who attended from 1933 to 35. The Spaniards attended the French speaking version of the courses, along with French and Italian comrades. The breakdown of the curriculum was as follows: Military technology: 30%; General tactics: 25% Political: 25%; Military-political: 15%; Desk (work?), technical: 5%

Walter’s understanding of what constitutes the core course is abundantly clear. “The main emphasis of the study is...theory and practice of armed uprising,<sup>49</sup> degradation (razlozhenie)<sup>50</sup> of the bourgeois armed forces, street fighting, subversive affairs, and complete mastery of...manual and automatic weapons.” Walter adds that military instructors are drawn from the IV Directorate, a reference to the military intelligence unit of the Red Army in the interwar period and predecessor of the GRU. The head of the IV Directorate in our period was Yan (Ian) Karlovich Berzin who would later become chief military advisor to the Popular Front Government during the Spanish Civil War. The special school was located at Pyatnitskaya Street with an additional site at the Bakovka railway station of the Belorussian line near Moscow. Walter is particularly worried about the subversive affairs course, which lacks consistently committed instructors. To remedy this, Walter writes that (all caps in the Russian text) “It would be desirable to create your own subversive chemical lab with two staff”. Walter is also concerned with the insufficient textbooks and adds that only Neuberg’s text on armed insurrection and Rovetsky on street fighting are available. The reference to Neuberg is easily understood. Walter is referring to the booklet published originally in German in 1928, and in French in 1931 by the Comintern-financed Bureau D’Editions under the title of *L’Insurrection Armée*. The Spanish section of the Comintern published the

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<sup>49</sup> This last phrase is a mantra of Comintern communications to its sections, and we shall have more to say about it in the below discussion of the terminology used by the Comintern to refer to armed uprisings and seizures of power.

<sup>50</sup> See the chapter entitled “Communist Activity to Subvert the Armed Forces of the Ruling Classes” in the textbook Walter refers to in this document: A. NEUBERG, *Armed Insurrection*, London: NLB, 1970, p. 151-170. The objective was to agitate and create disaffection via the creation of cells made up of soldiers, NCOs and officers who would at the right time become the core of the proletarian army and result in the disintegration of the army.

booklet in Spanish in 1932 through its publishing house, Editorial Roja.<sup>51</sup> The term “insurrección armada” was made progressively familiar in Spain through the book printing and distribution by the Comintern publishing houses, but far more so through the promotion of the book’s armed insurrectionary principles and tactics in the publications of PSOE, Juventudes Socialistas and UGT.<sup>52</sup> From 1931 to early 1936 the phrase appeared with increasing frequency in the Spanish periodical literature, as a survey of the press archives reveals.<sup>53</sup>

In early 1934, an urgent letter<sup>54</sup> was sent to the Central Committee of the Spanish party instructing them to accelerate the sending of students to the International Lenin School, which included both armed insurreccional / military

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51 See two ads in *La Tierra* of 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of April 1932: “En este libro, recientemente escrito y ya perseguido en todo el mundo capitalista, se hace un detenido examen de las principales insurrecciones proletarias de Europa y Asia, señalándose la táctica del bolchevismo en la batalla definitiva contra el poder burgués. Su autor, A. Neuberg, activo revolucionario, ha luchado en varias insurrecciones, ha enseñado táctica militar revolucionaria en el Instituto Lenin de Moscú, y es hoy uno de los grandes valores del comunismo internacional. Pedidos a Editorial Roja, Calle Raimundo Fernández Villaverde 10, Madrid”. New Left Books of London published a helpful English edition in 1970, which included a very interesting introduction by someone who was involved directly in the project: Erich Wollenberg. In his introduction, Wollenberg mentions the book was commissioned by Pyatnitsky in 1928, that Ercoli had an editorial role, and that the writers were Pyatnitsky and a number of the leaders in the insurrections presented in the book as case studies for global learning. Wollenberg explains that the Armed Insurrection text was needed because the earlier insurrection guide, “The Path to Victory: A Theoretical Discussion on Marxism and Insurrection” by “Alfred Lange” (in reality Tuure Lechen), was aimed at fighters versed in Marxism-Leninism. Pyatnitsky wanted a follow-up work aimed at wider audience including fellow travelers.

52 See *Renovación* (10 February 1934), p. 3: “Por considerarlo de trascendental interés en los momentos actuales, damos a continuación fragmentos del interesante libro de A. Neuberg...Las Juventudes Socialistas deben leerlos, estudiarlos, comentarlos y adaptarlos”, the fragment selected dealt with guerrilla warfare in cities; *Renovación* (17 February 1934), p. 2; also *Transporte*, the organ of UGT’s transport union on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1934 with its leading headline reading: “Los tranviarios de Madrid se pronuncian por la insurrección armada.” After the Popular Front was declared the winner of the February 1936 elections, the expectation of a new armed insurrection, this time benefiting from full unity among socialists and communists, was declared at a rally including Socorro Rojo, as well as both socialist and communist leaders. See *La Libertad* (19 March 1936), p. 3.

53 I have used for this survey the Hemeroteca Digital of the National Library of Spain, a collection of 143 historic newspapers and magazines from all sides of the political spectrum and most Spanish provinces. In 1931 there were three mentions of the phrase “insurrección armada”; 4 in 1932, of which two were ads for the book; 3 mentions in 1933; 19 mentions in 1934, most in reference to the socialist-led armed insurrection of October, and several in open calls to armed insurrection in the socialist periodicals, others in the monarchical and Catholic press warning of the danger of armed insurrection, including references to the book; 36 mentions in 1935, all but 2 in connection with the October 1934 armed insurrection, but several in the moderate socialist newspaper *Democracia* arguing against armed insurrection; 27 mentions from January 1<sup>st</sup> to July 17 1936, either in reference to October 1934 or of future insurrections.

54 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 219, L. 34-35, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102016>

and political training since 1928.<sup>55</sup> The Spanish party had been “extremely slow” in sending the students and only two had been sent up to the time of writing and had done so without the required absolute secrecy. At that rate the full class of 30 would not be ready to start by end of May. Additionally, the quality of the students was low and two are considered illiterate (Mas and Montero). The center stresses to the Spanish party the requirement to include women, Komsomol members (youth), members of the communist factions *within* UGT and CNT, and especially more students coming from the “oppressed nations” of Catalonia, “Vizcaya” (in reference to the Basque region of which Vizcaya is a province) and Galicia. Students are required to have experience in strikes and pitched battles, to come from large factories and strategic sectors like transport. In January 1935, the Political Commission of the ECCI writes the Spanish section<sup>56</sup> again in relation to ILS students and courses. The letter stresses some of the same points as to students from “oppressed nations”, women etc., but makes several references to the October armed insurrection: The setting up of two separate classes is justified “based on the situation in the country and the prospect of a *new* upsurge in revolutionary waves (emphasis mine)”, and the requirement for new students is that they be tested in class battles, advanced fighters, especially from the October armed struggle. Lastly, the ECCI stresses that most of the students should not be political immigrants, that is, the large group of socialists and communists that was already in Moscow evading Spanish justice, so that they can return home immediately “for work within the country”. It appears at least some of the “political immigrants” were enrolled. Among the socialists who had been involved in the October insurrection and were now hosted by the Comintern in the Soviet Union were

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55 “In October 1928, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) authorized the Executive Committee of the Comintern to introduce into the MLS curriculum a number of new military disciplines...” Vladimir PYATNITSKY, *Osip Pjatnickij...*, *op. cit.*, p. 269. Vladimir Pyatnitsky cites RCKHIDNI. Fund 17.162, D. 7 as the source. Strictly military instructors like Wilhem Zaisser taught at both ILS and at the military school at Bakovka station (see below). Nigel West writes that the military training came at the end of the ILS regular program, see Nigel WEST, *Mask: MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 289; Kirschenbaum writes that street fighting and shooting were part of the curriculum in 1936 and “perhaps earlier”, Lisa A. KIRSCHENBAUM, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 16; in May 1932, Finnish graduates of the ILS were immediately deployed to armed insurrectional operations, see Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 25, D. 1399, L. 139-141, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101492> Details of the military ILS course material are known from the testimonies of Steve Nelson and other Americans who attended ILS in the same period (early 1930's) including weapons training, guerrilla tactics etc. See United States Senate, *The Case of Steve Nelson from the Records. Appendix to Part I. Proposed Anti-Subversion Legislation*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1959, p. 635-653.

56 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 224, Part 1, L. 4 ob., available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102018>

Margarita Nelken, Enrique de Francisco, Laureano Briones, Graciano Antuña, and many others, who evidenced clear commitment to the Comintern during their stay and upon their return.<sup>57</sup> The curriculum of ILS will also be exported to Spain in 1936, as a letter from the Spanish Sector of the Roman Lander Secretariat informs the ECCI on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1936. A two-month school was to be set up in Madrid and Barcelona, as a “branch” (philial) of ILS but under the management of the PCE. The school should provide training for Communist local leaders as well as the leadership of the socialist party and UGT, and the left-wing intellectuals. Responsibility for the school should be given to comrade M., probably a reference to “Moreno”, that is, Stepanov, and a budget based on 1935 data is provided for the “Spanish Sector ILS” including uniforms and per diem for 53 people, totaling 226,000 French francs. In spite of the prospect of local branches of the ILS in Spain, socialist del Vayo seemed to have preferred sending eleven socialists to Moscow for training in February 1936, and the communication exchange between him and MOPR leader Stasova is in the TNA Stasova file, KV2-3596.

The Abramov file at TNA (see note on OMS above) opens a window into OMS operations in Spain that would be otherwise closed, due to the classified status of this material in Moscow. The file reveals that the OMS was also running its own secret school for cipher wireless operators in Moscow, one of the key elements of the Comintern’s subversive operations in Spain. Abramov (“Doctor”) was actively engaged in recruiting Spanish students for this course in November 1935, urging Victorio Codovilla (“Medina”) and Carlo Codevilla (“Raul”), the OMS representative in Spain, to personally select the students. The leading cryptographers associated with this OMS operation in Spain in our period were “Rosa” (Irina Benz) and “Pascal” (Lydia Dübi). The OMS personnel in Spain were involved in all the subversive operations beyond communications, and included the delivery of 200,000 francs just before the February 1936 election, delivery of fake passports and visas, liaising between the socialists and communists in Moscow in 1935 and Abramov and his organization in Spain, etc.

In addition to various forms of armed insurrectional training provided to Socialist and Communist students, the Comintern’s Organizational Department stressed the absolutely essential “work in the armed forces” that its sections were to carry out. This message from the center was particularly stressed for all sections, including Spain, *after* the VII Comintern Congress. In a detailed secret memorandum representing the Organizational Department of the ECCI,

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<sup>57</sup> See A. V. ELPÁTIEVSKY, *La Emigración Española en la URSS: historiografía y fuentes, intento de interpretación*, Madrid: Exterior XXI, 2008, p. 46-72, for a discussion of the 45 socialists hosted by the Comintern in Russia with the approval of Ercoli and Diaz, correspondence between them and del Vayo, activities and discussion with Nelken, etc.



“T. Lechen” addresses how the Comintern has and will assist the sections with work in the army. T. Lechen is none other than Tuure Lehen,<sup>58</sup> aka “Alfred”, the master insurrectionist and guerrilla leader who had co-edited the leading text books on the subject for the Comintern. Lechen affirms the ongoing absolute centrality and urgency of insurrectional and degradational work in the army “in spite of the united front” (Nesmotrya na edinyi front). The work of supporting the sections in their military work in the past (special schools, mass work in the army etc), suggest Lechen, needs to be updated and strengthened. In an additional secret memorandum on military work by the sections written in December 1935,<sup>59</sup> “Zeisser” refers to the VII Congress *unpublished* military tasks<sup>60</sup> which include infiltration of the armed forces (cell work) and preparation for armed uprising by all sections. “Zeisser”, Wilhem Zaisser,<sup>61</sup> is another German military expert, tested in multiple insurrections from China to Europe and Morocco. He was an instructor at both the military school at Bakovka station (see above) and at the ILS. Zaisser writes that the ECCI must continue to support the sections in these tasks and that the experiences of sections on armed insurrection and civil war must be collected for the benefit of all. The message of the essential nature of “work in the army” was delivered to the Spanish section in no uncertain terms in the run-up to the socialist-led October 1934 armed insurrection. In a September 15<sup>th</sup> 1934<sup>62</sup> letter from the ECCI to the Central Committee of the PCE; la Casa detailed directives for the preparation of the struggle for power. The letter contains a significant degree of wishful thinking, given the fact that PSOE, UGT and FJS kept the PCE out of the gathering of weapons and other preparations until the last minute. However, the letter is illustrative of the Comintern’s intense dedication to training and preparing all its sections for armed insurrection, including working

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58 Lehen is the “Alfred” of “The Path to Victory: A Theoretical Discussion on Marxism and Insurrection” and was a frequent lecturer at all the military schools. He had been deployed to Germany in 1929 to infiltrate the army there and was a veteran of insurrectional work in Austria in addition to his home country of Finland and would be sent to the SPANISH CIVIL WAR in 1936. See *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*.

59 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 25, D. 1335, L. 122-125, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101405>

60 For the secret unpublished clauses of the VII Congress on mandatory military work by the sections see Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 494, Op. 1, D. 437, L. 2, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101403> The document was given to the sections with a cover letter signed by Walter.

61 Zaisser was later sent to Spain during the CSW as “General Gomez”. He later led the Stasi in East Germany. See his biography at Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS-Lexikon; Zaisser, Wilhelm, available online <https://www.bstu.de/mfs-lexikon/detail/zaisser-wilhelm/>

62 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 4, D. 310, L. 15-21, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101389>

within the armed forces to infiltrate and degrade them. The ECCI approves the participation in any armed insurrection and encourages the PCE to try to lead it, “even when the movement begins under the leadership of another party”. While the ECCI approves the joining of the socialist-led Alianzas Obreras, the ECCI wants the PCE to raise within them the key question of taking control of the army, and PCE must invite the socialists to create anti-fascist cells within it. Without “army work”, no victory is possible, it concludes.

The PCE had, by early 1935, a number of graduates of Moscow-based armed insurrectional training, some of whom were also UGT members, and managed to develop a substantial network of army cells by early 1936. The best known and probably most successful implementer of Comintern “army work” was Enrique Lister, a graduate of both the ILS and Frunze academy.<sup>63</sup> After attending the VII Congress as a guest, he re-entered Spain with a Portuguese passport. Codovilla and the PCE leadership commissioned him to take over immediately the work of creating communist cells within the armed forces of Spain, work the party had been carrying out since 1932.<sup>64</sup> Lister writes that the party dedicated great impulse and resources to this work, setting up cells in barracks in many provinces. In 1935, hundreds of soldiers, NCO’s and officers were trained and managed by party representatives, and in Madrid the party had at least one cell in every barracks. Given this success, the party organized a clandestine conference in Madrid in January 1936 with delegates from multiple infantry and artillery regiments in attendance, as well as representatives of other branches of the armed forces. In a September 22 1936 report,<sup>65</sup> Codovilla makes reference to the “Pacific barracks” (Cuartel de Pacífico), and to the fact that it had Communist cells as of July 17<sup>th</sup> 1936. He added that in that location “communist and socialists were in a majority”. Starting in late 1935, the clandestine organ of the PCE for the armed forces, Soldado Rojo, was distributed secretly in most military installations across Spain. The leader of the opposition, in an appeal to the Prime Minister, Mr. Azaña, famously denounced this infiltration of the armed forces while holding an issue of Soldado Rojo in his hands.<sup>66</sup>

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63 Enrique LISTER, *Memorias de un luchador*, Madrid: G. del Toro, 1977, p. 57. Lister writes that at the military academy he was accompanied by other Spaniards, one of which had participated in the October 1936 insurrection.

64 *Ibidem*, p. 59.

65 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 20, D. 270, L. 13-51, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102028> On the 18 of July 1936, the “Cuartel de Pacífico” or Cuartel de Daoiz y Velarde, was guarded by JSU and UGT elements, and several soldiers from the barracks collaborated in the supply of weapons to socialist militias. See Antonio CORDÓN GARCÍA, *Trajectoria: Memorias de un Militar Republicano*, Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1977.

66 Mr. Calvo Sotelo argued that the infiltration and undermining of the armed forces was one of several subversive activities being supported by both socialists and communists, working as a cohesive

Communist “work” in the Spanish Navy was equally extensive since at least 1932. In a 42-page report<sup>67</sup> produced shortly after the Spanish Civil War for the PCE leadership, Manuel Espada Peregrino details the extent of Communist infiltration in the armada. Espada, navy NCO and later member of the Communist 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, begins his report with a note of sarcasm: “¿Es verdad que el ‘coco’ del comunismo tan manoseado por la reacción había plantado sus reales en los Buques de la Escuadra (sic)?”. The report is Espada’s own affirmative answer to the question, which includes his discussion of the masonic connections of officers and NCOs prior to and in the early years of the II Republic and the setting up of the first communist cells on the Almirante Cervera and other vessels. The aim of these cells was, writes Espada, the “llamamiento a la insurrección armada y a organizar los consejos de obreros y campesinos, soldados y marineros”. The leaders of these cells referred to themselves in their agit-prop materials as “Los Marineros Rojos de la Escuadra”. According to Espada, a majority of navy corporals were under the influence of these cells before the outbreak of war, a significant success that was, in Espada’s words, the result of significant “seasoning” and “finishing.”

The Comintern-mandated and supported activities of infiltration and undermining of the armed forces had been a significant concern of western European governments, especially in the early to the mid 30’s. The UK and French<sup>68</sup> Governments’ tracking of these subversive activities within their armed forces is of particular interest to us. In the case of the UK, the ongoing British experience of Comintern operations within its borders made the Baldwin Government particularly determined to track and contain Comintern subversive activities in Spain, given its industrial and strategic interests there.<sup>69</sup> In the case of France,

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force within the Popular Front coalition. Thus Calvo Sotelo: “¿Es que no sabe S.S. que se desarrolla en los cuarteles una política enorme de indisciplina? (grandes y prolongados rumores) Aquí tengo un número del Soldado Rojo que ha llegado a mis manos, en el que se dan nombres y apellidos de jefes y oficiales, señalándolos a la brutalidad de las gentes comunistas” *ABC* (16 April 1936), p. 28.

67 Archivo Histórico del PCE, Tesis, manuscritos y memorias, Sig. 35/1. M. Espada, “Informe a los camaradas de la Dirección sobre su actuación en la guerra, en la Marina”. Espada’s fascinating report confirms a number of details about the masonic and communist infiltration of the navy, the leading role of Jose Antonio Paz Martínez, and the communist control of the U.M.R.A and others made by Fernando MORENO DE ALBORÁN and Salvador MORENO DE ALBORÁN, *La Guerra Silenciosa y Silenciada. Historia de la Campaña Naval Durante La Guerra de 1936-39*, vol. I, Madrid: Gráficas Lormo, 1998.

68 For the Comintern work in the British army see for example Christopher ANDREW, *The Defence of the Realm. The Authorized History of MI5*, London: Penguin, 2009, p. 161-185; Nigel WEST, *Mask: MI5 s... , op. cit.*, p. 271, 294-295. For the Comintern army work in France see Georges VIDAL, “L’armée française face au communisme du début des années 1930 jusqu’à ‘la débâcle’”, *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, 30 (2/2004), p. 283-309. See also, for example, *Le Figaro* of 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1936 warning of recent Comintern instructions for the French section to “intensifier le travail dans l’armée française”.

69 See Douglas LITTLE, “Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (2/1988), p. 291-311. The

violent events just South of the border since 1934 caused consternation, especially as viewed in connection with parallel Comintern-supported events and activities in France, more on this below. The French Minister of War, Jean Fabry, spoke about “the same revolutionary techniques” being deployed on both sides of the border and the implications of this for the national security of France.<sup>70</sup>

In the context of interwar Europe in which multiple and conflicting views regarding the source and nature of legitimate government coexisted, Soviet Communism’s traction among important sections of the population owed much to its alternative legitimacy based on a complete and violent break with the past.<sup>71</sup> For Stalin and the Comintern and for those who held the reins of power among socialists in Madrid, the UGT and the socialist youth as of January 1934, there was no parliamentary path to socialism. As we have seen, revolutionary struggle for proletarian dictatorship remained the *raison d’être* of the Comintern throughout the period of our study. While stressing the need to modulate the tactics according to local conditions in each country so as to win over a majority of the “reformist” socialist masses, Comintern communications also reminded the sections that the coming revolution required constant preparation. The three primary terms used in Russian language Comintern documents to refer to the forceful capture of political power are coup (*pereborot*)<sup>72</sup>, the German loan word *putsch*<sup>73</sup>, and insurrection (*vosstanie*)<sup>74</sup>,

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fact that the “Zinoviev letter” was a fake does not turn the Comintern operations in the UK so carefully tracked by MI5 into mythology. See in The National Archives, the KV 2 series.

70 “M. Jean Fabry lut dans un silence impressionnant les documents officiels du Komintern qui donnent les consignes por les temps a venir”. In an article entitled “M. Jean Fabry Évêque Les Dangers de L’Heure...”, *L’Intransigeant* (26 April 1936), p. 3.

71 See Martin CONWAY and Peter ROMIJN, “Political Legitimacy in Mid Twentieth-Century Europe” in Martin CONWAY and Peter ROMIJN (ed.), *The War for Legitimacy in Politics and Culture 1936-1946*, Oxford: Berg, 2008, p. 1-27.

72 A revolt, a coup. The noun is a cognate of *revoliutsiya*, revolution. The noun appears 4,233 times in all its inflected forms in the 109,000 document electronic library of historical documents of the Russian Historical Society. The search was carried out in January 2022, and later additions to the database may alter these numbers, though not likely the overall proportions. The noun is used in reference to the 1930 left wing coup attempt by Spanish army officers at Jaca, of the July 17<sup>th</sup> uprising led by Mola, Franco and other generals, of the 1939 Casado uprising against the Communist-controlled Negrin Government, and, interestingly, of an insurrection against Azaña Dimitrov told the ECCI was an option in late July 1936: “with the army divided, if we can take a garrison in the center we can do a coup (*pereborot*) and overthrow Azaña in 24 hours... then do a manifesto for a truly republican and democratic government” Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 18, D. 1101, L. 21-23, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102023>

73 *Putsch*, appears 303 times in the electronic document database. It is used in reference to the December 1933 anarchist insurrection attempt, of the Comintern-alleged 1937 putsch attempt by the POUM “Trotskyists” in Spain, and also of the putsch-like tactics of the Socialists in October 1934, essentially for not including the Communists sufficiently in the plan and execution.

74 Over 10,000 times, including references to insurrections supported by the Comintern in Greece, Bulgaria, Finland, and of the Spanish and Austrian insurrections of 1934, etc.

often accompanied by the qualifier *vooruzhennoe* (armed). Of these, armed insurrection became the standard term to refer to the Comintern mandated means, as per Marxist-Leninist doctrine, of seizing political power. The Austrian and shortly after, the Spanish armed uprisings of 1934 demonstrated to the ECCI that armed insurrections were indeed possible in modern countries with technically advanced armed forces. The Comintern urged all sections to draw the correct conclusions and use these two success stories to draw the proletarian masses away from reformist parties and intensify their implementation of the insurrectionary instructions given to them by Moscow. “For the Spanish proletariat”, Manuilsky told the ECCI in January 1935,<sup>75</sup> “the Asturian insurrection will play a huge role, something like the role that the Moscow uprising played in 1905... It showed the Spanish proletariat the need to take up arms to overthrow the government the bourgeoisie. This is a big lesson”. The coming to power of the Popular Front in February 1936 did not change the insurrectional plans of the Comintern for Spain, a fact that was made transparently clear in a February 21<sup>st</sup> 1936 ECCI directive to the Spanish section<sup>76</sup>. The instruction was not to assume that parliamentary representation would break the remaining resistance of the enemy and to increase agitation of the broad masses, being alert to the “opportunistic waiting for the natural maturing of the revolution”. The focus remains on a “conspirational method of organizing an uprising”, for which a single proletarian party under a unified Communist control is now needed.

One of the key benefits the Comintern expected to draw out of the October 1934 armed uprising was merger with the socialist unions<sup>77</sup> and youth sections who had led the insurrection. The Anti-fascist front (1933) and the popular front (first version in January 1935) were the two strategic moves the Comintern deployed to achieve this end.

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<sup>75</sup> Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 2, D. 196, L. 82-94, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101394>

<sup>76</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 20, D. 262, L. 16-21, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102020> In line with Togliatti: “La Victoria electoral de febrero 1936 abre una nueva fase de la revolución en España...una espléndida victoria táctica...impulsa a nuevas masas por el camino de la lucha revolucionaria contra los terratenientes, la gran burguesía y el capitalismo” Palmiro TOGLIATTI, *Escritos sobre...*, *op. cit.*, p. 42-43.

<sup>77</sup> The instructions to pursue a merging of the unions came together with the permission to join the Alianzas Obreras in the run-up to the October 1934 armed uprising. The instruction was to leverage and grow existing penetration of UGT so as to control the management, and then move towards a congress for unification and to a merger based on class warfare, create armed worker-peasant militias, etc. See Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 4, D. 310, L. 15-21 already cited above.

## “WE MUST HAVE OUR HANDS FREE”: FROM ANTI-FASCIST FRONT TO POPULAR FRONT

As early as March 1931, the Comintern had reprimanded the Spanish section on their inability to deploy the duplicitous Marxist-Leninist modus operandi of fronts, slogans and tactics that are flexible even to the point of appearing to contradict the Comintern's true aims and actual underground work. The Spanish section was being transparent in their rejection of parliamentary democracy and boycotting of the municipal elections that would result in the installation of the Second Republic. Humbert-Droz addressed the naiveté of the Spanish party in no uncertain terms:<sup>78</sup> We consider the tactics of boycotting the election to be wrong. You must run with a complete program that is driven by slogans that incorporate those of the proletariat, soldiers, peasantry, etc. Yes, we want to smash democratic illusion, but the task at hand is to win over the proletarian masses. To this end, do not engage in a general criticism of parliamentarianism in toto, but rather, expose concrete inconsistencies in it in a manner that appeals to the desires of the masses. The Spanish leaders were failing to understand and deploy the most fundamental skills of a communist revolutionary: Agitation and propaganda which identifies, stirs and leverages human emotion to align it with the party's revolutionary aims. The anti-fascist front of 1933 and the popular front which the Comintern helped set up in Spain on its basis represent the successful achievement of the Comintern's instructions to the Spanish section since 1931. This required an embarrassing U turn on the branding of the PSOE leadership as social fascists, a label that bore little credibility after the process of bolshevization of the key socialist leadership was complete in early 1934.

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1932, the Spanish section presented a report to the Roman Lander Secretariat<sup>79</sup> in which it confessed its inability, up to the time of writing, to show the masses the reality of the “fascist-Bonapartist-monarchist-clerical danger” and its connection with the bourgeois government, let alone lead a fight against it. The left-wing socialist ideologue Luis Araqúistain, writing to a foreign audience in English in April 1934 admitted openly that Spain lacked all of the fundamental ingredients of fascism: “Out of what could Spanish fascism be concocted? I cannot imagine the recipe”.<sup>80</sup> In his speeches and writings to Spanish audiences that same year, however, Araqúistain referred often to the fascist threat in Spain as justification for revo-

<sup>78</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 19, D. 99, L. 10, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102004>

<sup>79</sup> Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 109, L. 14-52, 151-157, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102012>

<sup>80</sup> Luis ARAQUÍSTAIN, “The Struggle in Spain”, *Foreign Affairs*, 12 (3/1934), p. 470.



lutionary, insurreccional socialism.<sup>81</sup> Exposing a fascist threat in Spain was indeed a tall order which required the full resources of the Comintern. A detailed survey of the press archives reveals how anti-fascism was born and eventually became the first platform uniting socialists and communists. In 1931 and 1932, all of the references to “anti-fascist” in the press refer to events in Italy, Germany or other locations outside of Spain. The first mention we have found of an anti-fascist protest in Spain was a march organized by the left-wing student union F.U.E. against the German embassy to protest Hitler’s policies.<sup>82</sup> On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1933 the first and last issue of *El Fascio* was published with an immediate government-imposed shut down of its operation. This failed periodical seems to have become the local visualization of fascism that was needed for anti-fascism to become a potent force in Spain. From the outset, however, anti-fascist protests and campaigns, which turned violent on occasion, were directed not against the minuscule JONS or the publishers of *Fascio*, but against Catholics, monarchists or members of the Acción Popular or CEDA.<sup>83</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, the Radical Socialist Agriculture Minister warned anti-fascists to tone down their rhetoric and protests, since “no es necesario ser antifascista donde el fascismo no puede existir”.<sup>84</sup> But the atmosphere lent itself to the funneling of anti-fascist sentiment into a formal political platform that would unite the left against a common enemy.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1933, *El Heraldo de Madrid* publishes a letter inviting all men and women to join “a powerful anti-fascist front”, and among its signatories are José Antonio Balbontín, Pasionaria and Eduardo Ortega y Gasset, Radical Socialist and frequent representative of Socorro Rojo (International Red Aid) at rallies and other events. At the first official event of the new organization, delegates were invited to the first World Anti-Fascist Congress in Copenhagen. Registration was to be carried out by writing to the attention of Aksel Larsen, the leader of the Danish Communist Party. By July, Evaristo Gil, representing the socialist union UGT, was able to confirm that over 200 organizations belonging to the II International had attended the World Con-

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81 Araquistain brands Gil Robles a fascist, before whom “se ha acabado el socialismo reformista, democrático y pacífico... pronto no habrá más que un socialismo revolucionario, insurreccional en el mundo...” *Heraldo de Madrid* (15 February 1934), p. 1.

82 I have used the digital archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de España. *La Nación* (10 March 1933), p. 16.

83 *Siglo Futuro* (20 March 1933), p. 2 recounts anti-fascist attack on the Escuela de Obreros Católicos; *La Libertad* 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1933 recounts how Communist and union youth went to obstruct an Acción Popular rally with Mr. Goicoechea speaking; *Ahora* (28 March 1933), p. 9: “Comunistas sevillanos... mitin antifascista... combatieron el fascismo y propugnaron la unión de los elementos revolucionarios para combatir a las derechas” (emphasis mine).

84 As reported on *Heraldo de Madrid* (27 March 1933), p. 8.

gress.<sup>85</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, the *Luz* newspaper announces the visit to Madrid, in support of the anti-fascist front, of the London-based Ellen Wilkinson and Lord Marley of the Comintern-sponsored Relief Committee<sup>86</sup>. The Socialist Luis Jiménez de Asúa is now mentioned as President of the Anti-Fascist Front. With Wilkinson and Marley came Henri Barbusse<sup>87</sup> and the three engaged in various media interviews and meetings with politicians over the following days. Barbusse, speaking at the Teatro Español on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July, delivered the Comintern line on anti-fascism: “Las potencias contra las cuales combatimos no se llaman Alemania, Italia, Japón, sino que se llaman imperialismo, capitalismo y fascismo.... no hay causas particulares, sino que todas tienen una causa común, general a todas, que es la organización capitalista actual”.<sup>88</sup>

The Comintern and its Spanish section, with the support of the “Münzenberg trust”, had achieved a significant success with the creation of this widely appealing political platform. The Anti-Fascist Front embodied the Comintern’s united front concept and secured socialist participation while keeping under control significant remaining tensions between socialists and communists.<sup>89</sup> The anti-fascist platform was to serve an even greater purpose in early 1935. Drawing masterfully from Willi Münzenberg’s propaganda toolset and with

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85 *Heraldo de Madrid* (6 July 1933), p. 10. The congress had moved to Paris, which enabled the participation and support of the significant Comintern and French Communist Party organization there.

86 Ellen Wilkinson, MP, was an intimate friend and collaborator of both Willi Münzenberg and Otto Katz, the creators and managers of the Comintern’s anti-fascist agitprop machine in Paris. See the substantial Otto Katz and Willi Münzenberg files detailing Ellen Wilkinson’s regular communication and financial arrangements with the Paris-based Cominternians: The National Archives, KV 2/1383, available online <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11151667>; The National Archives, KV 2/773, available online <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11050140>

87 Barbusse would soon take over from Münzenberg as lead Comintern Anti-Fascism propagandist, within Comintern funding of around 100,000 francs per month, and 3,000 francs in personal expenses, as of September 1934. RGASPI.495-60-246a, 142-44, 150, cited in Sean MCMEEKIN, *The Red Millionaire. A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow’s Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 363. See also Helmut GRUBER, “Willi Münzenberg: Propagandist for and against the Comintern”, *International Review of Social History*, 10 (2/1965), p. 193-196. See also Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 19, D. 213, which includes documents from Henri Barbusse about the management of anti-fascist fellow travelers connected to the Comintern in Spain, including Ellen Wilkinson. Also, part of Münzenbergs team in Paris, KPD expatriates like them, were Heinz Neumann and Gustav Regler, like Otto, Spanish speakers who had resided in Spain at various points under Comintern assignments in the early 30’s. Neumann’s file at The National Archives is KV 2/1058, available online <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11090390> and Regler’s KV 2/3506, available online <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11602913>

88 *Heraldo de Madrid* (13 July 1933), p. 15.

89 See for example the article on UGT’s transport workers union: “¡Viva el frente único!”, *Transporte*, Suplemento al núm. 90 (15 June 1933), p. 4; reporting on the Paris Congress of the Anti-fascist front. The article, citing the French socialist reporter at the congress, attacks the Communist organizers for pretending to be in favor of a united antifascist front while excluding some socialists and “Trotskyists”.

Stalin's blessing, Henri Barbusse created the World Committee against War and Fascism<sup>90</sup> in the summer of 1934. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1935, the Committee wrote a secret memo to the Roman Lander Secretariat of the ECCI<sup>91</sup> making reference to a series of reports the World Committee against Fascism and War received from its “Spanish representative in the committee”, comrade “Albert”. The reports, dated 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1935 detailed the successful Comintern campaign to secure socialist and republican support for the establishment of the Popular Front in Spain. It seems clear that “Albert” is none other than Hugo Eberlein, a.k.a. (Max) Albert.<sup>92</sup> Hugo Eberlein was an extremely gifted Comintern financier and negotiator, involved in multiple international deals for the Comintern in previous years from China to France. He was often deployed as part of OMS operations, for example in Shanghai in 1930, in connection with the Comintern-created Metropolitan Trading Company, the Comintern channel for financing the military operations of its Far Eastern Bureau.<sup>93</sup> Eberlein was most famous as the protagonist of what soon became known as “the Eberlein Affair” in France in November 1935, ten months after writing these reports. Upon crossing the French border in possession of a false Danish passport in the name of Daniel Nielsen, Eberlein was arrested with cash and propaganda aimed at promoting the “liberation” of the “oppressed people” of Alsace-Lorraine.

In the introductory note, the Committee informs the Roman Lander Secretariat that, due to slow progress by the Committee and a number of missed

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90 See on this the study based on complete Soviet archival research on Barbusse and his close relationship with Stalin and the Comintern in Romain DUCOULOMBIER, “Henri Barbusse, Stalin and the making of the Comintern's International Policy in the 1930s”, *French History*, 30 (4/2016), p. 526-545, esp. 540. Ducoulomber shows the growing influence of Barbusse with Stalin and the latter's approval of Barbusse's strategy that led to the creation of the Committee as a merger of Amsterdam and Pleyel.

91 Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 495, Op. 32, D. 225, L. 95-100, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/102019>

92 See for example the editorial notes added to Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), RGASPI. F. 488, Op. 1, D. 15, L. 23, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/101408> ‘Max Albert’ is the pseudonym of Hugo Eberlein. On Hugo Eberlein see Branko LAZITCH and Milorad M. DRACHKOVITCH, *Biographical Dictionary...*, *op. cit.*, for a career survey; see Vladimir Pyatnitsky who writes that Eberlein was his father's closest confidant, Vladimir PYATNITSKY, *Osip Pjatnickij...*, *op. cit.*, p. 168, 214, 538; Gustav REGLER, *The Owl of Minerva*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960, p. 209, 228. Regler was Eberlein's KPD comrade and partner in multiple operations. Regler tells the fascinating story of Eberlein's arrival in Moscow fresh out of the German revolution in 1918. There was no sugar for his tea and Lenin proceeded to search the Kremlin until he came back with sugar for Eberlein, wrapped in a page out of Pravda. Eberlein and Regler were together in the Saar during the failed 1935 Comintern campaign there, during which Eberlein was keeping a tight rein on the Comintern funding. See also reference to Eberlein in the TNA Abramov file. Also Marie-Cécile BOUJU, *Lire en Communiste: Les Maisons d'édition du Parti Communiste Français 1920-1968*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, p. 84.

93 See Frederick S. LITTEN, “The Noulens Affair”, *The China Quarterly*, 138 (1994), p. 501.

opportunities, they had decided to send over a “friend”, later referred to as an instructor and identified as “Albert”, in order to move things forward. Upon arrival of the instructor, “our friends”, continues the memo in reference to the PCE, decided together with him to lead the movement of the Popular Front (dvizheniye narodnogo fronta). While the Committee has not yet confirmed independently the success of this initiative as reported by the instructor, continues the memo, “judging by the mood of the working masses...we believe that on this basis a broad movement can be created...(as) an instrument of mass revolutionary struggle to such a scale as has not been seen here before”. Albert’s reports, the first one from the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, read like a sales manager’s pipeline opportunity review. He gives a numbered list of the parties / unions and persons the “Popular Front” will consist of, detailing those whose participation “you can definitely count on” (in capitals in the Russian document), and those with whom negotiations are still ongoing and results are expected by the following day. Those that are a done deal are Radical Socialist Party, Federal Republican Party, Federation of Agricultural Workers, Autonomous Union of Postal Workers, Autonomous National Telegraph Workers Union, Union of Anti-Fascist Students (a united front of socialists and communists), Republican Women’s Union and Cultural and Sports Workers Union. Under negotiation are the top prize Socialist Party and its union, UGT. “Albert” also mentions a number of leading politicians and intellectuals joining as individuals due to what he considers the current illegal status of their party or organization, including Victoria Kent, the socialists Luis Araquistain, Jiménez de Asúa<sup>94</sup> and del Vayo (del Vayo is identified as left wing and part of the Caballero faction), Pasionaria, Eduardo Ortega y Gasset, Antonio de Lezama, Director of *La Libertad* newspaper, Franchy Roca, leader of Federal Republicans, and others. “Albert” adds that some of the individuals have also committed to participate in a constituent assembly of the Popular front (uchreditel’noe sobranie narodnogo fronta) to be held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January at the Ateneo or at the headquarters of the radical socialists (Ortega y Gasset’s party). The proclamation of the Popular Front is to be based on the slogans: The struggle against reaction, the lifting of the state of siege (arising from the October 1934 armed insurrection), in defense of democratic and parliamentary freedoms, for the release of prisoners and the shutting down of military tribunals and for peace. “Albert” adds, revealing the highly flexible and pragmatic approach taken, that the slogan “against war” had to be dropped since the radical republicans

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94 Jiménez de Asúa had also been an early member of the Comintern-funded Amigos de la Unión Soviética (Friends of the Soviet Union), and Frente Antifascista, participating in the rally addressed by Barbusse in July 1933 (see above). Southworth may not have known this and found his inclusion in an alleged Comintern candidate commissars list incredible, given that he was a “supporter of parliamentary Government”. Southworth quoting Gabriel Jackson approvingly in Herbert R. SOUTHWORTH, *Conspiracy and...*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

could not agree to it. Of these, only the defense of democratic and parliamentary freedoms, struggle against reaction and defense of peace have been communicated to the government.

Albert’s update dated 17<sup>th</sup> January gives additional details on the involvement of Victoria Kent, and of a large group of intellectuals who will be organized in support of the initiative following “the French model”. In the evening of Sunday the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, “Albert” breaks the news of those who have “officially joined” (in caps in original). Along with other parties already mentioned above, “Albert” adds that a long meeting was held on Sunday with the secretary of the Socialist Party and with the Chairman of the UGT, the result is the grand prize of Eberlein’s campaign: The Socialist Party has officially joined the Popular Front. These were frank conversations, adds “Albert”, and he informed the socialists that this is the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement as well as the World Committee (against War and Fascism). On the basis of this trusted background and shared ideas and enmities, the UGT Chairman informed Albert, he writes, that he sees no obstacle to the joining of the (Communist and socialist) trade unions. Finally, it is interesting to note Albert’s comment on the status of the Ateneo. While they were not able to join officially due to the fact that they receive public funds, all the prominent intellectuals who have signed will be in the Ateneo’s oversight committee, which secures, in effect its participation. Understandably, Eberlein concludes that “our friends are very happy”, in reference to PCE.

Contrary to the plans expressed in these reports, the negotiations and agreement around the Popular Front as detailed in the document did not become widely publicized in February 1935. *La Libertad* of 17 March 1935 did take note, however, of a meeting of the Federal Party led by Franchy Roca, one of the leaders highlighted individually in Eberlein’s report, which discussed the proposal for “a popular front” in March 1935. The Comintern was not committed to specific formulas. The popular front concept had worked in France and was getting traction in Spain, in spite of some republican suspicions of its origins. In discussing the popular front and united front from above concepts Dimitrov advised to define them in general terms only because “we must keep our hands free”.<sup>95</sup> It would take nearly a full year for a popular front-type coalition to take shape officially as an electoral platform with non-Communists such as Azaña taking the leading role. In any case, several conclusions can be drawn from the content of this document. First, contrary to to

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<sup>95</sup> Literally unbound (развязанные). Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 494, Op. 1, D. 423, L. 10, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23, 32, 33, 50, 66, 68, 69, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 89, 90, 94, 95, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/91238>

Juliá and Graham<sup>96</sup> among others, the French and Spanish Popular Fronts can both be traced back to the brilliant propaganda machine of *Münzenberg and Barbusse in Paris*. Specifically, both emerged out of the Comintern-organized anti-fascist platform in its various forms taken in 1933-35: Amsterdam-Pleyel, World Committee, etc. Indeed, in the Comintern strategy, Spain was explicitly following the French pattern, because the French section was stronger in thought leadership, positioning within the society as well as weight within the Comintern. Further, the French Popular Front coalition published its program on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1936, just under a week before the Spanish Alianza de Izquierdas published their agreement, with slogans of peace and freedom reminiscent of those mentioned in the Eberlein report. Secondly, contrary to Rees<sup>97</sup> and Preston,<sup>98</sup> the Comintern and its Spanish section did have a leading role in the original design of the Popular Front as a mass movement, though Azaña and others took the lead in the formation of the later left-wing electoral coalition. When Preston suggests only francoists believed the Frente Popular was a creation of the Comintern,<sup>99</sup> he neglects to mention the moderate socialist newspaper *Democracia*, which affirmed as much.<sup>100</sup> Thirdly, contrary to

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<sup>96</sup> Santos JULIÁ, “The Origins...”, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Helen GRAHAM, “The Spanish Popular...”, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>97</sup> Rees writes that “The PCE was even more fortunate in finding itself as part of the Spanish Popular Front, given that it played no active part in its creation”. Tim REES, “The Popular Fronts and the Civil War in Spain” in Silvio PONS and Stephen A. SMITH (ed.), *Cambridge history of Communism. Volume I: World revolution and socialism in One Country 1917-1941*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 262-263. Even if Rees sets aside the Eberlein document and the Comintern’s larger popular front strategy emerging from the VII Congress, Rees cannot ignore the fact that the non-inclusion of the PCE was a deal breaker as per the socialists demands, and that Caballero and the PCE were in constant discussions while the PSOE considered Azaña’s invitation to the electoral alliance.

<sup>98</sup> Helen GRAHAM and Paul PRESTON, “The Popular Front and the Struggle against Fascism” in Helen GRAHAM and Paul PRESTON (ed.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, London: McMillan, 1987, p. 16. In the same volume, David Levy explains the French Communist Party’s leading role in the creation of the French Popular Front: “The (PCF) became the moving force behind the Popular Front, providing both the political initiatives and the slogans for the movement”, even the very phrase Front Populaire, drafted by the Comintern representative Fried. David LEVY, “The French...”, *op. cit.*, p. 58-83.

<sup>99</sup> Paul PRESTON, “The Creation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 85. Preston engages here, as he does elsewhere, in fairly obvious straw man building. He quotes a popular and rather colorful francoist account in order to discredit the thesis and establish guilt by association of anyone else holding such a view. Preston’s own ideological commitments are fairly transparent in this discussion. A more balanced view is presented by McDermott and Agnew who see the origins of the Popular Front in a triple interaction of factors, but certainly including the Comintern’s leading. Kevin MCDERMOTT and Jeremy AGNEW, *The Comintern...*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>100</sup> “El frente popular es hoy la orden de Moscú”, *Democracia* (20 September 1935), p. 3. Though *Democracia* appreciated the concept of the popular front as an electoral coalition. This identification of the popular front with Moscow and the Comintern was, of course shared in the Catholic and monarchist press in Spain and in the conservative press North of the Pyrenees. Thus *Le Matin* (13 December 1935), p. 1: “Staline, patron du Front Populaire”.



Preston, Graham, Juliá<sup>101</sup> and many others, it is simply not true that “the PCE counted for almost nothing”, and, therefore, it could not play a leading role in the formation of a Popular Front. As we have shown above, the Comintern and its Spanish section had a consistently applied strategy to infiltrate and control UGT-affiliated unions and to drive towards a merger or absorption into UGT. That final step was taken in November 1935 benefiting from substantial SRI funds and Comintern networking with socialist leaders in both Madrid and Moscow. Interestingly, very shortly after the socialists received Azaña’s invitation to join the left wing electoral coalition (“coalición de izquierdas”)<sup>102</sup>, Caballero asked UGT to enable the start of negotiations for the CGTU to join UGT.<sup>103</sup> The merger of the socialist and communist youth organizations takes place in April 1936, but the discussions had started months before as socialist youth leaders met secretly with del Vayo *and* with the Comintern’s representative Victorio Codovilla in del Vayo and Araquistain’s prestigious apartment building on Espalter 5, a short walk away from Retiro Park.<sup>104</sup> The closure of the deal necessitated a visit to Moscow to meet the K.I.M. leadership there, an organization the merged JSU was later to join. Juliá notes the cool reception Caballero gave to Azaña’s offer in late 1935, and his insistence that the non-inclusion of PCE and UGT would be a deal breaker. The above Comintern report sheds light on Caballero’s strategic alignment with the PCE as early as January 1935 and helps explain his unenthusiastic and conditional response to Azaña. All of these achievements of the Comintern and its Spanish section amount to rather more than “almost nothing”, and the ECCI’s perspective on its success in Spain illuminates this point. Speaking on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1936, Ercoli addresses the ECCI Presidium<sup>105</sup> and asks an enthusiastic audience: “How did

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101 Preston “At the time of the formation of...the Popular Front, the Communist Party played merely a peripheral role”, Paul PRESTON, “The Creation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 84. Likewise Graham: “...the PCE was numerically so slight as to be politically negligible”, Helen GRAHAM, “The Spanish Popular...”, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

102 The term used in the manifesto was not “Frente Popular” but “Coalición de Izquierdas”. Interestingly, *La Libertad* of the same day claims to have led the initiative and refers to the pact using the Comintern nomenclature of “frente único” and had referred to it as “frente popular” on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. As we saw above, the *La Libertad* Subdirector Antonio de Lezama was among the names mentioned by Eberlein in the Comintern report. Indalecio Prieto, on the other hand, had used “frente popular” and “coalición de izquierdas” interchangeably in *La Libertad* of January 10<sup>th</sup>. See the text of the Manifiesto Electoral de las Izquierdas, for example, on “Texto Del Manifiesto Electoral De Las Izquierdas”, *Heraldo de Madrid* (16 January 1936), p. 3-4. The socialists signed in their own name and in the name of (“en representación de”) UGT, PCE, FNJS, Partido Sindicalista and POUM. However, Vicente Uribe of the PCE signed the document as well.

103 This could have happened the very same day, see Santos JULIÁ, “The Origins...”, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

104 Luis ARAQUISTAIN, *El Comunismo y la Guerra de España*, San José (Costa Rica): s.n., 1939, p. 9.

105 Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of the Documents of Contemporary History (RCKHIDNI), RCKHIDNI. F. 495, Op. 2, D. 222, L. 129-138, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/91242>

we reach a united front in France and Spain?...what was the first step in organizing the popular front against fascism? Thanks to promotions...campaigns, rallies, organized by our party we reached the popular front in France. It was the same in Spain...we overcame the resistance of part of the socialist leadership". In Stalin's own words, democracy, "as the masses understand it", is our bridge to the popular front.<sup>106</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to complement and balance the historiography of the Comintern in Spain by focusing on the subversive and illegal dimension of Comintern operations in Spain prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. To this end, we have referred to and explained a number of Comintern, TNA and PCE archival materials that reveal the semi-legal and illegal activities of the International Communist organization in Spain not discussed in detail or altogether ignored in the literature.

In the first section we established the early financing and directive efforts of the Comintern that achieved its Spanish section's successful infiltration of Spanish unions, especially UGT, and of Spanish culture and society as a whole via its front organizations. In the second section we showed that the fundamentally revolutionary aims, inherent to Leninist doctrine, remained in place after the VII Congress of the Comintern. Further, we showed that the Comintern's perception that Spain was ripe for revolution also remained unchanged after 1935, and their training, financing and directing of their Spanish section was consistent with that perception. Our third section, the heart of this paper, demonstrates that the Comintern's illegal operations in Spain in our period were heavily focused on the preparation and promotion of armed insurrection. Military and "work in the army" training of communists and others in Moscow and Spain, constant reminders via letters and instructions delivered in no uncertain terms before, during and after the VII Congress of the Comintern, confirm there was in fact no change in strategy, the Popular Front tactic notwithstanding. Finally, our last section discusses a little known Comintern document detailing the early (January 1935) recruitment by a mysterious figure we believe is Hugo Eberlein of all the leading left wing and republican parties to the Comintern vision of the Popular Front.

It is clear that among the reasons for the major change in Comintern rhetoric and tactics that was made public in the VII Congress, the support of Stalin's

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<sup>106</sup> Record of the conversation of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) I.V. Stalin with the German writer Leon Feuchtwanger. January 8, 1937, available online <http://docs.historyrussia.org/ru/nodes/126138>

changing geopolitical needs was of great importance. However, the Comintern archives reveal that tactical maneuvers like the antifascist and popular fronts never weakened the fundamental aim of the Comintern, inherent to Marxism-Leninism: Winning over the broad masses for armed insurrection and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The basic Comintern playbook for achieving these ends, together with the appropriate funding, training, and ongoing oversight, were fully deployed in Spain well before the outbreak of civil war. The paper completes a missing link in the literature by treating the early transition period to the Popular Front, never before fully covered from this angle.

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