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Image of the Spanish Lenin : the radicalization of Francisco Largo Caballero

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IMAGE OF THE SPANISH LENIN:
THE RADICALIZATION OF
FRANCISCO LARGO CABALLERO

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Peter Maiden
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ABSTRACT

IMAGE OF THE SPANISH LENIN: THE RADICALIZATION OF FRANCISCO LARGO CABALLERO

by Peter Maiden

Francisco Largo Caballero was born into a working class family in 1869. Sent to work at the age of seven, he became conscious of social issues. At the age of twenty he turned into a socialist. He became a union dignitary who sought bread-and-butter gains for the workers he represented. He aided the revolutionary strike of 1917. In the 1920s he co-operated with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera until the establishment of the Republic of 1930. He then became Minister of Labor. Out of power for two years, he participated in the revolutionary upsurge of 1934. In jail for that, he moved to the left. He came to be called the "Spanish Lenin." He became Prime Minister in September of 1936 until he was betrayed by the Communists in 1937. After fleeing the Fascists to France he became a prisoner in concentration camp, which he survived, going on to write his memoirs.

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INTRODUCTION

One man in Spain in the 1930s most embodied the aspirations of the Spanish workers: Francisco Largo Caballero. Spanish historian Pablo Castellano writes: "The history of Largo Caballero is nothing other than the history of the Spanish workers' movement in its entirety."¹ Late in life he cultivated the image of himself as the Spanish Lenin. In some ways the nickname was inaccurate. However, Largo Caballero was a revolutionary of singular importance in the history of Spain.

Historians have not always been kind to Largo Caballero. They attack his seeming inconsistencies and his supposed recklessness. Castellano says: "Some want to present him as the opportunist who, chameleon-like, changes his tactics and positions according to the prevailing winds. . . ."² Castellano offers a different and better-fitting view of Largo Caballero: "[He was] a realistic man who always wanted to offer the most appropriate response to the needs that developed in the complex dialectical process between classes."³

Largo Caballero rebelled against authority in childhood, and became a political radical at the age of 20. His radicalism deepened consistently over the years. As he matured he became more and more revolutionary. Events—the general strike of 1917, the October revolution of 1934—made him more steadfastly radical and proud of his leftism. His fiery rhetoric late in life touched the hearts of the Spanish workers. There was a method to his

¹Pablo Castellano, "Francisco Largo Caballero (1869-1946)" in *Tiempo de Historia* (Madrid) Vol. 1, No. 9 (August, 1975): 17.

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Ibid.

radicalization the historians tend to overlook.

There has been no book-length biography of Largo Caballero, so I rely on his memoirs and the studies of the Spanish Left contained in the works of Burnett Bolloten, Gerald Brenan, Richard Gillespie, Stanley Payne, Paul Preston and Hugh Thomas, among others.

CHILDHOOD

Francisco Largo Caballero was born in Madrid on October 15, 1869 to Ciriaco Largo and Antonia Caballero Torija. His father was from Toledo, and was a carpenter by trade. Francisco's parents' relationship did not last and they separated when the boy was four years old.

Francisco's mother then took him to Granada where she had work. He was put in the care of a local couple who enrolled him in a school. Francisco spent some days learning and happily playing with the other children. After a while Doña Antonia and Francisco went back to Madrid and Antonia's family. The mother took on work as a servant. Francisco went to live with an uncle, Antonio, who was a shoemaker. Antonio had three children, all older than Francisco. They resented Francisco as an intruder who took of their food.

Young Francisco continued going to school in Madrid until he was seven. He was then put to work by his mother's family, who needed the money. And so, very early, he was made to earn his own keep, and he did not return to school. Although one can imagine he may have felt good about helping his mother, his lack of classroom study was a handicap.

In Francisco's working-class neighborhood in Madrid there was a cardboard box factory, and he went to work there first. He pasted paper to prepare boxes which he then delivered to the factory's customers. He hated the work as it was injurious—his hands were covered with sores from the box-making process. The deliveries were also harmful. He had to go out in all

weather without proper shoes—even though his uncle was a shoemaker, there were none for Francisco.

Looking for better conditions, Francisco became an apprentice to a bookbinder. He folded paper, heated irons to imprint words on the spine, and went with the bookbinder's daughter to the market. Wages were low, he was told to believe, because the boss was going out of his way to teach him a trade. This labor came to an end when Francisco dared to question his wages and was met with a stream of abuse. He left that job, and then was employed by a leather working shop. That place also mistreated its young workers and Francisco again took to the streets.

Largo Caballero wrote in his memoirs: "Although I was a boy, already I had developed a strong feeling of dignity and protest; my consciousness rebelled against outrages and injustices."⁴ He was a manchild who had to forego boyhood for a working life. That was young Francisco's cross to bear, but the corollary—his mature working-class consciousness at a young age—eventually had rewards for the future Socialist leader. In his renowned career he was to more than make up for his lack of formal education—he matured into a truly self-taught, class-conscious man.

In May, 1878, nine year-old Francisco was at the right place at the right time and found work as a plasterer's apprentice. This was to become his trade. Over the years he found the work agreeable. His clients tended to have money and they could often afford to pay for a higher class of work—"giving me the feeling that it was not a job like any other, but an art," he writes.⁵ He

⁴Francisco Largo Caballero. *Mis Recuerdos: Cartas a un Amigo* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Alianza, 1954), p. 30.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

was a prodigy who moved through the ranks and became a master plasterer at the age of sixteen. It was in May of 1890, when Largo Caballero had grown to a man of twenty, that he experienced an International Workers' Day that was to change his life.

LARGO CABALLERO'S POLITICS: PART ONE

Largo Caballero was working on a highway outside Madrid on May 1st, 1890. He heard about the celebration of International Workers' Day in Madrid that day. He could not go himself because his boss would not let him—he would have missed pay day. What he heard from those working nearby who did go was that Pablo Iglesias, the father of Spanish socialism, spoke to the assembled crowd. Iglesias demanded an eight-hour day, Largo Caballero was told, and proposed a united workers' front to push this change forward. This appealed to Largo Caballero and whetted his appetite for information about the Socialists.

Most of all, what Largo Caballero learned was that workers could be victorious in the struggle with the ruling class if they "associated." That was what he set out to do. He soon found himself at a meeting where Iglesias spoke, and he was, as he recorded in his memoirs, thrilled to hear him: "His words produced the same effect on my intelligence that light has on darkness."⁶

Largo Caballero soon became a Socialist. He did not then read the literary works of Socialism—in fact he was barely literate at the time.

⁶Ibid., 34.

Nonetheless he writes in his memoirs: "I signed on willfully to the commitment to defend and work for certain ideas, for the emancipation of my class, the working class. I was disposed to see it to its conclusion."⁷

What was the manifestation of this commitment? Largo Caballero writes in his memoirs:

It led to a radical change in my life. I let go of all diversions and distractions that might not have a cultural or instructional objective. I turned over all my physical and intellectual energies to the task of the defense and propagation of the [Socialist] ideas that I willfully embraced. The intellectual baggage that I carried upon entering the ranks of Socialists was quite small. I had no more than that I got in three years of primary school, from the ages of four to seven, almost the time that one is in infancy. In a phrase, I had to reconstruct myself, with the iron will necessary to triumph and in so doing escape the terrain of the apathetics.⁸

Largo Caballero immediately joined the Socialist trade union, the *Unión General de Trabajadores* or UGT. He learned to read at the age of 24, taking in the Socialist newspaper, *El Socialista*, and other party materials. After four years in the UGT he joined the Socialist Party, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, or PSOE. Some joined the Socialist ranks out of a moderate interest or mild sympathy—Largo Caballero did so with a passion. As a young union bureaucrat he tried to make things happen with the same care he would take in a job for his livelihood. He rose quickly in the ranks of the UGT, where he became invested with a degree of authority that belied his age. In 1905 he was elected to the Madrid municipal council, and he then ceased his work as a plasterer and became a full time organizer and functionary in the UGT.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid. p. 36.

Gerald H. Meaker said of Largo Caballero during the years 1914-1923: "Though quite intelligent, Largo was no intellectual and was willing to leave theory to the professors and journalists."⁹ That he would become the "Lenin of Spanish Socialism," Meaker adds, could "not have been foretold."¹⁰

Largo Caballero's ideology in his early years as a labor organizer was very practical. He believed in revolution, but not a Marxist-Leninist revolution. Revolution was for him everything progressive done for the working class, one day at a time. Santos Juliá writes, quoting Largo Caballero from the early 1920s:

Revolution is not, in Largo's thinking, after all, a single action, a decisive moment, the taking of power. Revolution is what one does "every day" if one works every day for the organization of the workers: "We, the socialists, of the *Union General*, believe that one need not make more than one revolution: one of daily labor, ceaseless, intelligent, serene, firm and energetic. . . . The most revolutionary action that one can take is the strengthening of the organized working class."¹¹

Thus the struggle for an eight-hour day or higher wages was, for Largo Caballero, simultaneously struggle for socialist revolution. Writes Raymond Carr: "The Socialists were determined to give the workers immediate benefits: much of Largo Caballero's early work was devoted to setting up burial societies, sickness insurance, and co-operatives."¹² He was a Socialist revolutionary and a bread-and-butter labor leader at the same time. He saw

⁹Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914-1923* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 276.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Santos Juliá, "Socialismo y revolución en el pensamiento y la acción política de Francisco Largo Caballero," in Francisco Largo Caballero, *Escritos de la República* (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 1985), p. xxi.

¹²Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed., 1982), p. 455.

no problem with playing both roles and declaring the combination was revolutionary. The Socialist Party also ran candidates for political posts. For Largo Caballero and the Socialists, writes Santos Juliá: "Revolution was, simply, that which was done daily in the [UGT] and in the political structure to put the working class every day closer to its ideal [revolution]."¹³

THE SOCIALISTS

The Socialist organizations which attracted young Largo Caballero were fairly new on the Spanish scene. In 1879 five men had met in Madrid and formed the nucleus of a Socialist Party. The men were printers and typographers, and they were led by the orator who pulled Largo Caballero's heartstrings, Pablo Iglesias. They formed the nucleus of the soon-to-be-developed PSOE.

The Socialist Party, newspaper and Union started small but grew steadily. The PSOE was aligned with the Socialist Second International and shared its revolutionary naivete, expressed by Largo Caballero, that simple association would lead the working class inevitably towards the sweeping away of capitalism. Marx believed that workers' organizations with proletarian class-consciousness would form the vanguard of socialist revolution. Largo Caballero was in a position as a labor organizer to lead his life in the center of the movement for socialism in Spain.

Richard Gillespie writes in his history of the Spanish Socialist Party: "The appeal of Marxism in the PSOE was stronger and proved more durable

¹³Ibid., p. xxiii

than in most of its fellow parties of the Second International."¹⁴ This was, in part, because there was a history of working class association and rural collectivization in Spain. Gerald Brenan states: "as history shows, there has often been a definite trend in Spain towards Socialist institutions." He explains:

. . . by making the stress and strain of competitive life and of factory conditions intolerable, the capitalist system has produced a strong desire in every class for a change. What Socialism offers, what every Spaniard desires, is safety. The ethical side of Socialism too, the belief that to everyone should be given not according to his deserts, but according to his needs, is deeply rooted in the Iberian nature. This belief, which has never been current in the democracies, is part and parcel of the Spanish Catholic tradition. It is what most distinguishes Spanish from English and French Christianity. No race in Europe is so profoundly egalitarian or has so little respect for success or for property.¹⁵

The UGT started to grow slowly. Says Brenan: "Every new group had to struggle against the bitter hostility of the employers, the municipalities and the caciques [political bosses], whose actions were never hindered by any scruples as to their legality."¹⁶ Meanwhile, "The comparison with the teeming forces of the Anarchists was discouraging."¹⁷

The UGT grew, however, and was after awhile a force to reckon with. There was not, however, a strong theorist in the Socialist movement. Gillespie states:

¹⁴Richard Gillespie, *The Spanish Socialist Party: A History of Factionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 7.

¹⁵Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 226.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 219.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 217.

None of the early Socialists used Marxism to produce an original study of the real problems of Spain. For most of them, it remained a series of truths and a formula of universal validity to be propagated as a doctrine and received 'just like children learn the responses to the catechism,' as the philosopher Unamuno sarcastically observed.¹⁸

This is the classical Marxist failing—reiterating Marx's texts, especially *The Communist Manifesto*, instead of thinking philosophically and critically as Marx himself thought.

What was the ideology of the early PSOE? Historian Paul Preston notes that Iglesias walked a tightrope between revolutionism and reformism:

Pablo Iglesias, its founder, never gave his party much in the way of independent theory. *Pablismo*, as his ideas were later termed by Trotskyist critics, was always more preoccupied with cleaning up existing politics than with the class struggle, adopting an austere and monkish tone which made the party seem to at least one observer like a brotherhood of moralists.¹⁹ In fact, *pablismo* was a mixture of revolutionary ideology and reformist tactics, which, given the party's numerical weakness, was for Iglesias the only realistic alternative to either destruction or clandestinity.²⁰

Gillespie relates a paradox faced by the Socialists in organizing a movement: "The political system was open enough to encourage the Socialists to pursue reformist tactics, but too forbidding for many to entertain illusions about reformist strategy ever leading to socialism."²¹

¹⁸Gillespie. *Spanish Socialist Party*, p. 9.

¹⁹Largo Caballero had his boss stop paying salaries in a tavern where they were quickly exchanged for wine, and had them paid at the workplace.

²⁰Paul Preston. *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 2.

²¹Gillespie. *Spanish Socialist Party*, p. 16.

The leadership of the PSOE faced a long, upwards march, as states Stanley G. Payne:

As José Mesa, one of Iglesias' principal colleagues, wrote to Engels in 1873, "Any effort to move immediately toward a proletarian revolution in Spain will end in a massacre." The founders of Spanish socialism, like their counterparts in nearly all other Marxist parties, believed that a long, slow process of work, organization, education, and socio-political change would be necessary to build the strength of socialism and achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat.²²

The PSOE operated in competition with the middle-of-the-road Republicans and the Anarchists to the right and the left of them, respectively. Gillespie writes that early in its existence

[t]he violence of PSOE attacks on the anarchists and Republicans represented tacit recognition that for a long while these forces were the main attractions for Spain's workers. Persisting anarchist popularity left the PSOE with far less room for manoeuvre than socialist parties enjoyed elsewhere. While the latter could co-operate relatively easily with liberal parties, Iglesias was well aware that a more moderate approach by the PSOE would swell anarchist ranks and leave the party indiscernible from the more progressive wing of Republicanism. The PSOE had to stand for something more than democracy plus reforms; it needed a working-class image and had to offer a vision of a materially and morally superior social order.²³

Some say internecine conflict in the Socialist Party was the Achilles heel of the Socialist movement in Spain. There were three tendencies amongst the Socialists, each personified in a leader and each with a characteristic ideology. Largo Caballero represented working class leftism. In

²²Stanley G. Payne. *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970). p. 63.

²³Gillespie. *Spanish Socialist Party*. p. 12.

his career he was a bread-and-butter union leader, but he was to become a Marxist-Leninist visionary. He had a nemesis in Indalecio Prieto, another Socialist leader. As Prieto was a successful businessman and an eloquent speechmaker, Largo Caballero may have envied him somewhat. Prieto believed in a unified front of Socialists and the petit bourgeoisie. He was never really a Marxist, and had little to do with the trade-union side of the Socialist movement. Payne says: "Largo was a convinced . . . Marxist and he looked down upon Prieto as an unscrupulous, opportunistic politician."²⁴

The third tendency was personified by Julián Besteiro, a college professor who was on the right wing of the Socialist Party, and who believed in an evolutionary Socialism. Marx thought in terms of historical stages on the world scene, led by classes asserting their own particular interests. Besteiro thought the bourgeoisie should use the vehicle of the Republic to make its revolution before the Socialists could use it to make theirs. Says Payne: "Largo deprecated Besteiro . . . as an impractical theoretician and a vain intellectual."²⁵

Interestingly, the PSOE and UGT did not, at first, successfully recruit intellectuals. Writes Gillespie: "Even the intellectuals of the 'Generation of 1898', who lamented Spain's national decline, showed little interest in revolution or the workers' cause, their allegiance being rather to the middle class or the élite."²⁶ From their early years, the PSOE and UGT, rather than bring in intellectuals, sought to raise the intellectual level of the workers

²⁴Payne. *Spanish Revolution*.. p. 106.

²⁵Ibid.. p. 105.

²⁶Gillespie. *Spanish Socialist Party*. p. 12.

themselves. This was largely done through what were called "*Casas del Pueblo*," or "People's Houses." Brennan describes their functions:

Every Casa del Pueblo contained the committee rooms of the local branch of the party, a free lending library at which not only Socialist literature but also books of general interest were provided, and usually a café as well. In the towns there was also an assembly room where meetings could be held. When one reflects that only four or five cities in the whole of Spain possessed a public library, the educational value of these workers' clubs can be appreciated. They were available to every member of the UGT.²⁷

The *Casas del Pueblo* were fully appreciated by Largo Caballero. There workers such as he could liberate themselves, as he had, from the "terrain of the apathetics." The concept of the *Casas del Pueblo* was transcendent of the divisions among the working class. Largo Caballero gave a speech in 1936 in Linares, where a *Casa del Pueblo* had just been constructed. The speech was printed in Largo Caballero's mouthpiece *Claridad*, and in it he said:

Ownership of a building in and of itself is of little importance; that building must be made use of to educate the working class in its redeeming ideals. And one must have patience and determination. Organic unity is one of the essential things. All the workers of Linares must go to the *Casa del Pueblo* of Linares, with no exceptions. There is no way, there never has been, and now more than ever there will not be a separation between workers, be they socialists, be they communists, be they syndicalists.²⁸

Gillespie notes that the high level of militancy in the Socialist Party was due to the party expending its efforts on the nurturing of the character of its membership. He writes:

²⁷Brenan. *Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 219.

²⁸*Claridad* (Madrid), January 25, 1936.

The party devoted much attention to the *formación*, the training and basic doctrinal preparation of its members, with a view to them eventually occupying positions of responsibility. It demanded a high level of activity and commitment from members, and thus developed as a party of militants rather than as a mass organization with a more relaxed conception of membership.²⁹

Gillespie attempts to explain how the PSOE was unsuited for insurrection:

On occasion its militants demonstrated an uncommon capacity for struggle, sacrifice, and even revolutionary consciousness, only to end up defeated. . . . The problem was that a party that was by now geared to piecemeal progress could not shed its bureaucratic inertia and praxis suddenly when an opportunity for insurrection arose. Neither the organization nor its leaders were prepared or equipped for such eventualities; they were fashioned for legal, non-clandestine, modes of struggle. While in theory the party was highly centralized and disciplined, in practice it was far from being streamlined.³⁰

Perhaps if there had been a real effort from the base up for an insurrection the PSOE would have risen to the occasion. Gillespie notes missed opportunities in 1917, 1930 and 1936. Largo Caballero was not for the most part in favor of a movement to smash the state and install a dictatorship of the proletariat at any of those times, however, basically holding that the time was not ripe.

Historian Hugh Thomas writes: "Largo Caballero owed his popularity to the fact that thousands of Spanish workers saw in him a reflection of their own struggles; he was the man *par excellence* of the *casas del pueblo*, who had risen through his own fortitude, dour persistence and honesty, as well as a resolve to avoid intemperate revolutionary action."³¹

²⁹Gillespie. *Spanish Socialist Party*. p. 20.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

³¹Hugh Thomas. *The Spanish Civil War*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).

Largo Caballero faced hardships in his life as a socialist leader. Chief among them were the repeated arrests he faced in the 1910s and 1920s. He writes in his memoirs:

As the logical consequence of the carrying out of my posts . . . I have always found myself implicated in the country's [working class'] great political and social events. Sometimes this was for certain and other times because it was suspected. Either way, when I wasn't already in jail they looked everywhere for me to take me there. Any announcement of a strike was enough for the police to make a foray and shut me up in jail until the government considered the danger passed. In the courts of preliminary investigation I was well known and spent little time without being processed, once by the civil jurisdiction, then by the military. This situation bothered me, more than for myself, for my family. They was always this intranquility facing the idea that I might be detained at any time, day or night.³²

THE 1917 STRIKE AND THE DICTATORSHIP

Between 1889 and 1917 Largo Caballero moved up through the ranks in the UGT, holding no less than thirteen leadership positions during that time. He led a successful strike of the plasterers for an eight-hour day. It was in 1917 that he became the acting chief of the UGT, replacing the ailing Pablo Iglesias. He was part of the committee that put a general strike into action that year. The strikers' demand was to be the lowering of prices on basic foodstuffs, which were priced out of the reach of the workers. Largo Caballero explained the methodology of the strike:

The method of the campaign was to be: first, to create written and spoken propaganda leading to resolutions that would then be sent to the powers that be; second, if the government did nothing, to stage a twenty-four hour general strike throughout

p. 41.

³²Largo Caballero, *Mis Recuerdos*, p. 43.

the country; third, if in spite of this the government is still indifferent, to organize a revolutionary general strike.³³

All three actions—propaganda, strike, and revolutionary strike—were put into effect. The final strike lasted only three days and at a heavy cost: the army used its machine guns against the strikers leaving seventy dead, wounded in the hundreds and two thousand arrested and imprisoned, the latter including Largo Caballero. He relates the story of his arrest in his memoirs:

On the night of the 15th of August we were sitting at the dining room table when someone rang at the front door. Ortega's wife answered the door. It was the Inspector and some agents. As the place was small we were momentarily facing each other. The Inspector, addressing himself to me, said: Are you all here?

See for yourself! I answered.

I have an order to detain you, you must come with me.

Will you allow us to have our dinner? I pleaded. He hesitated for a moment and answered:

All right then!

He walked off, leaving us with the agents. I was eating and I observed that one of them was smiling. I could not contain myself and asked him:

Why do you smile?

I'm smiling—he answered—because you eat as if nothing is going on.

We have not committed any crime! I replied.

The [right wing] newspapers affirmed that we were found under the beds, and Virginia hidden in an earthen jar.³⁴

The violence used against the strikers in 1917 was traumatic for the the PSOE. However, referring to this strike Carr writes: "Failed revolutions can create traditions as easily as successful revolutions."³⁵ Public sympathy for

³³Francisco Largo Caballero, *Escritos de la República* (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 1985), p. 4.

³⁴Largo Caballero, *Mis Recuerdos*, pp. 56-57.

³⁵Raymond Carr, *Spain*, p. 505.

their cause was forthcoming. Brennan states:

Every revolutionary movement, every strike that fails after courageously defying authority, is a moral success in Spain and leads to an increase in the numbers of the defeated party . . . The four Socialists—Largo Caballero, Besteiro, Anguiano and Saborit—who were condemned to penal servitude for their part in the strike were at once elected to the Cortes [the Spanish parliament] . . . The government had to release them. In the following year the UGT, which in 1900 had only 42,000 members, could claim 220,000.³⁶

A principal rival for the Socialists was the middle class Radical Party of Alejandro Lerroux. Writes Payne: "Though he thundered vaguely of revolution, Lerroux's reputation for corruption, his penchant for compromise, and his lack of commitment to genuine social reform all made him anathema to the Socialists."³⁷

On September 13, 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera staged a coup and forced Spain onto the road of his dictatorship. The General's ideology of the state was modeled after Mussolini's. He wanted labor to play a role in a corporate structure. This was something Largo Caballero could bring about if he thought his party could survive it, which he did. Under the law arbitration committees were formed which did actually help workers. Largo Caballero became Secretary of Labor.

On September 17, 1929, Largo Caballero was published in the newspaper *El Sol*, as follows:

I, who have been accused of rightist tendencies, am one of those who believe that, as long as the working class can act within a legal context which allows it to develop its organisation, it would be madness to leave that context. However, I also believe

³⁶Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth*, pp. 221-222.

³⁷Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 69.

that if eyes are closed to the desires of the country and if possibilities are closed whereby the country might have developed towards progress, then the working class will know how to do its duty.³⁸

At the time of the fall of the monarchy the Socialists were ready for a new era. While they might otherwise have atrophied during the dictatorship, the Socialists who participated did well and could subsequently flex some left-wing muscles. This was a victory for Largo Caballero, the UGT and the PSOE. Meanwhile the CNT was in disarray; it was forced to disband its national confederation and carry out its politics in clandestinity.

THE REPUBLIC

On August 17, 1930, a group of notables signed the Pact of San Sebastián calling for an end to the monarchy and the organization of a new government. An election was held for municipal posts on April 12, 1931 which the monarchists and the Republicans both saw as a plebiscite on royal rule. The Republicans came out ahead, and the King realized he had lost the support of the Spanish people. He consulted some in the Army, who told him there would be civil war if he stayed on the throne. He abdicated two days later. The end of the King's reign marked the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy. The leaders of the Republicans came out of jail and in from exile to serve in the new government.

There were some for whom the republic was anathema. The Carlists wanted to return to the monarchy as it was in the 1870s. The voices of the

³⁸Cited in Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 15.

workers and peasants were to be heard in a democracy, and this frightened the reactionaries.

The first prime minister of the new Spain was Niceto Alcalá Zamora of the Liberal Republican Right. He was, according to Stanley G. Payne, a "symbol of Republican moderation and reliability, calculated from the start to reassure conservatives."³⁹ His was the Republic's party farthest to the right. The center-right were the Radicals of Alejandro Lerroux—"They opposed any drastic social or economic reform," declares Payne. "They understood Republican democracy primarily as a liberal democratic political system, as a new and freer set of rules of the political game, but not necessarily a far-reaching project of structural change."⁴⁰

The Socialists decided to participate fully in the birth of the Republic. Explains Payne:

This decision was not subjected to a thorough analysis, but generally held that a fully democratic Republic committed to basic modernization and change would complete the development of "bourgeois democracy" in Spain, eliminate residues of "feudalism" and traditionalism, initiate bold social and institutional reforms, and generally clear the way for a transition to some unspecified model of socialism in some unspecified manner at some unspecified point in the future.⁴¹

Largo Caballero backed the idea of a republic to replace the Monarchy after he saw that it would be backed by the rank and file. Indeed the UGT grew rapidly with the exercise of new freedoms. So did the Socialists' new union of rural workers, the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra*,

³⁹Stanley G. Payne, *Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 36.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 37.

or FNTT. The second Premier of the Republic, Manuel Azaña, wanted the support of the Left, as he saw it had a large constituency. So it was that Largo Caballero become Minister of Labor in the new government. That post was to be pivotal for the labor leader.

The early months of the Republic were not a time of organization for armed rebellion and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Raymond Carr explains Largo Caballero's rhetoric at this stage of the socialist struggle:

Only in unguarded moments was [his] language of legalism abandoned for the threat of the proletarian revolution. In November 1931 Largo Caballero threatened that, if the Cortes were dissolved "before they had completed their mandate," then the U.G.T. and the Socialists would interpret this as provocation "which would oblige us to proceed to a civil war." He later explained that he was "speaking figuratively." Such retractions did not reassure the bourgeois mind.⁴²

Largo Caballero went to work right away as Minister of Labor. First he declared May 1st to be a national holiday—how well he must have remembered his radicalization on May Day in 1890! He then made the eight-hour day the norm for Spanish workers. Then, legislation he put through instituted binding arbitration and social security. Other measures aided the landless rural laborers, who had traditionally been misused and gone hungry. He institutionalized sickness benefits, paid holidays and minimum wages. The law of *términos municipales* held out employment of local labor before bringing outside labor in to work the fields. Finally, the law of "mixed juries" created an institution to change labor practices up from the grass roots. These arbitration boards were staffed with workers and managers, bringing local forces together to resolve local labor problems. Summing up, Payne

⁴²Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 610.

compares the Spanish legislation to "contemporary German, Scandinavian, and American New Deal legislation in its regulation of collective terms of labor."⁴³

Largo Caballero felt undermined by forces of reaction and the inaction of forces on the Left. His decrees were powerful in intent but weak in effect. The power structure in the countryside remained essentially the same. In some cases the Civil Governors allowed landowners to ignore Largo Caballero's initial legislation. That legislation was anyway only a stop-gap measure prior to a thorough agricultural reform law being put into effect. Wide-ranging reforms seemed near impossible. Write George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert:

Objectively agrarian reform was the most pressing issue facing the Republic but governments did not act as if this were the case. It took almost a full year for a bill to be presented to the Cortes and another six months for it to become law, and even then the law was far from meeting the needs of the situation.⁴⁴

Although the reforms were slow in coming and moderate, the Spanish right began a virulent backlash campaign. The smallest rupture in the economic status quo was treated by them as being unbridled Bolshevism. Largo Caballero, who was called "too conservative" when he organized under the dictatorship, was called "too radical" when he sought to put his labor legislation into effect. To him these charges were as water off a duck's back. Beyond rhetoric, Preston states that in 1932 Largo Caballero had something concrete to defend:

Largo's views were . . . pragmatic. He was aware that his

⁴³Payne, *Spain's First Democracy*, p. 109.

⁴⁴George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939* (London: Longman Group, 1995), p. 91.

participation in the government had led to great advances in the living conditions of the Spanish working class and to a massive increase in UGT recruiting. Since both of these achievements had been his life-long ambitions, he would do everything in his power to prevent a return to pre-1931 conditions.⁴⁵

That was exactly what the right wanted to do—turn back the clock. The right-wing CEDA (*Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas*) of Gil Robles was set against the PSOE of Largo Caballero. In a way the CEDA and the Socialists at that moment were mirror images. Each had a hidden agenda. The Socialists wanted more than the reforms they were making in the 1931-1933 period. They actually sought after a social revolution on the part of the workers and their allies. On the other hand, more than checking the pace of reforms, the CEDA for its part covertly desired a fascist state. Left-wing revolutionism and right-wing Fascism were to come to the light as mortal enemies in October 1934.

Largo Caballero was greatly disillusioned when his agrarian reforms were rejected by the Right and not defended by the moderates. Says Brennan:

The refusal of the Republican parties to treat agrarian reform seriously lay then at the root of the Socialists' disillusion with the Republic. It was a feeling that welled up from below, affecting the young more than the old, the recently joined more than the confirmed party men. . . . This feeling found a leader in Largo Caballero.⁴⁶

Preston notes that "Largo was soon to be proclaiming that, if bourgeois democracy was incapable of preventing the rise of Fascism, it was up to the working class to seek different political forms with which to defend itself."⁴⁷

⁴⁵Preston. *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 78.

⁴⁶Brenan. *Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 273.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

He wanted the Right to know in no uncertain terms that Fascism would not be tolerated. It was not to come to power by electoral or any other means.

The 1933 election results were thus: 3,385,000 for the Right and 3,000,000 for the Left. The election laws were such, however, that the Right would be able to control a solid majority in the legislature. The Left was weakened because Anarchists did not vote. The Anarchists could have mustered a million votes—their boycott of the elections sealed the fate of the Left candidacies.

The empowerment of the CEDA in the 1933 elections was seen as a dangerous advance into Fascism. Largo Caballero and the Left fought that advance with all their might. They felt the CEDA was going to do what the Right wing had done in Germany. Largo Caballero himself was very concerned with European Fascism and the danger that it might spread to Spain. The CEDA wanted to re-write the Spanish Constitution to eliminate reforms put into effect before they came to office. Also, according to Payne, the "CEDA officially stated that it intended to amend the Republican constitution to provide for a corporative assembly selected by heads of families and members of professional groups rather than by the numerical masses."⁴⁸

Payne shows the reactionary regime's reversal of the all-important agrarian policy: "The new Minister of Labor did almost as much to favor employers in the arbitration committees as Largo Caballero had done to favor the workers; the law that established *términos municipales* requiring

⁴⁸Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 70.

employment of local workers was annulled."⁴⁹

Backed by wealthy patrons, the CEDA ran an intensive propaganda campaign. Preston outlines what was done:

A vast amount of cash was spent on a campaign technically reminiscent of Nazi procedure. Millions of leaflets were printed and scattered on villages from the air. 200,000 coloured posters were printed. Lorries drove around the streets of the bigger towns carrying screens on which were projected films of Gil Robles's speech. Twenty times a day there were radio spots exhorting listeners to 'Vote for the Right!' or to 'Vote against Marxism!' . . . Apart from radio, full use was made of modern transport and neon signs to carry CEDA propaganda to every part of Spain.⁵⁰

All this was seen by Largo Caballero and the Left to be the first step towards Fascism. Still, the CEDA was claiming to be a reform movement. Preston relates:

The inaugural congress of the CEDA produced much talk of an advanced social programme. In view of the social forces which the CEDA represented, the Left was not impressed. *El Socialista* saw the new party as a mixture of all the regressive tendencies in Spain, the unification of everything that was old, crumbling and rotten. The CEDA'S determination to revise the Constitution was seen as the beginning of the end, as the first provocation . . . Intensely aware of what was happening already to Jews, communists, socialists and liberals in Germany, the Spanish Left was highly sensitive to the behaviour of the Right. The persistent harping on disorder by the rightist press was seen as the preparation for a move towards fascism.⁵¹

⁴⁹Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 132.

⁵⁰Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 49.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

THE RISING OF 1934

When the CEDA entered into the government in November of 1933, the Socialists laid in plans to stage a major rebellion. Largo Caballero said in a speech at Salamanca just before the election:

I say to you that if we win on the 19th, we shall make the capitalists change their minds. But if we lose, it seems to me that we will enter a new period in which electoral activity will not be enough. It will be necessary to do something more powerful. Anything but renounce our ideals! There will be no justice so long as socialism does not triumph. Only when we can hoist the red flag of the revolution on the official buildings and towers of Spain will there be justice.⁵²

Many in the Socialist Party were strongly in agreement with this sentiment. Among them were the new leftists in charge at *La Socialista*, the party's daily newspaper, about which Payne writes:

When the clerical *El Debate* asked for peace and harmony, *El Socialista* replied on January 3, 1934, "Harmony? No! Hatred to the death of the criminal bourgeoisie!" Daily it published lists of UGT syndicates which it claimed supported a revolutionary orientation and demanded that the UGT's national committee change its policy.⁵³

Brenan writes of Largo Caballero's concerns at this time:

As President of the U.G.T. he was especially alive to the danger of losing ground to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. And he had also a personal grievance. First of all he had quarrelled with Azaña [Prime Minister of Spain]. Then as Minister of Labour he had been especially disgusted at the way in which much of the legislation drawn up by him had been sabotaged. . . . Caballero had found that even the officials in his own ministry refused to obey the directions given them. . . . Thus it came about that

⁵²Cited in Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 111.

⁵³Ibid., p. 135.

already in February 1934 he was saying that "the only hope of the masses is now in social revolution. It alone can save Spain from Fascism."⁵⁴

Brenan explains how Largo Caballero's radicalism came about with his rhetoric outpacing his praxis. He writes: "Eighty years before this Karl Marx had pointed out that the Spanish revolutionary movements developed more slowly than those of other countries and that they usually took several years to reach their climax. Thus there was really nothing very surprising in this . . . development."⁵⁵

Preston writes that for Largo Caballero the Republic was good when it represented change, but lost its reason for existence when controlled by the Right. Says Preston:

Only when the total opposition of the Right began to make reforms impossible did Largo's attitude change. He started to adopt a revolutionary stance for two reasons. To begin with, he had hoped to frighten the Right into a more pliant attitude. Then he had discovered that his new line found a sympathetic echo among the masses. Rather than risk losing their support to the CNT or the Communists, he gave them what they wanted to hear.⁵⁶

Soon the ideological conflict between the Left and the Right exploded into violence. In October, 1934 when the CEDA got three positions in the Cabinet, the rebellion broke out across Spain. Largo Caballero himself oversaw a general strike in Madrid. Once the strike was underway he was arrested, along with others highly placed in the movement. One who escaped the long arm of the law was Indalecio Prieto, Largo Caballero's nemesis in the Socialist Party. Prieto helped smuggle some arms to the North, but he fled to

⁵⁴Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth*, pp. 273-274.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 274.

⁵⁶Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War.*, p. 133

France as the reaction came down on the Socialist movement. Largo Caballero writes of him in his memoirs:

What was certain was that in moments of danger, he disappeared like magic. I know of no case in which he went to jail for defending socialist ideals or the interests of the workers' unions. For him there were no police, nor gendarmes on the French border: he made himself invisible, despite his voluminous physique. Although he was boastful he did not have the nerve to suffer physical discomfort because of his ideas . . . he was scared stiff of prison. All his shouting, gesticulations and breast-beating were well-rehearsed comedy. This conduct some have labeled political skill. We socialists are tired of such skill.⁵⁷

The most violent struggle in October, 1934 was that in the mining district of Asturias. The workers there staged a revolutionary struggle against the full power of the forces that were at the government's disposal. The workers excelled in their use of dynamite as a weapon. Stanley Payne calls Asturias "the first revolutionary commune in western Europe since Paris in 1871."⁵⁸ States Payne: "In the 'liberated area,' they officially declared the proletarian revolution, abolished regular money, and also instituted a revolutionary terror . . . "⁵⁹ Adrian Shubert shows:

During the brief two-week life of the Asturian Commune the workers controlled about one-third of the region and 80 percent of its population. Within this territory, with the coalfields at its heart, all established authority disappeared with the subjugation of the Guardia Civil.⁶⁰

Preston sketches the contours of the Asturian revolt:

⁵⁷Largo Caballero. *Recuerdos*. pp. 143-144.

⁵⁸Payne. *Spain's First Democracy*. p. 218.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁶⁰Adrian Shubert. *The Road to Revolution in Spain: The Coal Miners of Asturias 1860-1934* (Urbana Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987). p. 6.

There can be little doubt that it was spontaneous rank-and-file militancy which impelled the local PSOE leaders to proceed with the revolutionary movement. They knew that without the solidarity of the rest of Spain it was condemned to defeat . . . The miners fought mainly with dynamite, since they had little ammunition for the arms that they captured. They organised transport, hospital facilities, food distribution and even telephones within days. Subjected to heavy artillery attacks and bombing raids, they fought on with indomitable courage, thinking it was better to die for the ideal of a workers' republic than down a mine.⁶¹

Although there were some caches of arms collected to back up the workers in their national strike, it was not Caballero's plan that there be a social revolution at the time of the Asturian uprising. A socialist leader told miners in prison afterwards: "Nobody ordered you to make the revolution. The order was for a strike."⁶² A mini-revolution was indeed what took place, and it captivated the rest of Spain. The reformism of the Socialists was outdone by radical measures on the part of the strikers. Revolutionary committees were formed which supplanted the social controls of the bourgeoisie.

Around 30,000 workers joined the rebellion, and, says Payne: "The size of the revolutionary militia was limited only by the number of weapons available."⁶³ Payne goes on: "Within less than forty-eight hours the revolt was completely out of control, and the government had to summon from Morocco elite shock forces of the Legion and Moorish Regulares that were trained in irregular warfare."⁶⁴

⁶¹Preston, *Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 128.

⁶²Cited in Shubert, *Road to Revolution*, p. 15.

⁶³Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 155.

⁶⁴Ibid.

The reaction was cruel and its outcome tragic. Shubert explains why the rebellion was short-lived:

The Asturian revolution lasted only two weeks, and its defeat was followed by a savage repression in which some 30,000 people were imprisoned and many tortured. The defeat is neither surprising nor difficult to explain. The insurrection was not preceded by a crisis of the state, merely by a cabinet crisis that was settled before the rising began. The army and police were both reliable, unaffected by revolutionary propaganda and free from serious discontent. There was no chance of their refusing to fight against the Asturian workers. Had the government had to disperse its forces against a number of revolutionary foci, it is possible that the movement could have succeeded, but this was not the case. The Asturian workers found themselves alone against the entire military apparatus of the Spanish state. The outcome was a foregone conclusion.⁶⁵

As stated previously, in Spain a failed revolution gains adherents as well as a successful one. The liberation of the territory of Asturias was a triumph of the Left. The workers' solidarity and high level of union adherence was one reason. Also, the Socialists, Anarchists and Communists joined in support of the miners. Everyone, along with Largo Caballero, wanted the Right to know that Fascism was going to be stopped by whatever means were found to be necessary. As Marx saw the future in the Paris Commune, so Largo Caballero saw the future in liberated Asturias.

The rebellion was smashed at the cost of 1,100 fatalities among the workers in Asturias. There were approximately 450 deaths among the police and the army.

Largo Caballero gave an interview to the United Press International,

⁶⁵Shubert. *Road to Revolution*. p. 163.

which was reprinted in *Claridad* just after his release from prison in December of 1937. He said:

The October movement, spontaneous and uncontrollable, was a response to the insincere elections. It had unquestionable value; it saved Spain, and especially the proletariat as a whole from the ignominy of the implantation of fascism in the manner of other European countries. Without this magnificent sacrifice, surely, in those moments, the launching of fascism would have definitely taken place.⁶⁶

As it was, the launching of Fascism was only delayed until July, 1936.

Carr describes the climate at the end of the Asturian struggle:

When it was over, the nation was morally divided between those who favoured repression and those who did not. Surrender of the vanquished did not reassure the victors, or discourage the defeated. 'We have been beaten only for the time being' [writes M. Grossi in a book on Asturias written in prison]. . . . Our surrender is simply a halt on the road where we correct our mistakes, preparing for the next battle which must end in the final victory of the exploited.' The Asturias divided Europe as well as Spain: the charges of atrocities committed by both sides exercised the consciences of right and left, and were taken up in the European press.⁶⁷

LARGO CABALLERO'S POLITICS: PART TWO

The prison where Largo Caballero was kept after the October, 1934 rising was a veritable university of Left-wing politics. Although he had earlier understood the gist of the teachings of Marx and Lenin, it was here the Spanish leader first read their works. Thomas notes: "Now approaching seventy, the imagination of this long respected and moderate socialist leader

⁶⁶*Claridad*, January 18, 1936.

⁶⁷Carr, *Spain*, p. 635.

became dominated by revolutionary visions."⁶⁸ Occupying his mind, as well, was the struggle against Fascism.

He now began to see himself as the Spanish Lenin. That name for Largo Caballero was first used by radical students in 1933. Largo Caballero was interviewed by a reporter for the Associated Press in prison in 1935, to whom he announced: "You see here behind bars the future master of Spain! Lenin declared Spain would be the second Soviet Republic in Europe. Lenin's prophecy will come true. I shall be the second Lenin who shall make it come true."⁶⁹

At this time the newspaper *Claridad*, known as Largo Caballero's mouthpiece, extolled his virtues. His personality as described here was a powerful vehicle for his ideology:

If there is a leader who is a genuine product of the union and political movements merged closely together, it is the secretary of the *Unión General de Trabajadores*. As he is an extraction from the masses it is enough to identify oneself with him in order to be with [the masses]. He is faithful to his own spirit, which is also that of the workingmen's crowds. His identification with the feelings of the class in which he was born and lives is his great merit. With his formidable strength he has stood up against attacks that would have destroyed other men.⁷⁰

Largo Caballero told *Claridad* that there was no risk of a caudillo—a one-man, strong-man political movement—coming up within the Socialist movement: "The Party does not want caudillos, nor do I think that within it there is anybody that would seek to be one."⁷¹ He spoke also of the need to

⁶⁸Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 145.

⁶⁹Cited in Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 24.

⁷⁰*Claridad*, November 30, 1935.

⁷¹*Claridad*, Dec. 7 1933

put ideas before personalities in a speech to students in August of 1933:

. . . nothing that occurs in our party should be turned into a personal question. I speak for all of us. Don't make personal questions of any differences in our ranks. Between us there is nothing more than opinions that are expounded. He that gets it right, gets it right. The rest will respect agreements or not, will participate in them or not; but that does not mean we need lead up to something that would be truly serious and dangerous.⁷²

Upon his release from prison Largo Caballero carried his revolutionary message across the country in a series of speeches to wildly enthusiastic crowds. He frightened the middle class with his words, although his deeds were pacific. He felt sure the masses wanted a radical message from him, and he was not going to disappoint them. In fact, students and workers loved his rhetoric. His audiences were sometimes to the left of him. Thus he practiced what some called "tailism"—leading from behind. The "new left" backing Largo Caballero was insurrectionary. Writes Carr:

The militancy of the new left captured Largo Caballero, of all the labor leaders the most profoundly disillusioned by the experience of co-operation with bourgeois democracy between 1931 and 1933. He became the driving force behind the *Alianza Obrera*, designed as a revolutionary alliance of all working-class parties; he fought the obstructionist tactics of the reformist leaders and the hesitations of Prieto.⁷³

Historians have said much about the weakness of the Socialist Party because of splits among its leaders. A very large majority of workers in the UGT, however, as well as a majority of members of the PSOE supported Largo Caballero and his ideology, called *Caballerismo*. Fernando Claudin expounds:

⁷²Francisco Largo Caballero. *Discursos a los trabajadores* (Barcelona: Editorial Fontamara, 1979), p. 30.

⁷³Carr, *Spain*, p. 632.

The Caballero tendency were in effect a separate party, and they put forward the socialist revolution as their immediate objective, criticizing the idea of an intermediary, anti-fascist bourgeois democratic stage defended by the PCE. They said it was necessary to go straight on to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. They did not have a precise definition of the structure of such a "dictatorship", but affirmed that it would, of course, be led by the Socialist Party, as the main political party of the Spanish working class. . . . *Caballerismo* was an expression of the revolutionary radicalization of the great mass of the industrial and agricultural proletariat under the old banners of Spanish socialism and their firm intention to finish once and for all with the regime of capitalists and landlords.⁷⁴

On the eve of his taking the office of the presidency and war ministry in September 1936, Largo Caballero was interviewed by Mikhail Koltzov, Stalin's unofficial envoy to Spain. Koltzov wrote in his diary:

It is difficult to comprehend the source of this belated radicalism, this maximalism, in a man who, for decades, defended the most conciliatory and reformist positions within the working class movement, who entered into agreements and even coalitions with extreme right-wing bourgeois governments, including the reactionary Monarchist dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. But [Largo Caballero's advisor] Álvarez del Vayo and many others affirm that the 'old man' has in fact changed enormously deep down within himself, that the struggle in Asturias [in 1934] and [the experiences] of the entire subsequent period have caused him to revise his political course. . . .⁷⁵

What was Largo Caballero's dream for Spain at this time? He viewed the Popular Front as a temporary alignment of forces, leading as it were to the triumph of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In March 1936 the *Agrupación Socialista Madrileña*, or Socialist Association of Madrid met and drafted a

⁷⁴Fernando Claudín, "Spain—The Utimely Revolution" in *The New Left Review* (London) No. 74, July-August 1972, p. 10.

⁷⁵Cited in Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 253.

program for the Socialist Party for its upcoming congress. It called for conquest of power by the workers by whatever means necessary to establish a proletarian dictatorship and erect a people's democracy. The document states: "The illusion that the proletarian Socialist revolution . . . can be achieved by reforming the existing state must be eliminated. There is no course but to destroy its roots."⁷⁶

Ironically, at this point Largo Caballero's adherents were far more Marxist-Leninist than the Communist Party of Spain, and certainly more so than the other tendencies of Socialists. When Largo Caballero moved to the left he increased the distance between himself and the Besteiro and Prieto factions. He wanted to break with the moderate Republicans, who had shown him their incapability of making far-reaching changes in Spain. He thought the Socialists should not follow the parliamentary road; rather, he wanted them to pursue an insurrectional path.

Luis Araquistáin was a close advisor to Largo Caballero, and on May Day 1934 he published a new journal, called *Leviatán*. In his editorial, Araquistáin gave the insurrectional point of view:

The Republic is an accident. We must return to Marx and Engels, not with our lips, but with our brains and willpower. Almost all of us were deceived and the time has come to admit it. Revolutionary Socialism has not failed, but the distortion of it has. Marx and Engels were right about everything in their theory of history and of the state and in their plan of action. Let us not trust in parliamentary democracy even if sometimes socialism wins a majority; if violence is not used, capitalism will defeat socialism on other fronts with its formidable economic weapons.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Cited in Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁷Cited in Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton &

In light of the debate for and against revolution, Bolloten compares the three Socialist leaders, highlighting their remarkable conflicts:

Caballero's revolutionary stance deepened the already irreconcilable divisions within the Socialist party. Julián Besteiro, the dignified, soft-spoken and once influential 'academic' Marxist, representing the right wing of the party, who had urged his Socialist colleagues in 1933 to accept democracy and had remonstrated that "the illusion of the dictatorship of the proletariat is paid for too dearly," had retired into the background, and the struggle for control of the Socialist movement between the revolutionary Caballero and the evolutionary [Indalecio] Prieto—at once political and highly personal—had moved to center stage. To Prieto, Caballero was irresponsible: "He is a fool who wants to appear clever: He is a frigid bureaucrat who plays the role of a mad fanatic." Prieto held that the Socialists were not strong enough to carry out a successful revolution and should solidify their alliance with the Republicans. To Caballero, Prieto's reformism was anathema, and he regarded his opponent as a "republicanoid" rather than a Socialist. "For me," he wrote in *Mis Recuerdos*. "Prieto was never a Socialist . . . either in his ideas or his actions." "[He] was envious, arrogant, and disdainful; he believed he was superior to everyone; he would tolerate no one who cast the slightest shadow in his path."⁷⁸

The Socialist Party thus did not speak with one voice on the issue of the revolution. Besteiro argued against support of the October 1934 uprising, and held out against Socialist inclusion in the Popular Front government. In 1936 Besteiro thought Spain was not ready for a socialist government and believed that the Republic itself did not stand a chance of survival. Besteiro was elected to the Cortes in 1931, 1933 and 1936. In 1936 the Caballero-dominated Socialist Party had him removed from office.

Prieto had a poverty-stricken background. Like Caballero, he rose

Company, 1970). p. 137.

⁷⁸Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 25.

quickly in the Socialist Party after joining as a young man. He had little to do with the UGT, concentrating his efforts on coalition of the PSOE with the reformists of the middle class. Thomas concludes: "Prieto was popular with the middle class. But, among workers, the sterner figure of Largo Caballero always commanded more affection."⁷⁹

PLAYERS ON THE SPANISH LEFT: THE ANARCHISTS

There were four major organizational players on the Spanish Left at the time of the Civil War: the Socialists, the Anarchists, the Communists and the POUM-ists. Sometimes their differences were glossed over; sometimes they were violent. Each had constituencies in the working class. The following sections will deal with the Left groups (except for the Socialists, who were dealt with above).

Largo Caballero believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was a form of government opposed by the Anarchists. They, in fact, held out against all forms of government. The Anarchists were organized in Spain into the CNT (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores*), and its political wing, the FAI (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*). Largo Caballero found his UGT in conflict with the CNT for the allegiance of radical workers. At times the UGT tried to absorb the CNT, and vice-versa. The Anarchists, for their part, acted hatefully towards Largo Caballero. One called him a "dictator in embryo," who wanted "the absolute hegemony of the Socialist party on the morrow of the triumphant insurrection of the working class"—a "crooked

⁷⁹Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 41.

aim."⁸⁰

Bernard Bolloten writes about the CNT:

Unlike the UGT, the CNT rejected the labor courts, or *jurados mixtos* [mixed juries] of the Republic, not only because they increased the power of the state in disputes between labor and management, but because their purpose, in the opinion of a prominent CNT-FAI member, was "to castrate the Spanish proletariat in the interests of 'class conciliation.'" Not conciliation, but continual and implacable war between labor and management was what the CNT wanted, and direct action was its method: violent strikes, sabotage and boycott. This was not simply a means of improving the standard of living of the workers; above all, it was a method of agitation, of stimulating and keeping alive a spirit of revolt in preparation for the day of insurrection.⁸¹

What is the history of this anticipation of insurrection? Spanish Anarchism first took root in the late nineteenth century, when the ideas of Michael Bakunin, a Russian Anarchist intellectual, were imported and absorbed. Bakunin had been involved in a struggle with Marx for control of the International. Brennan notes that "whereas Marx wanted to conquer political power for the proletariat, Bakunin wished the proletariat to destroy it."⁸² Marx, of course, came out the victor in that internecine struggle. Nevertheless, the conflict continued in Spain. Largo Caballero inherited from Marx his view of the role of the proletariat and the proletarian dictatorship. The Anarchists did whatever they could not to participate in the Socialist program of government. As we have seen above, the 1933 election was lost by the Left because the Anarchists refused to vote.

In Spain anarchism was a challenge to Marxism in the sphere of *mass*

⁸⁰Cited in Bolloten. *Spanish Civil War*, p. 198.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 198.

⁸²Brenan. *Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 132.

organization. Largo Caballero consciously vied with the Anarchists for the allegiance of the workers and peasants. Seeking working class adhesion, he tried to match the Anarchists' militancy. Writes Gabriel Jackson:

Spanish socialism believed in political action, and in the use of parliamentary methods. But it had also to achieve benefits for the workers—especially since it found itself in competition with the larger, and more revolutionary, anarcho-syndicalist unions. . . . the UGT had to demonstrate its combativeness and effectiveness in the day-to-day struggle. The militants in Bilbao, in the Asturian mines and in the railroad unions proved in numerous strikes that they were as tough, as class conscious, and as combative as the anarcho-syndicalists of Barcelona.⁸³

How did the Anarchists organize the workers? Their skeletal, fluid and spontaneous network of political struggle made them radically different than their fellow Leftists, the Socialists. Brennan outlines their methodology:

Their first object was to enroll groups of poor workers, whatever their political or religious opinions might be, for mutual protection against employers: now and then there would be a small strike, which, if it was successful, would at once double the membership of the sections and lead to other small strikes in neighbouring districts. Then gradually the leaders would unfold their Anarchist creed with its hatred of the Church, its wild idealism, its generous and humane outlook, and the imagination of the hearers would be kindled. Thus it happened that, at moments of enthusiasm, the number of the workers controlled by the Anarchists would double and treble themselves and, when the inevitable reaction came, would shrink back to a small kernel of convinced militants. This plasticity of the Anarchist movement enabled it to survive persecutions and, as soon as they were over, to reappear stronger than ever.⁸⁴

This was how the Anarchist movement survived under the monarchy and

⁸³Gabriel Jackson. *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965) pp. 20-21.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 146.

the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. The Anarchists operated well in a clandestine manner and hung in tenaciously against the state's repression.

The Anarchists also had problems with the Republican government—and the Socialists involved in it—and they refused to vote in the elections of 1933. Largo Caballero's labor legislation put workers into organizations overseen by government bureaucracy, taking some control—or better, influence—away from the non-bureaucratic CNT. Carr offers a sample of the struggle of the Socialists of Largo Caballero vis-à-vis the Anarchists in 1932:

The C.N.T. was perfectly aware that Largo Caballero's labour laws threatened their whole organization. As Minister of Labour he backed the U.G.T. in its attempt to wrest control of the Barcelona dockers from the C.N.T. In Madrid, Prieto put down a telephone strike organized by the C.N.T., and *El Socialista* called the strikers' leaders 'brutally ignorant' and their union 'a labour organization based on pistols'. Thus C.N.T. extremists could paint Largo Caballero as a traitor and a collaborationist dog, as another Martínez Anido⁸⁵ come to destroy the revolutionary proletariat.⁸⁶

Why did anarchism find a social base in Spain? John A. Crow writes that the social reality of the poor Spaniard was a match with the ideology of anarchism:

Many writers have commented that Spanish anarchism is unadulterated Iberianism. It represents the magnificent independence of the Spaniard set loose in the arena of political action. The anarchist ideal is absolute liberty, an absurd concept, of course. But in Spain there has always been a fascination for the absurd. It is essentially the religion of Quixotism. The real meaning of "libertarian communism" was reorganization of the economy and government on a collective community basis,

⁸⁵General Martínez Anido was the governor of Catalonia who set up "yellow syndicalism" to compete with and weaken the CNT, against whom he then started a blood feud in 1920-1922.

⁸⁶Carr, *Spain*, p. 623.

without centralized state control. The small autonomous villages or syndicates themselves would be the bases of this new collectivism.⁸⁷

In their small collectives, land was taken and sometimes the parish church was burned. Study circles were formed to raise the ideological level of the people. Money was outlawed, and so were the vices of smoke and drink, and prostitution. The importance of these efforts to their practitioners was enormous; in fact, they believed the millennium had arrived. Brennan comments about the Anarchists of Andalusia that "Every new movement or strike was thought to herald the immediate coming of a new age of plenty, when all—even the Civil Guard and the landowner—would be free and happy."⁸⁸

Revolutionary syndicalism had a tendency to supplant organized religion among peasants and workers who rejected the latter out of class consciousness. Stanley G. Payne writes:

Much of the peasantry lived in a great spiritual void and was filled with social and economic resentment against the clergy, who were identified with the upper classes. The revolutionary myth gave them a new object of faith, however vague, and a means of channeling social hatreds in a legitimized fashion. For the *obrero concientes*, or awakened, responsible workers, the moral teachings of anarchism replaced the moral doctrines of religion in encouraging chastity, seriousness and the avoidance of alcohol.⁸⁹

The Anarchists were soldiers. Crow declares:

The anarcho-syndicalists believed passionately in one final great outbreak of violence which would end all violence. After this

⁸⁷John A. Crow, *Spain: The Root and the Flower* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1985), p. 298.

⁸⁸Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 157.

⁸⁹Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, pp. 25-26.

the new society would emerge. But first the powerful and the wicked must be killed. They were the ones who had held humanity back from the natural realization of its social ideal, liberty. The anarchists did not wish just to confiscate the luxuries of the rich, but to exterminate them.⁹⁰

The Anarchists also wanted to eliminate the clergy. They were responsible for many church burnings and killings of priests. José M. Sánchez quotes the CNT program of May 1936:

Religion, that purely subjective manifestation of the human being, will be recognized in as much as it stays relegated to the sanctuary of the individual conscience, but in no case will it be permitted as a form of public display, nor as a moral and intellectual coercion; individuals will be free to hold whatever moral ideas they find suitable and there will be no need for religious ceremonies.⁹¹

This is a mild statement of the Anarchist position; more radical was the Anarchist newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* of August 5, 1936: "The Church has to disappear forever. . . . The priest, the friar, the Jesuit, have dominated Spain; we must extirpate them. . . . The religious orders must be dissolved; the bishops and cardinals must be shot; and church property must be expropriated."⁹²

The PSOE was anticlerical but less vehement and violent than the Anarchists. Explains Sánchez: ". . . the Socialists apparently did not join in the anticlerical incendiarism of the early weeks of the Republic and in fact sent pickets to guard some of the churches because they realized that anticlerical violence would simply react against the Republican-Socialist

⁹⁰Crow, *Spain*, p. 298.

⁹¹Cited in José M. Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 37.

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 38.

reformers."⁹³ However, Sánchez continues: "By 1934 the Socialists had developed a more specific anticlerical program: they called for the dissolution of all the regular clergy and confiscation of their property and expulsion of those 'whose past attitudes made them hostile to the new institutions.'"⁹⁴

The Anarchists threw the weight of their membership's votes into the elections of 1935, resulting in the victory of the Left at the polls. This was done primarily in order to release their many prisoners taken by the government after the October, 1934 uprising. They organized into military units when the war came. They abolished rank and insignia and the practice of saluting, but they were combatants nonetheless. First as voters and then as soldiers the Anarchists became allied with the Socialists to their mutual benefit.

In 1936 Largo Caballero was offering to include the Anarchists in his Workers' Alliance. Carr sketches out how the Socialists and Anarchists got along side by side that year, and the role of *Caballeristas* in the relationship:

All Socialists were fearful of the power of the C.N.T. Right-wing Socialists had sought to destroy it; now Largo Caballero began to think in terms of attracting it to the Workers' Alliance. This alliance would push Prieto and the Socialist party leaders out of the picture since the C.N.T. could never contemplate an alliance with a political party. *Caballeristas* began to emphasize the residual anarchism of Marxism: they emphasized the withering away of the state; planning could be left to bourgeois Socialists and Prieto; once liberated, the revolutionary masses would settle their own destinies.⁹⁵

⁹³Ibid., p. 37.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Carr, *Spain*, p. 642.

PLAYERS ON THE SPANISH LEFT: THE COMMUNISTS

Spanish leftists took inspiration from the Russian Revolution of 1917. Around the world, the Russian revolution seemed to put further revolutions within reach of Socialist and fledgling Communist parties. In October 1935 Luis Araquistáin, an advisor to Largo Caballero wrote in *Claridad*:

If someone were to ask us what is, in our judgement, the greatest and most fertile event in human history, we would answer without hesitation that it is the Russian revolution of 1917. This revolution marks the beginning of the end of a long era that began, in the mists of time, with social organization based in private property. It opens a new epoch in which all peoples, one after the other, will necessarily pass into a regime of collective ownership of the instruments of production and distribution, establishing economic equality, the foundation of all the equalities and of the definitive liberation of man. There cannot be freedom without a controlled and communal economy.⁹⁶

In 1920 the *Federación de Juventudes Socialistas*, a Socialist student group, aligned itself and its 5,000 members with the Third International, or Comintern, the international bureaucracy of the Soviet Communist party. The FJS became the *Partido Comunista Español*, or PCE. Its manifesto outlined the Communist purpose:

The Communist Party has the social revolution as its only end, rejecting any limited program, and makes a political program of propaganda and attack on the bourgeoisie. Upon the ruins of the parliamentary regime and that of the bourgeois democracy, forever discredited, it will establish a soviet regime, the only one capable of realizing the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁹⁷

⁹⁶*Claridad*. November 9. 1935.

⁹⁷Víctor Alba. *El Partido Comunista en España: Ensayo de interpretación*

The Communists in Spain formed a small group until the outbreak of the Civil War. Early in their history they scorned the Socialists as "Social-Fascists," and the Anarchists as "Anarcho-Fascists." This viewpoint was haphazardly derived from Lenin's history of utilizing factionalism to seize control of the revolutionary movement. A rival Communist Party, the PCOE, *Partido Comunista Obrero de España* was formed by a break-away from the Socialist Party. Moscow soon ordered it, as a matter of general policy, to combine with the PCE, which it did.

From the start the Soviets had taken interest in Spain. David T. Cattell elucidates:

The Communist International had long been interested in Spain as a troubled spot of the world. Articles on Spain appeared frequently in the *Communist International*, the magazine of the Comintern. One article in 1931, for example, declared: 'The prospects for the Spanish Revolution are good.' From the frequency of the articles and their analysis of the Spanish situation it would seem that the Communists considered the prospects of revolution better in Spain than in most countries of the world, except for China and perhaps India. In the unsettled conditions and extreme poverty and repression of the masses, the Communists saw a revolutionary situation similar to Russia in prerevolutionary days.⁹⁸

Socialist youth were not the only ones attracted to the Soviet model. Some Anarchists went through an infatuation with the Comintern. Their attraction, however, was short-lived. As Alba explains: "The Bolshevik experience, which had converted the unions into instruments of the Party and the State in the area of production, and the theory of the syndicalists who saw the unions as means to change society and to administrate production

histórica (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1979), pp. 32-33.

⁹⁸David T. Cattell, *Communism and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 23

without submitting to anybody, were irreconcilable."⁹⁹

In 1925, at Stalin's behest, the fledgling PCE underwent "bolshevization." Alba states:

Bolshevization meant establishing the democratic centralism of the Russian Communist Party in all its [satellite] parties, prohibiting the existence of factions, giving to the Comintern [the right to] intervene systematically in local decisions, leaving to [the Comintern] the selection of their leaders, whom the parties would 'elect,' and making the parties dependent on the financial support of Moscow.¹⁰⁰

Moscow declared itself in opposition to the Republic at its onset, and so the PCE, one month before the Republic came to be, published the following:

The Communists are against the republican movement and denounce it as a deception of the working class, calling for the workers and farmworkers to struggle for their own workers' and farmworkers' republic, for their own class interests. For this reason there cannot be any alliance nor compromise between us and the republicans . . . They are enemies of the proletariat, the most dangerous ones, because they sow democratic illusions in their ranks and misdirect the workers' movement away from the struggle for its interests, so that they may serve the interests of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰¹

By encouraging the anti-Republican line of the PCE Moscow thus put it out of the mainstream of the Spanish Left. This guaranteed the Party would stay small and ineffective. The years of the Dictatorship were, writes Alba: "the infancy of the PCE. They lived them in rivalries, quarrels and maneuvers, without exercising any influence on the course of events . . . The years of the Republic were equally sterile from the point of view of influence and

⁹⁹Alba. *Partido Comunista*. p. 45.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.. p. 93.

¹⁰¹Cited in Ibid.. p.107.

doctrine."¹⁰²

There were advantages to the Moscow connection, however. It was much easier, for example, for the PCE to put out a newspaper, as Alba notes:

The Socialist Party needed decades before it could transform its weekly into a daily. . . . The Communist Party of Spain, with some few thousands of members, without any difficulty, put out its daily. It is evident that [the Communist] *Mundo Obrero* sustained itself, like the bureaucracy of the party, with the funds that Moscow provided.¹⁰³

Although out of touch with the political reality and manipulated by Stalin, the PCE had ideals. The charismatic Communist leader Dolores Ibárruri, known as *La Pasionara*, went through a deep conversion to a belief in left-wing utopia, as had Caballero. She writes in her memoirs:

My new faith was more reasonable and more solid than my religious faith had been. Now I expected nothing from the mercy of an unknown and unknowable god; my expectations were anchored in the strength of mankind—our own strength, our own struggle. I was not willing to leave the world as we had inherited it. I would struggle to change it, to make it a better world, to open a path for our children that would lead to a society without oppression and without poverty.¹⁰⁴

PLAYERS ON THE SPANISH LEFT: THE POUM

The Spanish Left actually had a strong theorist in the personage of Joaquín Maurín, the chief of the small *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*, the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, or POUM. The POUM was wrongfully identified as Trotskyist. Although it was supportive of some

¹⁰²Ibid., p.105.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁰⁴Dolores Ibarruri, *They Shall Not Pass* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), p. 62.

of Trotsky's theory and practice, it differed with much of that as well, and was condemned by Trotsky himself. Trotsky "detested" Maurín.¹⁰⁵ "The Comintern," writes Payne, "was determined to crush the POUM not because the latter was 'Trotskyist', but because it was the only united, well-organized anti-Stalinist revolutionary party determined to use coherent political means to carry out a fully independent Spanish revolution."

Maurín, for his part, "believed that Marxist revolutionaries would greatly multiply their strength and the opportunity for an early revolution by cooperating with other working-class groups, the left-wing sectors of the middle classes, and the left-wing sectors of the regionalist movements, especially in Catalonia . . . "¹⁰⁶

The Spanish Left had many weaknesses. The Anarchist collectives were models of working class liberation, but were quixotic. They were a case of admirable dreams unable to find a form for existence in the real world. The Socialist Casas del Pueblo were good for the worker but incomplete without worker control of the workplace. The Communists were flying blind, basically, with hardly any goal except to contain Fascism and keep themselves a step ahead of their opposing players on the Left.

The POUM had a program for the liberation of the proletariat. It was presented as nine steps in a pamphlet published in 1936 in Barcelona, which is worth citing in its entirety. The pamphlet was titled "What is the POUM and What Does It Want?" and read as follows:

First. The Spanish Revolution is a revolution of the democratic-

¹⁰⁵Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz. *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988), p. 88.

¹⁰⁶Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 80.

socialist type. The dilemma is socialism or fascism. The working class will not be able to take power peacefully, but through armed insurrection.

Second. Once power is taken, we must go on to the transitional establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The organs of power will be the workers' alliances. The dictatorship of the proletariat presupposes the most broad and complete workers' democracy. The party of the revolution cannot and must not do away with workers' democratization.

Third. Need for the Workers' Alliance locally and nationally. The Workers' Alliance must necessarily pass through three phases: first, as an organism of the United Front, carrying out offensive and defensive, legal and illegal actions; second, as an insurrectional organ; and third, as an organ of power.

Fourth. Recognition of the problems of the nationalities. Spain will be structured in the form of an Iberian Union of Socialist Republics.

Fifth. A democratic solution, in its first phase, of the land problem. The land to those who work it.

Sixth. In the case of war, transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. No hope in the League of Nations, which is the united front of the imperialists.

Seventh. The united party will remain outside the second and third internationals, both failures, and will struggle for world revolutionary socialist unity, carried on new bases.

Eighth. Defense of the U.S.S.R., without supporting its policy of pacts with capitalist states, but through the international revolutionary action of the working class. Right to criticize the policies of the leaders of the U.S.S.R. when they are counterproductive for the march of the world revolution.

Ninth. A permanent democratic centralist regime in the unified party.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷Cited in *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

Thus the POUM proposed a structure for the taking of power, when a revolutionary party would be converted into a ruling hegemonic power. *Worker democracy from below* would support a *dictatorship of the proletariat from above*. There would additionally be *international proletarian solidarity* and a *realistic view of the Soviet Union*. No other Spanish party articulated its goals as straightforwardly as did the POUM under Maurín.

Alba and Schwartz list some interesting statistics in evaluating the role of the P.O.U.M. at the time this pamphlet was published:

At that moment in Spain, according to the General Directorate of Security, there were 1,440,474 members of the U.G.T. and 1,577,537 in the C.N.T. The rightist parties had 549,946 members. The P.S.O.E. must have had around 100,000 members. The P.O.U.M. had 7,000 militants, which, before six months had gone by, had risen to 9,000, and controlled unions in which there were 60,000 workers. This was a lot compared with the 1931 figures . . . but was not enough if one took into account the ambitious goals the P.O.U.M. had chosen for itself.¹⁰⁸

The POUM posed an alternative to the Popular Front, the Alianza Obrera (Workers' Alliance), which was created by Joaquín Maurín. The Alianza was anti-fascist and concerned with Hitler's rise in Germany, but it was also active as a revolutionary organization. Maurín believed the events of October 1934 in Asturias were the opening act of the Spanish revolution; he thought they were similar to Russia's rising of July 1917. Maurín wanted, according to George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, a "strictly working-class electoral front which could then make a temporary alliance with the Republicans."¹⁰⁹ It was to combine the forces of the Socialists and Anarchists.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁰⁹George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context 1931-1939*. (London: Longman, 1995), p. 26.

Largo Caballero felt the same way about this as Maurín, but the Alianza was short-lived after the Socialists abandoned the idea in 1934. Conclude Adrian and Shubert: "Although the POUM executive continued to favour a strictly workers' electoral front it was forced to join the Popular Front because of overwhelming popular support for it. . . . The revolutionary approach to unity had failed."¹¹⁰

Maurín was elected to the Cortes in 1936. According to Alba and Schwartz: "The things Maurín said shocked, disturbed, and obliged one to think. The deputies were not accustomed to this kind of dry, cutting oratory. But Largo Caballero and some of his friends showed friendship toward Maurín, for what he had to say interested them."¹¹¹ Maurín was a voice of conscience—he was listened to even though the organization he ran was small and financially poor. The POUM's militia was, however, to play an important role in the Civil War in Catalonia—before, that is, they were destroyed by the Communists.

THE ENEMY

Fascism was the number one enemy of *Caballerismo*. Largo Caballero kept a close watch on Italy and particularly Germany as Fascism came to power in those countries. The middle classes in those countries, frightened by the Left, turned to Fascism as "the only new creed which could control the proletarian rebellion," says Payne.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 100.

¹¹²Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 1.

Payne writes in his study of the second republic that such a creed came about with the formation of a particular Spanish Fascism:

The first continuous, organized fascist group was a nucleus formed in Madrid by Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, a young intellectual who began to publish a weekly, *La Conquista del Estado* . . . Ledesma was followed by a mere handful of ten young students, but soon joined forces with a radical right-wing lawyer in Valladolid, Onésimo Redondo Ortega. In October 1931 they formed the first categoric Spanish fascist political organization, the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*, a typically verbose formulation that produced the acronym JONS and the term *Jonsistas* for its few members. He aspired to develop a revolutionary and fascistic nationalism that could compete with the left among the lower classes . . . ¹¹³

The JONS took on radical symbolism:

The members of the JONS . . . belonged to the first official political organization in Spain bearing a national syndicalist label. For their emblem they chose the yoked arrows of the Catholic Kings, a fitting symbol for those who dreamed of reviving Spain's imperial grandeur. It was during this period, also, that Ledesma coined several slogans—such as *¡Arriba!* and *España, Una, Grande y Libre*—which later became standard in the propaganda of national syndicalism. To demonstrate their radical aims, the Jonsistas adopted as their colors the red-black-red banner of the Anarchists.¹¹⁴

The Spanish ruling class looked about for a fascist leader and found one in the son of the dictator Primo de Rivera, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. He began his political career protecting the memory of his father. To justify his father's corporatism he came to Fascism, and founded a party called the Falange.

The Falangist movement had an artistic texture; it was a stylized

¹¹³Payne, *Spain's First Democracy*, p. 175.

¹¹⁴Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), p. 18.

reactionarianism. Raymond Carr explains:

Since rich monarchists cold-shouldered the movement when it refused to serve their purposes, and since the workers showed little inclination to join an attempt to capture the moral force of anarchism and the discontent of the proletariat for the Great Spain of history, the core of Falangism remained the university youth. Hence its romantic and rhetorical violence, the touch of wild poetry in its utterance: "style" and "austere" were the key words of its political vocabulary. Its adherents saw themselves as an *élite*, working on shoe-string budgets with a badly printed, bankrupt press, for national regeneration; as heroic missionaries in blue shirts preaching their vision of a Spain without wretched pueblos of mean houses, dirty streets, and sordid bars. "I call you to the ascetic labour of baring, beneath the rubble of a detestable Spain, the buried key of an exact and difficult Spain." The speeches of José Antonio resound with the poetic patriotism of the generation of 1898.¹¹⁵

Such was the voice of the enemy of Largo Caballero and his Socialists. It appears, however, that José Antonio harbored no great personal antipathy for Largo Caballero. Payne points out: "Party activists thought up elaborate plots for assassinating Prieto and Largo Caballero, but José Antonio would not countenance them."¹¹⁶

Violence began and escalated in 1936 between the Falange and the Socialists. Revenge upon revenge resulted in many deaths and the Falange was outlawed on March 14, 1936. José Antonio was then arrested, and on November 20 he was executed by the Republican government. At the outset of the Civil War the growth of the Falange exploded, in a parallel phenomenon with the mushrooming growth of the Communists in the Republican camp. The middle ground just gave way, and for all intents and

¹¹⁵Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, pp. 647-648.

¹¹⁶Payne, *Falange*, p. 75.

purposes disappeared.

THE ELECTORAL POPULAR FRONT

As the February, 1936 elections approached, the moderate Republicans wanted to ally with the Left for strength at the polls. The Left wanted to change its campaign after the disaster of 1933 which ushered in the *bienio negro*—the black two years, as they were known. Both groupings formed the Popular Front. Its primary task was to be the freeing of 30,000 political prisoners taken by the right-wing government. The promised amnesty brought Anarchists with their million votes to the polls. With that, in this election, the Right and the Left were competing on a level playing field.

The platform of the Popular Front was determined mostly by the moderate Republican parties. Its manifesto warned against what Manuel Azaña, who was to become Prime Minister, called, "dangerous innovations." He added, "We want peace and order. We are moderate."¹¹⁷ Part and parcel of the Popular Front's manifesto was a rejection of left-wing solutions. It read: "The Republicans do not accept the principle of the nationalization of land and its free distribution among peasants, as sought by the delegates of the Socialist Party."¹¹⁸ The manifesto went on: "The Republic conceived of by the Republican parties is not a Republic dominated by social or economic class interests, but a regime of democratic liberty. . . . The Republican parties do not accept the worker control sought by the representatives of the Socialist

¹¹⁷Cited in Brenan. *Spanish Labyrinth*. p.301

¹¹⁸Payne. *Spain's First Democracy*. p. 266.

Party."¹¹⁹

The PCE had no hand in the electoral coalition that was the Popular Front. Yet it took credit for its name and essential meaning. The Popular Front was originated in Moscow at the August, 1935, Seventh World Congress of the Comintern. The tactic of calling Socialists "Social-Fascists" came to an end. What was important now was the unity of democratic regimes against the threat of Nazi expansionism.

As was usually the case, the Soviet Union's new policies were backed up by propagandistic rhetoric. Arthur Koestler worked for the propaganda department of the Comintern in 1935. Later he wrote:

All revolutionary slogans, with reference to the class struggle and to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, were in one sweep relegated to the lumber room. They were replaced by a brand new façade, with geranium boxes in the windows, called 'Popular Front for Peace and against Fascism.' Its doors were wide open to all men of good will—Socialists, Catholics, Conservatives, Nationalists. The notion that we had ever advocated revolution and violence was to be ridiculed as a bogey, refuted as a slander spread by reactionary war-mongers. We no longer referred to ourselves as 'Bolsheviks,' nor even as Communists—the public use of the word was rather frowned at in the Party—we were just simple, honest, peace-loving anti-Fascists and defenders of democracy.¹²⁰

It should be remembered that the Soviet Union was admired by the Spanish Left. Its rhetoric was considered consciousness-raising. Spain was not alone in this—Communist parties around the world worked with the new Popular Front ideology to reach ever greater masses of people. Hugh Thomas makes the following cogent analysis:

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Cited in Ibid., p.96.

With the shadows of war and fascism alike growing, the Soviet Union had a good reputation in Spain as elsewhere among Left and progressive people. The great Russian experiment indeed did not yet seem to have betrayed its ideals. Thanks to a successful programme of propaganda and unprecedented secrecy, the facts of agricultural collectivization were not known, and the persecution of Trotsky not understood. The communist party were to claim that they were responsible for the pact of the Popular Front . . . But it required little prompting for the socialists to adopt the salute with the clenched fist and bent arm (originated by the German communists), the red flag, the revolutionary phraseology, the calls to unite in the face of international fascism, demanded throughout the world by communist parties. "Anti-fascism" and "the Popular Front" were becoming powerful myths, almost irresistible to those who both loved peace and liberty and were impatient with old parties.¹²¹

In the period just short of the elections of 1936, Largo Caballero resigned from the presidency of the PSOE. He felt the moderates in the party were being given too much influence. Under him, a parallel movement arose which included the UGT and the Socialist Youth. Yet he agreed to support the moderates as they put their program into practice. Only the POUM advocated a Marxist electoral strategy, and not even they could sustain it.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR AND THE REVOLUTION

The Spanish working class and peasantry were, in early 1936, giving the Right wing a run for the money. They were organizing more than ever before, and achieving unheard of power in Spanish society. They were taking

¹²¹Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 123-124.

control away from the industrialists and big landowners, the most important backers of Fascism. Soviet historian K.L. Maidanik describes the scene of the Spanish struggles in 1936:

. . . trusting only in their own strength, [the masses] took over the streets and, without waiting for the government's decisions, began with revolutionary methods to carry out from below the programme of the Popular Front. They freed the political prisoners, forced the employers to re-instate workers sacked for political reasons and, in March of the same year, started land occupations. The middle of March saw the beginning of strikes started by hunger, need, lock-outs and fascist provocations. The strike movement grew each month. Factories and workshops, building sites and mines came to a standstill; businesses closed down. In June and July there were on average 10 or 20 strikes a day. There were days on which 400,000-450,000 were on strike. And 95 per cent of strikes taking place between February and July were won by the workers. Massive workers' demonstrations went through the streets demanding bread, work, land, the smashing of fascism and the total victory of the revolution.¹²²

After months of secret planning, the Spanish military rose against the civilian government of Spain on July 17, 1936. The plotters believed Spain was headed down the road of godless Communism, and saw themselves as crusaders for right-wing Catholicism. The proletariat was running Spain into the ground, they believed, and they considered themselves to be the forces of order who could stop that from happening. Manuel Azaña wrote after the civil war:

In the early days of radiant optimism the minds of nearly all Spaniards were fired by a messianic goal. If, in the Nationalist camp, it was Christian civilization in the West they were saving, in the Republican camp the prophets proclaimed the birth of a new civilization. Terrible hyperboles that easily inflame what is

¹²²Cited in Fernando Caludín. "Spain--The Utimely Revolution". p. 9.

visionary in the Spanish soul!¹²³

Francisco Franco, soon to become the Maximum Leader of the rebels, was in Morocco at the outset of the rebellion. He communicated with Nazi Germany and quickly obtained Hitler's assistance. The Germans sent planes for an airlift of troops from Africa to Spain. That aid was crucial in the early days of the war.

The rebels expected a rapid road to victory. Such was not to be the case. Madrid withstood the fascist onslaught. La Pasionara's cry of "¡No pasarán!"—"They shall not pass"—was realized. In this the International Brigades played an important role, and so did Soviet air power. The International Brigades were put together by the Comintern. Foreign powers were, in fact, quite important in determining the course of the Spanish Civil War.

Largo Caballero, who had been in France, arrived back in Madrid on the day the rebellion started, July 17, 1936. Casares Quiroga, then in charge of the Spanish government, spoke with Caballero, who asks Casares "if the Republic has the means to suffocate the subversion. Completely demoralized, Casares admits he does not. 'Then'—replies Largo Caballero—"there is no recourse except to arm the workers."¹²⁴ Because the workers were indeed armed, the loyalists were able to stop the Fascists outside of Madrid.

Thomas states that Largo Caballero was catapulted into *de facto* leadership of a now revolutionary Spain which was holding its own against

¹²³Cited in Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 56.

¹²⁴Carlos Rojas, *Retratos antifranquistas* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), p. 166.

the rebels:

Victory over the [military] rising meant, in Madrid and its surroundings as elsewhere, the start of the revolution. Large portraits of Lenin now appeared beside those of Largo Caballero on the hoardings of the Puerta del Sol. [Spanish premier] Manuel Azaña might still linger, gloomy and aghast, in the Royal Palace; his friends might still hold the portfolios of government; but, in the streets, the 'masses' ruled. The socialist-led UGT [of Largo Caballero] was the real executive body in the capital.¹²⁵

The outbreak of the Civil War led immediately to a left-wing revolution in the Republican territory. In *Claridad*, Largo Caballero's advisor Luis Araquistáin wrote: "The war and the Revolution are one and the same thing. Not only do they not exclude or hinder each other but they complement and support each other. The war needs the Revolution for its triumph in the same way that the Revolution needed the war to bring it into being."¹²⁶ Bolloten writes that the rebellion of the Right Wing precipitated "a far-reaching social revolution that was more profound in some respects than the Bolshevik Revolution in its early stages."¹²⁷

There was widespread collectivization throughout Spain, in town and in country, with the exception of the Basque region. Around 750,000 rural workers joined collectives in the countryside, and over a million workers joined them in industry. Esenwein and Shubert write: "During the course of the war some 2,000 wholesale businesses, factories, restaurants, hotels, barber shops and countless other concerns were, in varying degrees, collectivized."¹²⁸ Bolloten sums up: "economic changes in town and country

¹²⁵Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 247.

¹²⁶Cited in Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 116.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 21.

¹²⁸Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain at War*, p. 133.

... were not confined to the property of the wealthy strata of society. With the collapse of the state, all barriers had fallen away, and it was too enticing a moment for the revolutionary masses not to attempt to remold the entire economy to their heart's desire."¹²⁹

Throughout the Republican zone social control was smashed and reformulated. Explains Bolloten:

Shorn of the repressive organs of the state, the liberal government . . . possessed nominal power, but not power itself, for this was split into countless fragments and scattered in a thousand towns and villages among the revolutionary committees that had instituted control over post and telegraph offices, radio stations, and telephone exchanges, organized police squads and tribunals, highway and frontier patrols, transport and supply services, and created militia units for the battlefronts.¹³⁰

The centrist government elected by the popular front strategy came apart under the pressures of the war, from within and without.

Largo Caballero became Prime Minister on September 4, 1936. He was simply the only man who could take the role of Prime Minister, due to the support he had from the working class. Insisting that victory in the war was the number one reason for Largo Caballero's coming into power, *El Socialista* editorialized the day after he took the position:

The government is born with the greatest of moral authority, and backed by the greatest of multitudes. We avoid, as useless and contrary to our nature, all the praises that we could, with real justice, dedicate to the men who formed it. Half of them, starting with he who presides [Largo Caballero], belong to our party, which is another reason, perhaps the biggest one, that we must be sparing in our praises. That which is important to note is that the government, through its structure and the standing

¹²⁹Bolloten. *Spanish Civil War*. p. 56.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 53

of the people who make it up, is an authentic representation of the Popular forces who fight on the battlefronts. It is for that reason—and it is born for this—that the government is able to forge a rapid and complete victory. No one proffers another government program, and this is not the time to think of one. There is only one watchword of this moment: *vencer*, to win.¹³¹

NON-INTERVENTION OF THE DEMOCRACIES

The government of Spain sought aid from the United States, Britain and France. It was not forthcoming. In fact the only two countries to aid the Republic were the Soviet Union and Mexico. France only offered assistance for a few short weeks before it was asked by Britain not to give aid. France did then stop. The disparity of foreign aid is dealt with by Brennan:

The result of the war was decided by the question of foreign help. Whilst there was little to choose between the political and military competence or incompetence of either side, almost all the mass support, the enthusiasm, the spirit of sacrifice was upon the Republican. The Falangists proved to be undisciplined and irresponsible: for a crusading spirit Franco could count only on the Carlists. But German and Italian help was enormously more powerful than Russia's, and for this reason the Franco force won.¹³²

The United States and England operated on the principle of "neutrality." France joined them, and all three countries, plus Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, signed a neutrality act saying they would not aid either side in the Spanish Civil War. The Fascist countries immediately trashed the agreement, and the Soviets followed suit. "Neutrality" for the United States

¹³¹*El Socialista* (Madrid), September 5, 1936.

¹³²Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 317.

and England had a strange twist—it was actually a way of supporting the rebels. Douglas Little shows how this took place:

Suspensions of Bolshevik subversion deepened in London and Washington in late July [1936] as the hard-pressed Popular Front regime turned increasingly to its Communist, Socialist and Anarchist allies to combat the right-wing rebels. What British and American trade survived was reduced to a trickle by Madrid's continued intransigence and wartime disruptions, while multinationals such as ITT and Rio Tinto [British mining] saw their funds confiscated by republican officials and armed workers. By early August few policy makers on either side of the Atlantic believed that the Spanish Republic could control its own left-wing supporters, let alone quell the military uprising. As a result many high-ranking British and American officials came to regard a Franco victory as more attractive than a Popular Front triumph in the civil war. Private preference became public policy later that summer, when both Great Britain and the United States pledged strict nonintervention in the Spanish conflict and prohibited arms sales to either side. This doctrine in theory appeared impartial, but in practice it amounted to a kind of 'malevolent neutrality' that tipped the balance decisively against republican Spain.¹³³

It is accepted wisdom that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was somewhat sympathetic to the anti-Fascists of Spain. Yet domestic concerns tied his hands. Allen Guttman explains:

The Spanish embargo remained in effect because most Americans were, despite their pro-loyalist sympathies, unwilling to risk another war and because Catholic voters important to Roosevelt's domestic progress were determined to keep the embargo until General Franco's ends were accomplished. When, in addition, we consider that any move to succor the Republic would have flouted Great Britain and left the United States with no support [on the issue] other than that of Mexico and the Soviet Union, we can see why pro-Loyalist agitation

¹³³Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 221

went for nothing and why Roosevelt chose in this situation not to act upon his own convictions.¹³⁴

It is clear that the United States public had a tough time understanding the Spanish situation. The vote in Congress to embargo Spain passed with a single "no" vote. Interestingly, the one "no" vote was cast by freshman Congressman John T. Bernard of the Farmer-Laborite party. Why did he take such a lonely stand? Barbara Stuhler declares:

It was partly a matter of conviction: he was fiercely partisan against Fascism. It was partly a matter of indignation: he was incensed by the tactics used by the House leadership to propel the resolution through Congress. It was partly a matter of definition: to call the Spanish arms embargo an act of neutrality when it, in effect, boycotted "both the police and the underworld" was, in his judgement, at best a misnomer and at worst an outright lie.¹³⁵

Mexico was a loner on the international scene when it gave assistance to the Spanish government—it was the only country to do so besides the Soviet Union. Left-wing Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas sent his ambassador, Isidro Fabela, to the League of Nations, as T.G. Powell relates:

[Cárdenas] wanted Fabela to make clear that Mexico considered the League's nonintervention policy to be a form of indirect aid to Franquista rebels and to the foreign powers helping them. Fabela should state emphatically that Mexico's assistance to the Republic, including arms shipments, was the 'logical result' of a *correct* interpretation, namely that aggression was to be discouraged by resistance.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Allen Guttman. *The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962). p. 116.

¹³⁵Barbara Stuhler. "The One Man Who Voted 'Nay': The Story of John T. Barnard's Quarrel with American Foreign Policy 1937-1939" in *Minnesota History* (Fall, 1972).

¹³⁶T.G. Powell. "Mexico." in Mark Falcoff and Frederick B. Pike. *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39. American Hemispheric Perspectives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). p. 64.

In the first month of the Civil War, Cárdenas was asked to send arms. Writes Powell: "Without waiting to negotiate a sale price with the Spaniards, he had the Mexican army move twenty thousand 7mm Mauser rifles and twenty million cartridges to Veracruz, from where they went to Spain on the Republican ship *Magallanes*."¹³⁷

LARGO CABALLERO'S POLITICS: PART THREE

Interestingly, although Largo Caballero believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat he did not, when given the opportunity, make himself a dictator. He did not go that far left, perhaps because he did not want to further alienate France, Britain and the United States. He did not want things to appear as if there had been a power grab by the Left. Also, he had no support for a dictatorship of the proletariat from the Soviet Union. He was, in fact, asked directly by the Soviets not to mount a campaign to be the proletariat's dictator.¹³⁸

Largo Caballero rose to the occasion of his presidency and leadership of the war ministry by apparently suspending his radical line and fighting the war on its own terms. One could not say that Largo Caballero was out of touch or an extremist when it came to wielding power. What he did do was set about reforming the military. The militia had been playing the leading role; Largo Caballero instituted a Popular Army of conscripts under command of the war minister, himself. Anarchists had rejected rank and insignia—Largo Caballero had them re-instated.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 61.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 119.

Enrique de Francisco writes impassionately about Largo Caballero's responsibilities:

Now [Largo Caballero] has on his shoulders, besides the responsibility of governing, that of defeating the rebels, that of winning the war. He has to be governor and strategist. But what does this man know of the strategy, or of the art, the science or the whatever of arms? He was not even made to do military service, as the son of a widow who depended upon his support. He did not even have the basic training of a soldier! But now he is the commander in chief of the army and the nation tells him that he has to defeat the military professionals. Formidable twist of fate!¹³⁹

Largo Caballero writes that normal matters of the government of Spain were let go and the war absorbed all the energies of the leadership of the country. Largo Caballero worked from nine a.m. to nine p.m. every day, for the most part on the issues of the war and how to prosecute it.

Clearly Largo Caballero was no military genius, although he did the best that he could. Thomas encapsulates: "He was a noble man and an honest man, everyone conceded, but he seemed not to be a war leader after all."¹⁴⁰ Nor, in the end, was he the leader of a great Spanish revolution. Carr states, in fact: "Largo Caballero's prestige was immense, and he was treated as a monarch of the labour world, but it must be doubted whether he could have carried the UGT to revolution or whether, indeed, he had any clear and immediate intention of so doing."¹⁴¹

Some observers found Largo Caballero to be dour. One was journalist Louis Fischer, who saw him at the Alcázar, a castle in Toledo held by the

¹³⁹Enrique de Francisco, "Prologue" in Largo Caballero, *Mis Recuerdos*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁰Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 433.

¹⁴¹Carr, *Spain*, p. 642

rebels, as Peter Wyden relates:

Looking weary, [Largo Caballero] arrived on the scene September 7 and watched a cannon pound the Alcázar only 280 yards away. His square face grim, he he walked back to his car, followed by Assault Guards, who obviously expected to be acknowledged with a smile or a raised-fist salute. . . . [T]he Premier only sped away. "*If this continues,*" wrote Fischer in his diary that night, "*Franco will soon win, which means fascism in Europe will win.*"¹⁴²

Franco knew how to rally the troops and it seemed strikingly clear that Largo Caballero did not (although Fischer probably overreacted).

Carr calls Largo Caballero "morose and secretive".¹⁴³ In Largo Caballero's mind, however, it was opportune that he hold his cards close to the vest. He writes in his memoirs about the reasons for his reticence:

The post of Chief of the Government was undertaken unwillingly. Such elevated posts separate one from family, co-religionists and friends, from those with whom one has lived and struggled for many years. Besides, such posts impose customs and make for new manners of getting along which are incompatible with the expansive and cordial character which one had before. One must constantly have a serious face, although it be against one's will, if one wishes to conserve the authority of the post. The most appreciable things about men are sacrificed: the freedom to be expansive and very nearly the freedom to tell the truth. *One must be discreet.* . . . Craftiness and falsification is normal in these positions, and this put me in a bad humor.¹⁴⁴

Largo Caballero as Premier was the object of attack from the Communist Party before too long. The Socialist newspaper *Adelante* defended Largo Caballero against the Communists, publishing the following

¹⁴²Peter Wyden, *The Passionate War: The Narrative History of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p.126.

¹⁴³Carr, *Spain*, p. 664.

¹⁴⁴Largo Caballero, *Mis Recuerdos*, p. 183.

broadside on the 23rd of April 1937 which is worth quoting at length:

The Communist party says it is supporting a Popular Front policy, but avails itself of every seasonable opportunity to pursue its own policy and to spread propaganda that must of necessity irritate non-Communists. In this way it only succeeds in achieving something quite distinct from what it brags about every day; in other words, it sows suspicion and sectarianism among the workers, rendering difficult the organic unity of the proletariat for which the Socialist party has been fighting for so long, and especially Largo Caballero, against whom the rage of four or five petty, resentful leaders is now concentrated. . . . leaders who are incapable of understanding that a man who is all self-sacrifice and determination can work modestly for seven long months while heaps of nonsensical slogans are spread about the rear with no better result than that of creating confusion. Where are the wits of those who disparage the leader of the Spanish working class? Do they think it is such an easy matter to destroy his prestige by a blustering political campaign? Do they not realize that Largo Caballero is not a political boss as *Frente Rojo* [the Communist newspaper] insinuated the night before last, nor an apprentice in dictatorship, nor even a potential dictator. *He is the incarnation of a whole revolutionary movement. He is the personification of the history of the Spanish working class and the Marxist movement in Spain. He is the embodiment of forty years of exemplary conduct in our trade-union and revolutionary struggles.*¹⁴⁵ (Italics mine).

LARGO CABALLERO, THE SOVIET UNION AND THE PCE

Besteiro, in a speech published in *Claridad*, tried to smash the image of revolutionary Spain being based on the model of the Soviet Union. The speech is outlined by Payne:

As so often in the past, Besteiro told the militants [in the audience] unpleasant truths which they refused to hear. He

¹⁴⁵Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 377-378.

suggested that the forces opposed to the Popular Front were stronger than the revolutionaries cared to admit, and that the analogies drawn with Russia were as false as ever. There the established system had been totally exhausted by an enormous world war, permitting the Bolsheviks to build through the use of force and terror an artificial majority. By no stretch of the imagination, he went on, could it be claimed that the Spanish Marxist parties in 1936 had a majority of the population behind them. Nor did Spanish socialism have the kind of leaders who could impose a terrorist dictatorship even if they wanted to.¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, in the Kremlin, Stalin was manipulating the Spanish conflict in his own interests. He received the gold reserves of the Spanish treasury to be spent down in the purchase of war material. He gave Republican Spain just enough aid to maintain its struggle, but not enough to come out quickly on top. He feared that a victory for the Spanish Left would make him look like an instigator of a Spanish revolution, and that would alienate France and Britain, whose support he counted on to help him resist Nazi aggression.

There remains some controversy on the issue of Stalin and Spain, as George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert relate:

Why Stalin ultimately decided to come to the aid of the republicans has been the subject of numerous heated debates. For example, his critics have argued that his commitment to the republican cause was nothing more than a Machiavellian tactic, aimed not so much at aiding the Spanish but rather at advancing the foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union. Those less cynical about Stalin's motives adamantly reject this interpretation, and instead insist that his decision to aid the Republic sprang primarily from his abiding commitment to the international revolutionary movement as well as his pressing desire to stop the spread of fascism.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 198.

¹⁴⁷Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain at War*, note 19, p. 201.

Probably both sides are right—Stalin was both Machiavellian and anti-Fascist.

The PCE took any opportunities available to build its own hegemony. It was, for a while, so close to Largo Caballero that before the war, he considered what the Soviet Union desired—a merger of the PCE and the PSOE.

The Communist Party wrote a letter to *Claridad* in late 1935 which closed with the following slogans: "Forward . . . with our struggle: towards the emancipation of the workers, for the fraternal union of the socialist and communist workers, and towards the common struggle of the Socialist and Communist Parties."¹⁴⁸

The PCE was instructed by the Comintern to reach out to the middle class in Spain. Stalin did not want a radical Spanish government that would alienate France and England, whose support he would be needing in his struggle against Germany. He wanted there to be just enough aid from the Soviets for the Republic to get by, and no more.¹⁴⁹ He wanted the PCE to be reformist rather than revolutionary in the eyes of the Western democracies. It should, in fact, champion the bourgeoisie as a revolutionary class. In addition, the PCE was expected to seek alliances with other left groups. *La Pasionara* proclaimed the following at the outset of the war in the name of the central committee of the PCE, showcasing the mold Stalin cast for the organization of that body:

The revolution that is taking place in our country is the bourgeois democratic revolution that was achieved over a century ago in other countries, such as France, and we

¹⁴⁸*Claridad*, November 30, 1935.

¹⁴⁹Similarly, Hitler limited his aid to the Nationalists so as not to create a premature European conflagration.

Communists are the front-line fighters in this struggle against the obscurantist forces of the past.

Cease conjuring up the specter of communism, you generals, many times traitors, with the idea of isolating the Spanish people in its magnificent struggle against those who wish to turn Spain into a tragic, backward country, a country in which the military, the clergy, and the political bosses would be the absolute masters of life and property! We Communists are defending a regime of liberty and democracy, and side by side with Republicans, Socialists, and Anarchists we shall prevent Spain from retrogressing, cost what it may.¹⁵⁰

Communists honeycombed the political-military apparatus of Republican Spain. They dominated the ranks of commissars in military units, leaders who were responsible for the education and morale of the troops. Largo Caballero writes that the Commissar "must be the vigilant one, the tutor, the godfather of all combatants regardless of political or union tendencies . . . "¹⁵¹ Despite what Largo Caballero thought at the time, the commissariat became an instrument of the Communists. Marxist scholar E.H. Carr declares:

The corps of commissars became a powerful group, whose influence in military affairs was directed to the management of the army and to the establishment of overall Soviet control. The undivided aim of military efficiency was pursued; this, too, coincided with Soviet and Comintern policy at this time. If any ideology was invoked [having to do with the commissariat], it was that of patriotism and not of revolution.¹⁵²

Communists were the first to get promotions from the ranks; they were the first to receive hospital treatment. Their ranks swelled as they took in naive

¹⁵⁰Cited in Bolloten. *Spanish Civil War*, p. 87.

¹⁵¹Largo Caballero. *Recuerdos*, p. 191.7

¹⁵²E.H. Carr. *The Comintern & The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 29.

recruits who saw only an idealized image of the Soviet Union. (Undeniably, however, it was the Soviet Union of all foreign powers—except Mexico—who showed benevolence towards the Spanish struggle in the form of material aid.)

The source of military aid became the source of administration and ideology, as E.H. Carr writes:

The arrival in Spain of massive Soviet aid, and its dramatic contribution to the defence of Madrid, led to the uncovenanted, and perhaps unforeseen, result of subordinating the policies and contributions of the republic more and more effectively to the influences and directives emanating from Moscow. Strategy and tactics were determined by those who controlled the flow of arms and equipment. Soviet advisors penetrated many institutions of the Spanish government.¹⁵³

The increasing Soviet hegemony angered Largo Caballero. Accordingly he and the Soviets soon had a falling-out. Peter Wyden tells the story:

With Foreign Minister Álvarez del Vayo serving as interpreter, the stubborn Premier conferred daily with the plump, sickly Soviet Ambassador, Marcel Rosenberg. Arguing for hours, they got nowhere. Largo's fundamental sin was not readily remediable: he was running a war that was going badly. When Rosenberg, after two hours of wrangling, threatened to withdraw Soviet aid if the Premier would not fire the Under-Secretary of War, Largo lost his temper and began to shout.

Secretaries gathered outside his office door. The Premier's shouting became louder. The door burst open. Rosenberg bustled out. The Premier stood in front of his desk, arms outstretched, one shaking finger pointing to the door. 'Get out! Get out!' he was yelling in a tremulous voice. 'You will have to learn, Señor Ambassador, that although we Spaniards are very poor and need help from abroad very much, we are too proud to let a foreign ambassador attempt to impose his will on the head of the Government of Spain!'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁵⁴Wyden., *Passionate War*, p. 265.

E.H. Carr writes that "behind its facade the PCE, as the willing instrument of Soviet authority, continued to advance inexorably towards complete control of the supreme organs of the Spanish government, which became what its enemies called it, the puppet of Moscow."¹⁵⁵ Once keyed into what was going on with the Communists, Largo Caballero proclaimed the following at a rally in Valencia:

A whole apparatus has wedged itself between the people and the government, perverting the consciences of many individuals and encouraging the darkest appetites, an apparatus that works consciously or unconsciously—in both ways I believe—against our cause, with the result, as I have already stated, that around the feet of those who should march, and are ready to march at the head of the democratic and working people, serpents of treason, disloyalty, and espionage are coiled.¹⁵⁶

THE MAY EVENTS IN BARCELONA

Catalonia, with its capital, Barcelona, has its own language and had historically been striving for independence from the rest of Spain. In the 1930s it led Spain in industry and in the level of organization of the workers. In 1937 it boasted a state government which was autonomous from the rest of Spain, called the *Generalidad*.

The left coalition which ruled Catalonia consisted of the Anarchist CNT and FAI, the Socialist UGT, the left-wing POUM, and the Communists, the latter organized into the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*, or PSUC. The PSUC was a "communist-controlled merger of four Socialist and

¹⁵⁵E.H. Carr, *The Comintern*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁶Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 361.

communist parties in Catalonia."¹⁵⁷ The PSUC developed along the lines of the PCE in the rest of Spain.

The British writer George Orwell went to Spain where he fought alongside the soldiers of the POUM. He described the tension in Catalonia on the eve of the May Events as follows:

. . . under the seeming gaiety of the streets, with their flower stalls, their many-coloured flags, their propaganda-posters, and thronging crowds, there was an unmistakable and horrible feeling of political rivalry and hatred. People of all shades of opinion were saying forebodingly: 'There's going to be trouble before long.' The danger was quite simple and intelligible. It was the antagonism between those who wished the revolution to go forward and those who wished to check or prevent it—ultimately, between Anarchists and Communists.¹⁵⁸

The spark that led to the explosion of the May events came from a police raid on an Anarchist stronghold, the telephone exchange. On the first of May 1936, which was traditionally a day of celebration on the part of the Left, things were quiet in Barcelona, as the leaders of the UGT and the CNT had agreed that parades would surely lead to armed conflict. On May 2, Prieto called the Generalidad from Valencia, where the Madrid government had moved to escape what was forecast to be the fall of the capital—although it did not fall. The Anarchist telephone operator answered that there was no government in Barcelona, just a 'defense committee.' On the same day, a call from Azaña to Companys, the President of Catalonia, was interrupted by the operator, who said that the telephone lines should be used for more important purposes than discussion between the two leaders. Hugh Thomas

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. xxiv.

¹⁵⁸George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), pp. 117-118.

writes: "The government and the communists had believed for some time that the CNT tapped their calls, which there were in a position to do. Perhaps they just listened. Communists have never liked being eavesdropped upon."¹⁵⁹

At any rate, the next day Barcelona's chief of police (a man of the PSUC) went to the telephone exchange and entered the ground floor backed by three truckloads of assault guards, with the idea in mind of taking over the building. According to the *Generalidad's* laws the Anarchist possession of the telephone exchange was legal. In October 1936 the government of Catalonia legitimized the ownership of large financial concerns by those who occupied them in the first days of the Civil War. The *Telefónica* was originally owned by International Telephone and Telegraph of the United States.

The workers in the telephone exchange saw that the police were breaking the law in a counter-revolutionary fashion. It was thus that the visit from the police was seen as provocation of violence. The Anarchists fired down the stairs at the police, who called for even more back-up. "Within a few hours," writes Thomas, "all the political organizations had brought out their hidden arms and had begun to build barricades. Shop owners hastily shuttered their windows."¹⁶⁰ The telephone exchange held its own.

Before night came on May 2, Barcelona was at battle stations. Thousands of workers left their jobs and armed themselves. Whole workplaces went out to support the Anarchists of the *Telefónica*., and barricades went up all around. Car traffic in the city was fired upon from all

¹⁵⁹Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*. p. 654.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

sides.

Bolloten describes the balance of forces in the conflict:

In a great ring around Barcelona extending from the working-class suburbs to the edge of the commercial and official section of the city, the Anarchosyndicalists were masters of the situation. Inside the business and political enclave of the Barrio Gótico, however, the opposing forces were fairly evenly matched. For example, in the Plaza de Cataluña, the central square, where the Anarchosyndicalists held the *telefónica*, the PSUC [Communist party of Catalonia] was entrenched in its headquarters, the Hotel Colón, which it had sequestered in July, and from whose windows almost the entire square could be swept by machine-gun fire.¹⁶¹

The Anarchists, as Bolloten notes, might have grabbed power in Catalonia, but they did not because they did not believe in taking state power, even if it was taken away from the right people.

What led to the battle between Spanish leftists which erupted here? The fragile balance of power between different left-wing groups in Catalonia came apart. Where would the fighting lead? The crisis was an acid test of the Largo Caballero government. How would he handle it?

As the key matter at hand in Catalanian society was the war, the crisis had its roots in the conflict about the leadership of the army. Bolloten writes:

... while the PSUC pressed for the fusion of the militia into a regular army "in the service of the republican government," the CNT urged that the militia be organized into an army "in the service of the Revolution" and that all positions of command from the war ministry down should be "controlled rigidly by the revolutionary trade-union organizations." There, in a nutshell, lay the irreconcilable conflict between the opposing sides.

In this dispute, the position of the POUM, which had its

¹⁶¹Ibid.

own militia forces, was clear: "The only guarantee that the working class can have as to the fate of the Revolution is its own army. And the army of the working class can be no other than . . . an army recruited from the militia. . . . It is absolutely necessary that control be maintained by the revolutionary organizations. . . . In short, our party declares itself resolutely in favor of a regular army, but of a regular army that is the living expression of the Revolution."¹⁶²

The POUM faced ever increasing pressure in Catalonia from the PSUC, as it did throughout the country from the PCE. The Communists in the end sought after the physical annihilation of the POUM. By May 1, 1937, the Communist campaign against it was in full swing. If the purge trials in the Soviet Union were the expression of Stalin's inhumanity in domestic policy, so was the anti-POUM campaign an expression of that inhumanity in foreign policy. Members of the POUM were subject to kidnapping, torture and murder by Stalinist forces.

Each side of the struggle within Catalonia fought for its own hegemony. The PSUC, like its sister organization the PCE, had many new supporters from the middle class: "They longed for a rapid end to Anarchist power and saw in the dynamic leadership and aggressive policies of the PSUC the only hope of salvaging some of their possessions from the wreckage of the Revolution," states Bolloren.¹⁶³ People afraid of the proletariat found their interests taken up by, of all people, the Communists. Thomas explains:

. . . this was no ordinary communist party. If its propaganda harked back to the Russian revolution, its practice suited, and reflected the desires of, the small shopkeepers, small farmers, taxi drivers, minor officials and junior officers who joined it between July 1936 and the end of the year, without reading much Marx or knowing much of Russia, in the hope of finding

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 418-419.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 415.

protection against anarchism and lawlessness. ¹⁶⁴

In Catalonia as throughout Republican Spain the Communists were experiencing a dizzying rise in power and influence. Thomas points out: "The astonishing, apparently endless series of triumphs since July 1936 of the self-confident Communists seemed to some a sure token that they possessed an elixir for continued success."¹⁶⁵ What was most remarkable about their position was their passionate hatred of the POUM. They were totally uncompromising in their demand that the POUM be smashed. Their strident and violent attacks can be understood as stemming from Stalin's paranoia.

The tremendous momentum of the Communists was resisted by a number of elements on the Left. Thomas says who they were:

Against this new political force [the Communists] was ranged . . . a heterogeneous gathering. There were the left-wing socialists, headed by Largo Caballero, still the Prime Minister, increasingly resentful of communist infiltration into the organs of the state and of communist arrogance. There were some officers and officials, such as General Asensio, who had kept their heads, failed to surrender to the emotions of the mass and were shocked by the communists' cynicism. There were the increasingly isolated revolutionary communists of the POUM . . . and there was the anarchist movement, though this was divided . . . ¹⁶⁶

Bolloten does an admirable capsulization of perspectives on the May Events in Spain and abroad. He writes: "No historical episode has been so diversely reported or defined," and continues:

The Nationalist press almost uniformly described the events as an Anarchist revolt against the Catalan government . . . The

¹⁶⁴Thomas. *Spanish Civil War.* p. 646.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.. p. 647

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

Pensamiento Navarro declared that what had occurred was "a genuine Anarchist revolution," the "last stage of liberalism and democracy." As for the foreign press, Hitler's *Voelkischer Beobachter* and Mussolini's mouthpiece *Il Populo d'Italia* also spoke of an Anarchist uprising as did other prominent foreign newspapers of varying shades of opinion. . . .

Pravda defined the conflict as a "Trotskyist-Fascist putsch" ordered by "Franco and the Italo-German interventionists to distract the attention of Republican Spain from the front" and to "frightened bourgeois circles in England and France with the specter of 'anarchy.'" For its part, *L'Humanité*, the organ of the French Communist party, characterized the events as a "Hitlerite putsh," whose ringleaders had adopted Anarchist slogans and "assured themselves of the assistance of irresponsible elements of the Iberian Anarchist Federation," while the *Daily Worker*, the organ of the American Communist party, reported that "monarchists, as well as fascist supporters of Franco, 'uncontrolled' anarchists and Trotskyists [had taken] part in the attempted uprising."¹⁶⁷

Largo Caballero's treatment of the situation was humane, unimaginative and practical. He did not go along with the Communists and refused to order the persecution of the POUM. He hoped at first that the demonstration of dissent would wear itself out quickly. Four days into the crisis, however, he reacted like a stern father and let the Anarchists know they were not about to overthrow the state. The Catalonian government gave up its treasured autonomy and allowed the Caballero government to send troops. When this was done, the rebellion ran out of steam, so to speak, and the Republic got back to its losing task of fighting Fascism.

THE FALL OF LARGO CABALLERO

One precipitating event to Largo Caballero's downfall was his failure to

¹⁶⁷Bolloten. *Spanish Civil War*. pp. 429-430.

dismiss General José Asencio, who stood in the way of the Communist control of the Commissariat and Communist advances in general. Asencio was attacked early in the war by the Communists, and when Largo Caballero was pressed, instead of dismissing Asencio, he promoted him to undersecretary of War. It was when the Soviet Ambassador said Soviet aid would be cut off if Largo Caballero did not fire Asencio that he threw the Russian out of his office. The other precipitating event leading to Largo Caballero's demise was his unwillingness to attack the POUM and what it stood for. The POUM was like a conscience of the Spanish Left and was appreciated by Largo Caballero, who did not share the cynical views of the PCE, the PSUC and the Soviets.

The May events had touched off a governmental crisis at the highest level. In fact, it was at this point, that Largo Caballero was deposed. How did this happen? Esenwein and Shubert explain:

Because he had refused to act decisively and effectively to put down the rebellion, Largo was vulnerable to the barbed criticisms of the communists and his opponents within the PSOE. When, on 13 May, he pointedly refused to accede to communist demands that the 'renegade' POUM be dissolved, Uribe and Hernández, the two communist ministers, stormed out of his cabinet. . . . In recent months the moderate or *prietista* wing of the socialist movement had coalesced with the left-republicans and the communists, and, by May 1937, the new constellation of anti-Largo forces was powerful enough to depose him. Without the backing he needed to form a new government, Largo was forced to step down from his posts as war minister and premier.¹⁶⁸

Largo Caballero was replaced by the more pliant Socialist Juan Negrín, who stayed in office until the war was almost over in March of 1939.

¹⁶⁸Esenwein and Shubert. *Spain at War*. p. 224.

"Negrín was a cautious administrator . . . a member of the Centre or Right of the PSOE; and this made him an acceptable head of government for the PCE, from whose programme revolutionary elements had been carefully expunged, and which demanded only efficiency in the conduct of the war," writes E.H. Carr.¹⁶⁹

Largo Caballero tried to exercise some influence through the UGT, but was blocked by his opponents. He turned to mass meetings; however, as write Esenwein and Shubert: "Not willing to tolerate Largo's personal campaign against his enemies, the Negrín Popular Front administration placed him under police surveillance and did everything in its power to insure that the querulous socialist leader (and his followers) would be deprived of a public platform."¹⁷⁰ Largo Caballero also lost control over the newspapers that backed him: *Claridad*, *Adelante* and *La Correspondencia de Valencia*.

Largo Caballero's defeat was complete. He writes of his downfall in his memoirs:

From the moment I left the government, Largo Caballero was no longer the same person. He had been transformed. He was no longer a Socialist and even less a Marxist. He was enemy number one of the working class. They called me arrogant, ambitious, intransigent, an Anarchist, and other idiotic names. My photographs dissappeared from everywhere. The idol they had created, they themselves delighted in destroying.¹⁷¹

Enrique Castro, then a member of the Communist party central committee, wrote about Caballero as the campaign to oust him went

¹⁶⁹E.H. Carr. *Comintern*. p. 45.

¹⁷⁰Esenwein and Shubert. *Spain at War*. p. 226.

¹⁷¹Largo Caballero. *Recuerdos*. p. 226.

underway in earnest:

Spain had never witnessed a great political funeral. Now it would. And before very long. Largo Caballero, the politician, had entered his death agony. He was unaware of this, just as he was unaware of many important things during his lifetime. . . . [But] it made his political death the more terrible, a death that would come brutally and and by surprise and in an atmosphere of almost complete political isolation.¹⁷²

How in fact did Largo Caballero feel about his "death"? He took it more or less as a forced retirement. He was not, in a word, neurotic, and he adapted quickly to life out of power, finding the termination of his duties to be something of a relief. He writes in his memoirs:

I returned to my house, at my daughters' side; already I can go about, speak with my friends, freed from the Commissions, telegrams, telephones, proceedings; it seems as if I have been serving a sentence of eight months and ten days and I am now free. I am quite content. At times I think that I must be thankful to my enemies, who have liberated me from a prison. When the ruler takes his obligations seriously, and moreover if his country is caught up in civil war, bloody, ferocious, as it is fought by the fascists, he who governs is not a man as the rest of them, he is a slave, one condemned to forced labor. Believe me, personally I am satisfied with having left the Presidency of the government and Ministry of War.¹⁷³

Toward the end of the war, the Communists were like the cartoon character of a coyote, who in pursuit of a roadrunner, runs off the edge of a cliff. He stands there suspended in space for a moment, before looking down. When he does, he at once plunges into the abyss. What form of government and society could the Communists have created in the event they had won

¹⁷²Cited in Bolloren. *Spanish Civil War*, p. 353.

¹⁷³Largo Caballero. *Recuerdos*, p. 229.

the war? The question is unanswerable—no plans seem to have been made. The only thing certain was that the fall of Largo Caballero left the Communists in control of only an empty shell of a moribund Republican Spain, and they had nowhere to go but down.

LARGO CABALLERO'S ODYSSEY

In hope of finding a safe haven, Largo Caballero left Spain in 1939 to go to France. This safety proved to be short lived, as he was in Paris when the Nazis took over France in 1940. He fled Paris along with a great exodus of Parisians trying to escape Nazi persecution. That was the beginning of a series of events in which Largo Caballero was to be sent here and there around France and finally into the hands of the Gestapo and into a concentration camp in Germany. "I am not a Ulysses," he writes, "but I was also going to live my Odyssey."¹⁷⁴

Largo Caballero fled north to Albi with two of his daughters and his sister-in-law. In Albi they had friends, and he hoped once there to make a plan to get out of France. He writes:

The exodus was horrible. The highways were blocked with thousands of evacuees from Paris and the towns that surround it. Men, women, children, old people, on foot, in cars, on bicycles, in carts and on horseback, passing without stopping before our view all day and night; one's heart dropped in contemplating that crowd, that like the people of Israel, but without Moses, went in search of the place of their salvation.¹⁷⁵

Trains were not running, but Largo Caballero managed to requisition a truck

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 267.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 267-268

and some gasoline for his people and a number of others. They went from town to town, at one place even being refused entrance; at others, finding no trains. They finally found the train to Albi at Anguleme, from where it ran amidst great confusion and discomfort for the passengers. Says Largo Caballero: "We had taken five days from Paris to Albi. In all of that time we had scarcely eaten or slept. It was a good test of strength for one who was seventy-one years of age."¹⁷⁶

Once in Albi, Largo Caballero registered with the authorities in order to save his companions and friends any difficulties with the law. After he did that, the prefect told him he had twenty-four hours to get thirty kilometers away from Albi. He found a place with a French family in a village at the requisite distance. Once there, to make matters worse, Largo Caballero fell into the cellar and broke his collarbone.

One night in November, 1941, at two a.m., two inspectors accompanied by four gendarmes came to the door where Largo Caballero was staying and told him to accompany them to Albi. Largo Caballero's daughters and sister-in-law panicked, thinking he was going to be sent to Spain, where he would face death at the hands of the Franco government. However, he was taken to a clinic where he shared a room with a policeman, who was there, supposedly, for his protection. He was treated for arteriosclerosis, an illness that was to stay with him. When Largo Caballero protested being held there, he was told he was better off than he would be in a concentration camp. His plea to see his family, however, was honored.

He was soon summoned to leave Albi for points unknown. A police

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 271.

investigator took him to the station and said "I hope you go content to where you are going"—"How cynical," notes Largo Caballero.¹⁷⁷ After various stops along the way he wound up in Croq, the coldest city in France. There he was detained in an hotel, and was instructed there was not to be communication between him and residents of the town, in which there were a number of Spaniards.

When he went out for a walk, he was accompanied by policemen on either side of him. On occasion he was allowed to walk in the countryside, and once when he did that he encountered the Mayor of Croq, who greeted him and said apologetically that he only kept from conversing with him because of the government ban and the trouble it would cause both of them.

Meanwhile, in the cold his feet were bad again—his daughter Carmen acted as nurse.

Largo Caballero corresponded with the United States Embassy and got their agreement for him to get a visa to enter the United States. They just needed authorization for him to leave France. He made a number of attempts to get that authorization but he could not. Finally, two policemen came to his hotel with an order that he be taken to the Procurator General of the Republic for the disposition of his case. Again, the women were greatly alarmed.

Largo Caballero asked himself "When was the cruelty going to stop? It still was not enough?" He continues, "Since the year 1909—thirty years!—I had not seen myself free of the claws of police and tribunals, and all of that for the *crime* of having Socialist ideals. Is it that one cannot have ideals? Well,

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 275.

then, they can make us all idiots by decree or sterilize our brains!"¹⁷⁸ Largo Caballero was taken to a jail with execrable conditions, awaiting a hearing. He became aware that the hearing was prompted by the Spanish government, asking for his extradition. The grounds for the request were charges of "propaganda of robbery and crime." The French court found him not to be deportable, however.

Despite the bad situation he was in, Largo Caballero still expected to be set free. Instead, two investigators came to take him to prison. They told him he would be held because he was a danger to the State. He now recognized: "The protection was over! The French government, from being a *protected* person transformed me into a supposed enemy of the State."¹⁷⁹

He went to an administrative holding facility in Vals, where there were various foreigners and French who were against the government, but no criminals. Conditions were healthy—the food was decent and prisoners had access to newspapers and books. The prison was a former hotel. Largo Caballero writes, however: "Notwithstanding the advantages over regular prisons, no one wanted to be there; all of us wanted freedom."¹⁸⁰ He wrote a letter to the Vichy government, which was delivered by the chief of the prison, demanding a trial or to be released. He was, in fact, set free and sent to Nyons, where he was told to stay put until the government was disposed to let him leave France. Once in Nyons, Largo Caballero was introduced to the Sub-prefect, the Mayor and the police. It was again ruled that he was not to communicate with Spaniards in the town.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.. p. 277.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.. p. 278.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.. p. 280.

Permission to leave was given to Largo Caballero's daughters and sister-in-law, but was not given to Largo Caballero himself. Isabel got married in France and then went with her husband to Mexico. Carmen and her aunt stayed to look after Largo Caballero. Of Carmen he writes that "her youth and my old age are a tragedy."¹⁸¹

On the 19 of February 1943 the Chief of the Italian police and two Gestapo agents appeared at Largo Caballero's door. Again, the two women with him thought he was going to be sent back to die in Spain and burst out in tears. He was roughed up and shoved into a car. As they went, he had no idea where they were going. They wound up in Lyons, at the Hotel Terminus, headquarters of the Gestapo. He recalls his interrogation as follows:

- Are you Francisco Largo Caballero?
- Yes.
- Have you been Minister in Spain?
- Yes. Minister of Labor, of War, and President of the Council.
- Are you a red?
- I am Spanish!
- But red?
- I am Spanish!
- Are you against Franco?
- It is Franco who is against me.¹⁸²

Largo Caballero was soon taken by train to Paris, to the hotel where the Gestapo had its headquarters for all of France. In the hotel were cells, and there he was kept incommunicado for five months. He surmised that he was not sent to Spain because his death there would cause an uproar. In fact, when his death was wrongly reported at one point, people and governments

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 284

all over the world were alarmed and expressed their indignation. On the other hand, he could not be allowed by the Fascists to maintain communication with Spaniards, lest he would make a move against Franco. He was allowed to correspond with his daughter Carmen, but his letters to her were re-mailed from Lyon, giving the impression that was his location and not Paris.

Largo Caballero's terrible journey was soon to come to an end. Finally, he was taken from Paris to Berlin. He was taken to the central offices of the Gestapo, where there was a jail cell for him in the basement. He went through his dossier with the Commandant and was shocked by the amount of what we now call disinformation. Then, abruptly one morning he was taken to a car and delivered two hours away to the concentration camp at Oranienberg.

At the final point of his odyssey, in Oranienberg, Largo Caballero spent nearly two years. Conditions there were a hell on earth, but he managed to maintain his dignity—an incredible achievement. After liberation in 1945 he returned to Paris. His arteriosclerosis worsened and he had a leg amputated. In the last year of his life he wrote his life story from memory. He died in late 1946 at the age of seventy-seven.

CONCLUSION—THE SPANISH LENIN

Francisco Largo Caballero was a man of the masses, but he was not a caudillo. He was not silver-tongued; however his work spoke volumes. He had honesty and integrity and was not self-assuming. He always believed his leadership position was earned by years of dogged efforts to build the UGT and the PSOE. It was conscientiousness that took him to the top.

In the January, 1936 issue of his journal *Leviatán*, Largo Caballero's close advisor and friend Luis Araquistáin wrote about leadership from two points of view: the bourgeois and the proletarian. He philosophizes:

... The idea of the responsibility of the individual was never as clear and as urgent as it is today in the the period of the greatest development of the interpretation of History, which is a natural reflection of the modern bourgeois ideology.

Facing this interpretation, the contrary view has arisen, which is that of the proletariat. According to that, it is not the great man, but the great social masses who make history. This theory, created principally by Marx and Engels, does not deny the necessity or importance of eminent personalities; but, far from considering them as efficient or originative of history, only sees in them products or effects of history itself.¹⁸³

Largo Caballero's radicalization was a lifelong process—something he continuously underwent from childhood to the grave. He represented the workers on every level: from bread-and-butter unionism, to the political representation, to revolutionary leadership. Ultimately his political destruction prefaced the destruction of the Republic.

Largo Caballero was known as the Spanish Lenin. Yet the differences between Lenin and Largo Caballero are marked. Lenin was born a petite

¹⁸³Luis Araquistáin. "Largo Caballero ante los jueces" in *Leviatán* (Madrid) No. 20. p. 12.

bourgeois; Largo Caballero was born a worker. Lenin was a philosopher and author of many erudite texts. Largo Caballero did not read widely and wrote little more than his speeches and memoirs. Lenin's Russia was falling apart around him as his revolution advanced—Largo Caballero faced a strong right-wing military, a powerful church and a strong capitalist class. These are dramatic distinctions. Even if the comparison is not very accurate, however, the feeling the Spanish masses had for Largo Caballero meant they intuitively chose to name him after the greatest of twentieth century revolutionaries. Thus did Largo Caballero carry with him the image of the Spanish Lenin.

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