

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION, 1931-1939

September, 1974

five classes

The following five-class series is based on the Pathfinder Press books, The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39 by Leon Trotsky (\$3.95) and Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain (including The Civil War in Spain) by Felix Morrow (\$2.95). Extensive readings from both books are included in the required readings. Trotsky's writings concentrate on the key political lessons to be drawn from the events while Morrow's book provides a historical account of the rise and defeat of the revolution.

Class 1. Spain on the Eve of the Republic

Required Readings: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: "Introduction," by Les Evans, pp. 21-48; "Revolution in Spain," pp. 67-88; From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain: pp. 3-7

Supplementary Reading: The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: All of Part I not assigned above; The Trotsky-Nin Correspondence, pp. 369-400

Questions

1. In what ways was Spanish society permeated with semifeudal relations? What was the relation of the Spanish bourgeoisie to these semi-feudal institutions? How could semi-feudal relations be uprooted?
2. What were the tasks of the Spanish revolution in 1931? What conditions accounted for the weight of democratic demands in the Spanish revolution? Why did Trotsky emphasize the call for a constituent cortes (parliament)?
3. The policy of the Comintern on the eve of the republic was "third period" ultraleftism. In what ways did that policy affect Spain? How did the ILO characterize the Comintern at that time? When and in what way was this characterization changed?
4. Since the CP in Spain was small in numbers and limited in influence, what was to be gained by orienting toward it, as Trotsky insisted? Why couldn't the CP be discounted as irrelevant? What policy was followed by Andres Nin on this question?
5. Why did Trotsky raise the demand for the formation of "juntas" in Spain? What role could they play? Why was it incorrect to argue that such Soviet-type formations could only be called for in order to organize the insurrection?
6. What was anarcho-sindicalism? What was its fundamental weakness? What trends did it divide into in the course of the revolution? Why did Trotsky stress the importance of reaching the anarchist workers and how did he propose to do this?

7. The years 1931-35 were critical ones for the development of the Spanish revolution. What steps should a revolutionary party have taken to increase its numbers, strength, and influence in these years? How did the grouping of Left Communists around Andres Nin respond to this challenge?

8. What was the progressive character of Catalonian nationalism according to Trotsky? What did Trotsky advise the Spanish Communists to do in relation to the national question in Catalonia? Why was support for self-determination for Catalonia consistent, in Trotsky's view, with opposition to the "Balkanization" of Spain?

9. Trotsky often criticized Nin's indifference to international questions and his reluctance to involve his members in discussions in the international movement. What was the importance of these failings? How did they indicate an underestimation by Nin of the political basis of building a revolutionary movement? How was this underestimation reflected in Nin's attitude to Maurin's Catalonian Federation?

Class 2. Republican Spain through the Period of Reaction (Bienio Negro)

Required Readings: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: "The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It," pp. 111-134; "The Catalan Federation and Its Program," pp. 135-138; "The Spanish Kornilovs and the Spanish Stalinists," pp. 181-186; From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain: pp. 8-32

Supplementary Reading: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: All of Part II not assigned above up to page 207

Questions

1. What was the class character of the republican government established in April 1931? What forces participated in it?
2. What were the inadequacies of the program proposed by Pravda for the Spanish revolution?
3. Why did Trotsky view it as vital for revolutionists to have an orientation toward the Cortes (parliament)? How did the masses view the Cortes? Was the importance of the call for a "constituent cortes" decreased by the "peaceful" triumph of the republic? Why was it incorrect to counterpose the demand for Soviets to the demand for a constituent cortes or other democratic demands?
4. What was Trotsky's attitude to the struggle to make the bourgeois elections more democratic? Why did he hold that such struggles could be used to prepare the revolution? Why would a call for

boycotting the June 1931 parliamentary elections have been a mistake? Why was such a call correct under the previous regime of Berenger?

5. Why did Trotsky view the Stalinist policy as an adaptation to the "anti-parliamentary cretinism" of the anarchists? What were the dangers in such an adaptation?

6. What were the differences and similarities between the rise of the republic in Spain and in Russia in 1917? How did Trotsky think the differences would affect the pace of events? In what ways should the similarities have guided the choice of slogans and the overall strategy?

7. What was Trotsky's criticism of the Stalinist approach to the demand for the arming of the masses? Was readiness to call for armed struggle the dividing line that separated revolutionists from reformists during this period in Spain? What were the dividing lines?

8. Discuss the application of the theory of permanent revolution to Spain. How did the Stalinist theory of a "workers and peasants revolution" differ from it? How could this theory lead to both opportunist and adventurist mistakes?

9. Why was the April regime inherently unstable? Why did the bourgeoisie drive the Socialists out of the government in late 1933? What does this indicate about the reasons for bringing them into the government? How did the role of the Socialists make possible the "bienio negro," the rise of reaction after Autumn 1933?

10. What did Trotsky mean by referring to the possibility of a July Days in the Spanish revolution? What was the correct approach for a revolutionary party to take in the face of such a situation in contrast to reformist or ultraleft approaches?

11. What contradictions in the Third Period policies of the CP -- notably the theory of "social fascism" -- were reflected in its reaction to the attempted pro-monarchist coup in 1932? How did its reaction reveal the possibility for "third period" politics to become transformed into "popular front" politics?

12. What was wrong with Andres Nin's attitude toward the developing left wing in the Socialist Party and its youth? What underlay this attitude? What were its consequences?

13. Why did Trotsky call the platform of the Catalan Federation "pure Kuomintangism transplanted to Spanish soil"? What was the significance of Nin's decision to unify his Left Communists with

the Catalan Federation? Why was this unification unprincipled in contrast to, for instance, American Trotskyists' fusion with the Mustelites?

Class 3, The Popular Front in Power

Required Reading: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: Preface to Part II, pp. 101-102; "The Treachery of the POUM" pp. 207-211; "The POUM and the Popular Front," pp. 218-221; From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain, pp. 33-48, 112-120
Supplementary Reading: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain, pp. 72-129

Questions

1. What are the essential characteristics of a "popular front"? What is the difference between a "popular front" and a united front? Between a workers and peasants government and a "popular front" government? Under what circumstances does a "popular front" government usually arise? What purpose does a "popular front" government serve for the bourgeoisie?

2. What were the international factors behind the Comintern's change in policy in 1935?

3. What parties made up the Popular Front electoral coalition in February 1936? What parties were represented in Azana's cabinet? Why was the Popular Front government incapable of solving the social crisis?

4. What was the program of the Popular Front on the agrarian question? On workers' control of industry? On the right to strike? On self-determination for Catalonia and Morocco? On unemployment relief? On the separation of church and state? On free press and the right of assembly?

5. What was Azana's policy toward the officer corps? What effect did it have on the ability of the fascists to stage an insurrection? What would a revolutionary alternative to Azana's policy toward the army have consisted of?

6. What role did the Popular Front government play in the strike wave? How did it react to the preparations for a fascist assault?

7. Why did the overwhelming majority of the bourgeoisie opt for fascism? How does fascism differ from other repressive regimes like military dictatorships? In what way did the advent of the republic exacerbate the difficulties of Spanish capitalism? Why didn't the military try to crush the wave of general strikes by more conventional repressive means?

8. What did the bourgeoisie's efforts to get the Socialist Party leader Prieto to become Prime Minister signify? Why was the failure to accomplish

this followed by the fascist uprising?

9. What would have been a revolutionary policy toward the Popular Front government? What lessons can be learned from the policies of the Bolsheviks in 1917 toward the provisional government? How did these policies affect the course of the Russian revolution?

10. Why did the POUM leaders sign the Popular Front agreement and give support to its candidates? What was wrong with its excuses for this action? Why did Trotsky regard this act as a betrayal? Why are such actions a violation of principle rather than a matter of tactics?

Class 4. From the Workers Uprising to the Revival of the Bourgeois States

Required Reading: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: "The Popular Front in Civil War," pp. 229-230; "The Lesson of Spain," pp. 234-239; "Interview with Havas," pp. 242-244; "A Strategy for Victory," pp. 244-245; "Is Victory Possible in Spain?" pp. 256-263; From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain, pp. 48-62, 106-111, 121-164

Supplementary Reading: The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: All of Part III not assigned elsewhere

Questions

1. What was the response of the government to the fascist uprising? What prevented the victory of the fascists in the first days? What sparked the proletarian upheaval?

2. In what ways did the defense of Madrid represent a vindication of revolutionary-political methods of struggle? Why were these methods applied in a Stalinist stronghold? Why were they not used everywhere to halt the fascist advance?

3. Why was it correct to "fight hand in hand" with the popular front parties against Franco's assault? To do this, was it necessary to give political support to the government? The Stalinists argued that the menace of Franco required a political alliance with the bourgeoisie in the Popular Front. How did the Bolsheviks in Russia deal with an analogous danger (the Kornilov uprising)? What were the differences between their policy in 1917 and that of the Stalinists in 1936?

4. What was wrong with the slogan, "First we defeat Franco, then we make the revolution"? Why was the victory over fascism inseparable from revolutionary measures? Why did Trotsky predict that the victory of the republican camp would be the prelude to a new civil war if the bourgeoisie still ruled?

5. What are the political conditions for a victory in a civil war against bourgeois reaction? What is the relative weight of political and military factors in determining the outcome? In what ways would a revolutionary program and a workers government have proved a powerful weapon in the civil war? How would it have affected the Spanish workers and peasants? Franco's troops? The world working class?

6. What is dual power? Why is it a short-lived phenomenon? What was the form of "dual power" that sprang up immediately after the insurrection? Why didn't the 1936 dual power lead to an actual seizure of power and the creation of a workers government? Why was dual power so much stronger in Catalonia than elsewhere? How would a revolutionary party have approached the organs of dual power? What was the policy of the POUM?

7. Why did the bourgeoisie suddenly invite the workers' parties into the government after the workers' insurrection?

8. What was wrong with the action of the POUM in joining the Catalan government? What negative effect did this have on the building of Soviets? Workers militias? On the class independence of the workers and peasants? How did this action disorient the workers' movement and mislead their struggle?

9. How and why did the anarchists end up in the camp of the bourgeois regime against the revolution? What was the relationship between this outcome and anarchism's traditional rejection of state and governmental organization? Why was the Spanish revolution a decisive historical test for anarchist theories and organizations?

10. What was the attitude of Trotsky toward the POUM before it endorsed the Popular Front? Before it joined the Catalonian bourgeois government? How did his attitude change after this?

Class 5. The May Days in Barcelona and the Decline of the Republic

Required Reading: From The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39: "Insurrection in Barcelona," pp. 264-267; "A Test of Ideas and Individuals...", pp. 269-281; "The Lessons of Spain -- The Last Warning," pp. 306-326; "The Culpability of Left Centrism," pp. 342-346; "The Class, the Party, and the Leadership," pp. 353-366; From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain, pp. 165-203
Supplementary Reading: From Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain, pp. 204-251

Questions

1. What arguments did the anarchists put forth for refusing to take power in Barcelona in May 1937? Was their analogy with the July Days in Petrograd a valid justification for this course? Why not?

2. How would you answer the argument that the proletarian revolution in Barcelona was a mistake because it threatened to create civil war within the republican camp? Why would the seizure of power by the workers in Barcelona have strengthened the anti-fascist struggle?

3. How did Trotsky predict that the POUM would function in the Barcelona uprising? How did it function in reality? How did the POUM's behavior in the May Days facilitate the Stalinist repression of the POUM? What is wrong with the argument that any party was bound to be taken unawares by such a mass upheaval?

4. Why did the Stalinists supersede the social-democrats and anarchists in influence? What role was played by Soviet arms deals in this process? What role was played by political factors?

5. Why did Trotsky say that only the shadow of the bourgeoisie -- its attorneys, and not the bourgeoisie itself -- remained with the Republican government? Why doesn't this contradict designating it as a "popular front" coalition? Did this occur because the bourgeoisie found the Popular Front too radical? How was bourgeois rule preserved under these circumstances?

6. Why couldn't the imperialist "democracies" be counted on to intervene on behalf of the Republican government in an effort to weaken Hitler and Mussolini?

7. What accounts for the similarity in means between the fascists and the republican government? Why did the social-democrats and anarchists tolerate such measures for so long?

8. What was the significance of the fall of Barcelona to the fascists without a fight? What produced an outcome in such sharp contrast to the role of Barcelona before the May Days?

9. Why is it inadequate to attribute the defeat of the Spanish revolution to the perfidy of the imperialists? To the intervention of Hitler and Mussolini? To the "apathy" of the world working class?

10. What was the relationship between the actions of the proletariat and the course of its leaderships during the revolution? Were they in consonance or in conflict? Can the defeat of the revolution be explained by the "immaturity" of the proletariat? Why is it impossible for the masses in the midst of a revolutionary upheaval to spontaneously create a new leadership? What were the central tasks of revolutionists in such a situation? How did the role of leadership and masses in the Spanish revolution compare with the role of leadership and masses in the Russian revolution?

11. What is centrism? How did the POUM fit that description? Despite its leftist program and its willingness to sacrifice in the struggle against fascism, why was it correct to regard the POUM as the central obstacle to the solution of the crisis of leadership in Spain?

12. Discuss Trotsky's statement that the question of the Popular Front is "the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch." Why was this the case? How important is this question today?