

Spain: The continuing revolution

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1975

For the first time since I got here, people are openly and seriously comparing this to the pre-Civil War situation in 1936.

–Basque Diplomat, October 1975

For 36 years now, Generalissimo Francisco Franco has been ruling Spain through iron-fisted repression and the executions of thousands of Spanish workers and peasants. But last month the senile dictator may have signed his regime's death warrant with the executions of five revolutionaries.

At 4 o'clock on the morning of September 27, 1975 Juan Paredes Manotas, Angel Oteagui Echevarria (both members of the Basque separatist organization Euzkadi ta Azkatasuna–Home and Liberty), Ramon Garcia Saenz, Jose Luise Sanchez Bravo and Jose Francisco Baena Alonso (members of the Revolutionary Patriotic Anti-Fascist Front–FRAP), were shot to death at close range; an act that drove yet another nail in the coffin of the present government of Premier Carlos Arias Naverro. (The usual method employed in the executions of communists and anarchists is that of the garrott. Typical of the mindless liberalism of the coverage afforded events in Spain by the 'above ground' press in this country, editorial writer Edwin McDowell writing in an October issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, states that the use of the firing squad instead of the "traditional garrott—is regarded as a compromise..." on Franco's part and implies that the Spanish 'left' should be thankful for his generosity instead of participating in "mindless violence".)

During the trial of the five and after their executions, waves of general strikes spread throughout Spain with mass demonstrations of up to 130,000 people in the Basque land.

Although the strikes are primarily a demonstration of solidarity with the five militants, they are also part of a greater militancy of the working class. For the past six years strikes of this type have rocked the foundations of the Franco regime from one end of Spain to the other.

From 1960 to 1965, under the government of the Opus Dei (Work of God—a semi-secret conservative religious organization), the Spanish bourgeoisie enjoyed an economic growth rate of about 8.6% annually, higher than any other Western European country. But by 1974 Spain's production had dropped drastically, with an inflation rate running around 20%.

Like those of Japan, the then fastest growing nation in the "free world", Spain's industries, fueled by large post war growth, were geared for an ever expanding production rate. When the same economic crisis which the rest of Europe in the late '60s started to effect Spain, its industry and government were unable to rectify the situation. C.G., writing in *Internationalism* No. 6, points out that:

Like most economies which have grown too quickly, the Spanish economy-feels the crisis the hardest inasmuch as it has not had time to set up the administrative, financial and commercial structures capable of softening the impact of the crisis, and to the extent that most of its capital comes from foreign countries which are eager to withdraw it when things go badly.

–"Spain: The Manoeuvres of Capital and Combativity of the Workers."

Rise of the Opus Dei

For nineteen years after the terrible defeat of the Republic in 1936, the Falange (the fascist party, then Spain's only legal party) dominated the working class by the use of a system of *sindicatos verticales* (vertical syndicates, like those imposed on the workers in Germany and Italy during the '30s and '40s). While wages were set by the government and labor conditions determined by the boss, it became the main function of the *sindicatos* to police the workers and to 'keep them in line' by the use of thuggery and imprisonment. In the first half of the '40s, tens of thousands of militants and union leaders were killed and hundreds of thousands of workers sentenced to life in prisons and concentration camps. By 1942 there were an estimated 240,000 Republicans and sympathisers imprisoned and waiting execution.

During the reign of the Falange, Spain's economic growth was next to nothing, and the party's methods of dealing with the workers were nothing short of barbaric. Under such pressures the workers fought back in the only ways they could, sabotage and 'go slow' tactics. But by 1958 the Opus Dei had elevated its members to key-positions in the government and left the Falange with control only of the *sindicatos*. Within the next decade even that last hold on authority all but slipped from the fascist's hands, squelching any hopes they had of becoming the power in Spain.

The Opus Dei was largely made up of technocrats who brought the image of modernity with them to the economic and technological affairs of the country. With the changes that the OD brought about—a new constitution, relaxing of the press laws and that American invention 'collective bargaining'—the mirage of the 'age of Spanish liberalism' was cast upon the world.

In reality they were liberal in the least sense and had only replaced the barbaric methods of their predecessors with the more sophisticated repression of modern capitalism.

As Jean Monds explains in *Radical America* Vol.9, No.2:

The Collective Bargaining Law was intended to be the 'liberal' answer to the fascist administrative mechanisms of the regulation of the labor market by state decree. The word liberal is used here in its classic economic sense. The technocratic government, (who were 'liberal' in no other sense), hoped that by leaving workers and employers free to haggle over the terms of employment free from the intervention of the *sindicatos verticales*, they would thereby free the 'invisible hand' to achieve a more perfect allocation of resources in production. This in turn would lead to higher profits and economic growth.

–“Syndicalism and Revolution in Spain: The Workers Commissions”

Although great strides in so-called “progress” were made through collective bargaining, the one thing the OD did not expect was the setting up of “workers committees” by the factory workers themselves to put pressure on the *sindicatos* and the management for the benefit of the workers.

The committees applied pressure by staging lightning strikes and boycotts of such government services as transportation and factory cafeterias. (Actions like these were and are considered political demonstrations and thus grossly illegal. They are “dealt with” accordingly.)

To counter act the committees and rob them of their energy, the Falange, in 1963, announced “truly free and open” elections for representative positions in the *sindicatos verticales*. Jean Monds writes:

Filling such positions at any level higher than that of the factory meant very little in real terms of course, since at every stage the appointed bureaucrats could over rule the 'freely elected' ones.

–“Syndicalism and Revolution in Spain: The Workers Commissions”

By 1966 the Spanish Communist Party, (PCE), wearing the shirt of reformism, called upon the workers to participate in the elections and leave the bargaining to the 'specialists'. Thus the PCE's idea of bringing an end to “fascism” and “dictatorship” by the use of “peaceful and democratic means”, as it had done in the now fascist Chile, was put into action.

In January 1966, under the pressure of a faltering economy and the threats of more strikes, the Opus Dei declared a “state of siege” and imposed marshal law in the industrial area of Catalonia. By taking up the invitation of the Communist Party and participating in the elections of the sindicatos verticales, leading militant workers had made themselves accessible to the Guardia Civil and were systematically arrested and deported to obscure regions in Spain.

Since then the workers have fought back with more determination and more militancy. In 1970 there were four times as many strikes as in '69, with thousands of workers taking to the streets in support of five Basques who were on trial in December.

Once again, many of these demonstrations were put down by police shooting into the crowds. In 1971 in the city of Barcelona, workers struck and occupied the factories of Spain’s largest automobile manufacturer SEAT. When police were sent in to re-take the factories, a pitched battle broke out and several workers were killed.

Spain Today

Because of the Opus Dei’s inability to contain the actions of the workers and to pull Spain out of its economic troubles, they are no longer useful to Franco. One by one they have been removed from office, leaving only the Generalissimo to command a sinking ship.

At this time there are three political organizations which are vying for the successorship to Franco. They are:

(1) The current government of Carlos Arias Navarro, responsible for the recent crackdown on “violence” and “terrorism” by the use of the official violence and terrorism of the police, which is at the same time warning right-wing extremists of being “bound to the old ways.” The Navarro government is disliked by both the left and right, with the petit-bourgeoisie calling for their resignation.

(2) The Junta Democratica de Espana (Democratic Council of Spain–JDE). The junta was formed in the middle of 1974 by Santiago Carrillo, head of the Spanish Communist Party and Calvo Serrer, one time Opus Dei politician and close friend of Don Juan (father of Prince Juan Carlos de Borbon y Borbon, internationally-known dolt and heir to Franco’s kingdom). Members and supporters of the JDE include dissident monarchists, “liberal” industrialists, the “left-wing” of the Opus Dei and a whole hodge-podge of petit-bourgeois parties.

In fact the only groups that are excluded from the junta are the Spanish government itself and the so-called “extreme-right” of the Falange. As if the Spanish CP’s counter-revolutionary activity weren’t transparent enough, Carrillo was recently quoted as stating that: “Today, the question which is posed in an immediate way for all Spaniards is not the establishment of a socialist government or even a left government; it is the establishment of a government of national reconciliation.” (Paris, 6/23/74)

(3) The “centrists,” which includes the Monarchists, Christian Democrats and Social Democrats; and is the counter-part to the CPE’s “Democratic Junta.” Franco’s old minister, Ruiz Jimenez, plays an important role in this group.

The Spanish bourgeoisie, afraid of a workers’ revolution and realizing that Juan Carlos is incapable of running the country, are looking for some form of social democratic party to run the country and still keep their power intact. (As in Italy, the Communist Party is bending over backwards to get this job.) Meanwhile the petit-bourgeoisie are calling for the Armed Forces to take over, but while Franco still lives, the military sits tight. (In October 1975 Franco announced that he had caught wind of plans for a military coup, thus justifying a purge of younger officers in the Armed Forces, leaving the older, more reactionary ones in control.)

But with the national and international turmoil caused by the executions in September, along with the imminent death of Franco, the possibilities of anything like peaceful transition of power from fascism to a so-called democratic regime grow less and less with each passing day.

The working class with their militancy towards the hated Franco regime and their non-support of the CPE raise again the hopes for a new revolution, a revolution dominated not by professional parties or organizations, but by the workers themselves. The memories of betrayal by “left” politicians during the civil war are many and bitter among Spanish workers today and they won’t be fooled again.

Solidaridad y Revolucion.

see also:

Los Quijotes: Anarchist Youth Group, Spain, 1937
and
News of the Spanish Revolution: Anti-authoritarian Perspectives on the Events

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Fifth Estate #267, November, 1975

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