

Notes on the Death of Franco (Part II)

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In Part I of Notes on the Death of Franco, the historic rise of fascism under Franco was outlined. Part II analyzes modern Spain and the state of the revolutionary movement today.

Spain alone carried the classical tradition well into our own century. Here, every classical working class Movement, indeed, almost every revolutionary sect, played out its programmatic role with guns in hand. Each exhibited its possibilities and limitations within the traditional framework that had been created by the 1840s. With the collapse of the Spanish revolution a full history of proletarian socialism—whether syndicalist or Marxist, libertarian or authoritarian—came to an end.

As in France, modern industry with its concomitant shifts in population from the countryside to the cities, its reformist working class, its merger with the state, its use of economic controls, its fostering of a technocratic sensibility and hierarchical mentality, and its wide commercial base—all have combined to change Spain more profoundly in the past decade than in the past century.

The extent of these changes can be 'measured by the occupational shifts within the Spanish population itself. Spain, as seen through the picaresque novels of its traditional authors or the hazy eyes of romantic tourists, has long been categorized as a hopelessly pre-industrial nation, almost as though a traditional national temperament could perpetually surmount fundamental economic realities. This vision might have had some validity as recently as 1960, when agriculture was still the country's major activity, embracing nearly 42 percent of the population. Within a mere span of twelve years, the shift from rural to urban occupations has been spectacular. By 1972, only 27 percent of the Spanish people were involved in agriculture and the trend is still downward.

By far the overwhelming majority of Spaniards are now engaged in industrial production, construction, service activities, managerial tasks, professional work, commerce, and governmental responsibilities. The gross national product has been increasing at a rate of about seven to eight percent annually. Foreign investment in Spain is enormous.



Graphic by Munrós

Despite the recent economic slump which reduced the labor force in the American auto industry by one-third, Ford continued to invest some \$350 million in its installations in Spain. As one State Department official recently observed: "Spain is now one of the most heavily industrialized nations in the world."

The shift in Spain from agriculture to industry and commerce has created an entirely new constellation of social forces with new political, cultural, and temperamental realities. Spain now possesses a substantial managerial class, more American in its outlook than Hispanic. The *abricijo* is giving way to the handshake; the *siesta* to the luncheon.

Surrounding this managerial class is a supportive army of salesmen, technicians, statistical analysts; advertising legmen, accountants, bookkeepers, secretaries, typists, receptionists, and clerks—all oriented toward the Spanish version of the "American dream" of upward mobility and suburban amenities. The susceptibility of this sector to social radicalism is likely to be minimal, if non-existent; it is liberal at best and by no means totally bereft of authoritarian proclivities. It may desire a more democratic form of government in which to voice its interests, but certainly one that is moderate, prudent, and well-tamed.

Such a sector did not exist on a large scale in the thirties. As a sizable part of the urban population, it is the most significant buffer to "extremism." The new managerial class and the aspirants that follow in its wake form the mass base for a constitutional monarchy or a republic and would in themselves be sufficient to cushion the shockwaves that plunged Spain into social revolution forty years ago.

More enigmatic than the managerial sector is the Spanish working class—the class that still forms the great hope of the thirties' generation on both sides of the Pyrenees. Except for the Basque region, it would have been difficult by present-day standards to regard this class as fully industrialized forty years ago. In Barcelona, the textile workers who were to fill the ranks of the CNT were largely employed in shops of less than a hundred workers owned as family concerns.

Often, the most radical of these workers were of recent rural backgrounds, at most a generation removed from a peasant or craftsman status. A marked tension between the intimacy of the *pueblo* and the anonymity of the city, between work regulated by the seasons and work regulated by the clock, exacerbated the ubiquitous material misery that burdened Spanish life and evoked a fiery, intensely libertarian response.

Not surprisingly, Madrid, a city composed of bureaucrats, retailers, and craftsmen had a predominantly Socialist "proletariat." The construction workers in the capital were mainly anarcho-syndicalists. The Barcelona workers, on the other hand, were mainly anarcho-syndicalists; the more privileged railroad workers and the skilled machinists in the repair shops tended even in Catalonia toward the Socialists. One could clearly delineate between a hereditary proletariat and a transitional one—the former drifting into Socialist unions, the latter into anarcho-syndicalist ones.

The Spanish workers of the seventies are increasingly the creatures of multinational corporations—in part, too, emigre workers who have been employed by giant industrial enterprises in France and Germany. Despite the arduous nature of their work and the comparatively low wages they earn, they are in a very significant sense a part of the industrial bureaucracy of modern-day capitalism.

Unlike the old patronal system which imparted a "face" and a certain comprehensibility to Spanish capitalism, the modern corporate structure is anonymous and totally bereft of human scale. To the Barcelona workers of the thirties, "collectivization" with its concomitant system of self-management at the base of the economy had an authentically personal character.

The popularity of anarcho-syndicalist doctrines stemmed in no small measure from its tangibility and relationship to everyday experience at the workplace. The Barcelona workers of the seventies, by contrast, live in a comparatively atomized world of industrial gigantism where "nationalization" is likely to seem more "realistic" and the concept of a workers' state more appropriate to the prevailing economy than a stateless society.

Which is not to say that I regard the dissolution of Spanish society into the multinational corporate world as the least evidence of "social progress." Quite to the contrary, I have no ecological or social reason for viewing this development as anything other than a profound retrogression that would serve only to reinforce hierarchy, centralization, state-control, and eventually replace the terror-ridden but overt fascism of the Franco dictatorship by the "friendly" but concealed fascism of a technocratic dictatorship.

But the fact of this change must be introduced into our estimate of Spain's future development if we are not to cloud our vision with illusory hopes. Vincente Romano, in a rather naive introduction to a volume of documents by

the Spanish workers' commissions, stresses that "any future federation of Spanish labor unions will have to abandon the old divisions which existed before the Civil War and will have to include all workers without distinction as to their political or religious beliefs."

This view is grossly misleading. If it reflects any significant tendency within the commissions themselves, it would replace the intensely political unionism of the Spanish proletariat once so rich in its idealism and sense of social commitment, by the "pure-and-simple" economic unionism of the American proletariat, so deadening, bureaucratically stultifying, and hopeless in its social prospects.

The differences between the Socialist UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT in the thirties were serious enough. The tragedy is that these differences were not carried far enough—that the CNT, with a naivete that often slipped into a gross betrayal of its own principles, surrendered its revolutionary goals to the cause of "proletarian unity."

If the Spanish workers follow the path of "unity," economism, and organizational centralization, they will behave no differently than the working class elsewhere. Organizational "unity" on this basis will serve only to institutionalize them as pillars of a multinational corporate society, however militantly they struggle for their practical day-to-day interests. Their organization will no longer presuppose a radical change in society; rather, it will presuppose precisely the opposite: a struggle with capitalism, not against it.

This kind of struggle is intrinsically a negotiable one that occurs within the parameters of the prevailing social relationships. As to the pre-capitalist rural origins of the proletariat, they will disappear with the pueblo itself. Agribusiness lies as much in store for Spain as it does for France—and with the development of agribusiness, the erosion of the peasantry as a force for social revolution.

Illegality Advantageous to CP

A "unified" Spanish labor movement had already become the cry of the CNT in the last months of the "Spanish Civil War." To the degree that it was achieved, it benefited neither the anarcho-syndicalist segment of the labor movement nor the Socialist, but primarily the Communist. Today, a "unified" Spanish labor movement would almost certainly be controlled by the Communist Party.

Another harsh fact must be faced concerning Spain: by nearly every account available, the Spanish Communist Party is the best organized as well as the best financed political movement in Spain. Its membership has been estimated to be as high as 80,000 and is almost certainly not less than 30,000.

Membership in an illegal organization has a very tenuous meaning, to be sure, and the Communists have notoriously inflated their membership figures in all their parties. But there does seem to be widespread agreement, even among opponents of the Communists, that no political organization in Spain has comparable power and resources.

Illegality itself confers this advantage on the Communist Party, just as it serves to impart a democratic, nearly anarchist character to the Workers' Commissions. The communists command resources from abroad that other potentially larger illegal organizations clearly lack. Their position is also enhanced by the aura of power that emanates from their affiliations with the "Eastern Bloc" in Europe, even though the largest of the two Communist parties in Spain opposed the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and probably has very little access to Soviet resources.

Centralized, fairly well-knit, and "efficient," the Communists offer an image of considerable power, an image that is not without attraction to many Spaniards who have been taught to respect power by the dictatorship itself. By contrast, the Workers' Commissions (which are by no means controlled by the Communists) must adopt decentralized forms of organization and loose, highly democratic structures if they are to maintain the widespread adherence they enjoy in Spain—structures which political parties prudently avoid as too libertarian.

Between the comparatively well-organized Communists and the loosely organized Workers' Commissions, the Socialists, republicans, constitutional monarchists, and nationalistic parties live in a contradictory reality. Centralistic in theory, they carry on an ill-organized existence in reality.

Accordingly the Communists have been buoyed to the top of the illegal political world of Spain—and I must emphasize the word "political" because the Workers' Commissions and the anarchists face an entirely different situation—precisely because of the dictatorship, not despite it.

Considering the size of the managerial, professional, and white collar sectors of Spanish society, I strongly doubt if the Communists would be nearly as strong as they are today if organizations that appeal to the middle classes were free to function in Spain. It remains supremely ironical that Franco's "crusade against communism"

has ultimately done more to establish the Communists as the largest political grouping in Spain than any other single factor apart from Russian “aid” during the 1936–39 period.

The Workers’ Commissions are large, anarchic in structure, and too naive in their attitude toward hardened politicals like the Communists to realize the dangers that are implicit in their cry for “unity.” They do not profess to be a substitute for an institutionalized trade union federation.

In the event that they were legalized, they would become a battleground for conflicting social movements, such as the Communists, Socialists, Catholics and anarchists.

The Communists, who are often mistakenly believed to “control” the commissions, reportedly have been very much discredited due to the party’s failure to support the recent Basque general strike. The Socialists seem to have much less influence among the Spanish workers than the press has led us to believe, although they and the Communists would seem to be the most likely heir of the commissions—in short, a French-styled union movement, rhetorically radical, but pragmatically reformist and bureaucratic.

At the present time, however, the traditional PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party, to use the official name of the organization) is in considerable disarray and its capacity to influence Spanish events depends heavily upon its legalization.

Anarchism Prospers Again

The great unknown in Spain is the size and influence of the anarchist groups. The American press and the respectable anti-Franco juntas that have been soliciting governments and the public for financial assistance are patently unwilling to acknowledge any anarchist presence in Spain until evidence of anarchist activities literally explodes in the form of dramatic atentados. Even anarchists abroad had begun to despair that the memory of an immense anarcho-syndicalist movement in the ‘thirties had any meaning for Spain in the ‘seventies.

As recently as a few weeks ago, the most pessimistic accounts I heard denied the very existence of an anarchist movement in such traditional centers of anarchism as Barcelona and Zaragoza. Occasional actions by Spanish anarchists seemed to be little more than episodic events, carried off by small desperate groups which had filtered in from France.

There is now evidence that this image is inaccurate. Recent police roundups of scores of anarchists reveal that the size and certainly the influence of the movement has been greatly underestimated. Although I have heard enough conflicting opinions to wonder whether this movement is very large or very small, I am quite convinced from the police arrests that an indigenous substrata within Spain nourishes anarchist activity and organization.

It would indeed be surprising that a CNT or at least CNT nuclei do not exist in Spanish factories and villages. Acknowledgment of CNT activity appears even in Workers’ Commission documents I have read. It is also clear that the anarchist movement in the “interior” is very fragmented in terms of its ideology and practice. It is divided between the exiles abroad and the “illegals” in Spain; between “old timers” and youth; between those who emphasize propaganda and others who demand action; between libertarians who feel that many Marxian concepts can no longer be ignored and the adherents of a largely moral anti-authoritarianism. Finally, it is divided between those who wish to retain anarcho-syndicalist doctrine in all its orthodoxy and individuals who believe that traditional anarchism and Marxism must be transcended by a new form of libertarian socialism.

The divisions between the exiles and indigenous groups or the old and young are themselves quite traditional and occurred throughout the history of the anarchist movement in Spain. The need to perpetuate orthodoxy or transcend it in the face of historic social developments—this, quite aside from the old battle between revolutionary purism and reformist accommodation—is the most interesting of all. Owing to the illegal nature of the movement, it is difficult to determine whether the trend away from orthodoxy is nourished by Maoist or New Left influences.

Unlike other western European countries, Spain has had only a superficial contact with the New Left concepts of the sixties. The illegality of workers’ organizations and the political character of many strikes has made the Spanish Left highly working-class oriented. Critiques of the labor movement so common in the United States are not readily accepted by Spanish revolutionary organizations.

Enormous significance is attached to the working class in changing Spanish society—not merely by left and center organizations but even by “enlightened” sectors of the bourgeoisie which see an institutionalized labor movement as a safety valve in preventing an avoidable class war. Accordingly, the primary reform in Spain is seen to be not merely the legalization of “responsible” political parties, but more significantly, “responsible” trade unions. I

suspect that even a well groomed syndicalist federation would be acceptable, a federation that would almost certainly render a militant revolutionary anarchist movement inconsequential.

U.S. Props Fascism

The greatest single prop to the Franco dictatorship has been the United States and the American people remain more deeply implicated in Spanish developments than any other in the world. American aid rescued the dictatorship during its most difficult period in the fifties when the peninsula moved closer to revolution than at any time since 1936. American investments and tourism nourished the dictatorship throughout the sixties. American military bases in Spain remind the people that the regime has reserves over and beyond its police and armed forces upon which it can call in the event of any decisive crisis.

Indeed, American and Spanish military forces have trained together and vague clauses in the military agreements between the two countries allow for armed American intervention in Spanish internal affairs. Visits by Nixon and Ford have reinforced Franco's sagging prestige in precarious periods of the dictator's rule.

Today, the one feature that vitiates any meaningful analysis of Spanish conditions is a gnawing sense of uncertainty. We know from the foreign press that popular resistance occurs daily and on a widespread scale. But the true relationship of forces within the army, the church, the working class, the middle classes, the national groups, and the resistance organizations has been effectively obscured by the regime.

As long as the free expression of ideas is forbidden all the strata that compose Spanish society and the groups that profess to speak in their name do not even know their own strength and influence.

This sense of mutual ignorance, sustained partly by the legitimation the United States gives to the regime, represents a very explosive factor in Spanish social development. It makes any effort to venture a prognosis about the course of events virtually impossible. In the course of this labyrinthine "transition", Spain could well take a bloody turn—by no means one that would favor the Left—that could not have been foreseen a few years earlier. The conviction which I developed during a visit to Spain some eight years ago, notably that the people had been-too embittered by the slaughter of the thirties to slip into civil war, is no longer a certainty. A friend well informed on Spanish conditions reminds me that sixty percent of the Spanish people today have no memory of the conflict.

Militancy has replaced restraint among young Spaniards and the restless national groups. It would be wrong to believe that a bloody clash within Spain is impossible. The Spaniards are no longer the defeated people of the forties, nor do the warnings of the-previous generation carry any weight in the formulation of popular decisions.

Tempo is now everything. The ticking of the clock has replaced the "proverbial" tolling of the bells. With each passing week, grim frustrations are turning into aggressive anger. It would be ironical indeed if Spain, a country in which elementary bourgeois freedoms would probably suffice to remove the threat of a popular uprising, exploded in revolt—not because the regime, following in Franco's footsteps, acted too forcefully, but because it acted too late.

see also:

"Los Quijotes: Anarchist Youth Group, Spain, 1937" (FE #332, Summer 1989)

and

News of the Spanish Revolution: Anti-authoritarian Perspectives on the Events

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