



## READING THE RUNES

### New Perspectives on The Spanish Civil War

Archival and related research on the historiography of the Spanish Civil War since the death of Franco

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In an unexpected coincidence, the fall of the Communist regimes and opening (in some cases temporary) of their archives, beginning in the 1990s, followed a similar process of documentary disclosure in Spain, regarding the civil war of 1936-39, in which Communism played a central role. The Spanish archival disclosures were better organized, more complete, and more thorough than those, for example, in Russia. Generalísimo Francisco Franco died in 1975 and the dictatorship he created dissolved during a six-year transition to democracy overseen by King Juan Carlos.

The opening, publication, and study of archival material, however, lagged behind the republication and issuance of new works on the history of the radical Republicans in Spain, including the anarcho-syndicalist movement (National Confederation of Labour and the Iberian Anarchist Federation – CNT-FAI), the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), and the Catalan Republican Left (ERC). The most useful Spanish archival releases and new historiographical volumes have mainly dealt with these parties. By contrast, little fresh commentary on the “official” Spanish Communist Party (PCE) has been produced in Spain, and aside from documentation on the relations between the PCE as Communist International (CI) Communists and their main leftist adversary, the POUM, which considered itself Communist but anti-Stalinist, archival material on the PCE has generally been drawn from Russian holdings, releases from which are limited, although exceptionally valuable. A single volume of Soviet records on the Spanish war, *Spain Betrayed*<sup>1</sup>, described below and originally issued in English, then in Spanish, has greatly contributed to new perspectives on the war.

**The Spanish Civil War in the History of the Left**

The Spanish civil war was already estimated to have become one of the 20th century's most enduring and fecund historical topics, in terms of the quantity of scholarly, literary, and related productions, when Franco died. A vast output of primary source material was then published, and new analytical works in many languages, most of them based on secondary sources, continue to appear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This survey will cover only the outstanding works focused on archival disclosures or introducing previously unknown documentation, and dealing with Communism, the POUM, and the other radical forces in the conflict.

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The most interesting republications, new volumes, and archival materials are associated with the POUM. From 1937 to 1975, only a few valuable works about the left parties had been published in Spain, and almost nothing at all representative of the POUM and its point of view had been issued abroad, with the exception of some titles in France. By contrast, the Communists and anarchists had supported extensive printing activities in numerous foreign countries during the Franco era, including the U.S. and Britain, directed to the local public as well as to their adherents. The PSOE and the Catalan Left, aside from émigré periodicals and volumes of memoirs serving their own constituencies, had never published outside Spain and the countries of their diaspora, residing in France and Latin America.

The lack of reliable source material on the POUM was especially problematical. The POUM, its political attitudes, and its place in Spanish and Catalan working-class and civil war history had become a major theme of political, historiographic, and popular discussion of the war, thanks not only to the course of events but also to the works of observation written by three foreigners: George Orwell, Franz Borkenau, and Gerald Brenan.<sup>2</sup> Although Orwell, Borkenau, and Brenan cannot be blamed for them, three political myths had become standardized about the POUM. The first, articulated by Soviet sympathisers, was that it was a small Trotskyist sect comparable to such groups in many other countries, when in reality it was a major political force in Catalonia, far superior in influence there to the PCE.

The second legend, put forward by Trotskyists, was that the POUM's cadres had been "massacred", along with anarcho-syndicalists, by Soviet-directed agents in the wake of the



POUM's governmental suppression in 1937. Tragically, the POUM's co-founder, Andreu Nin i Pérez (1892-1937), a prominent Catalan writer and labour figure, and conseller (minister) of justice in the revolutionary Catalan Generalitat (regional government) of 1936, was murdered by Stalinists. The appointment of an alleged and unrepentant "Trotskyite" to the justice portfolio in Catalonia at the onset of the worst Moscow purge trials was a powerful repudiation of the claims of the Russian authorities and must have been perceived by the Stalin leadership with exceptional horror. While the POUM was not Trotskyist in official terms, its anti-Stalinism kept it very close to the Trotskyist movement, some Trotskyists fought in its ranks, and it did not denounce Trotsky or his acolytes in the Stalinist manner. But the full roster of POUM, Trotskyist, and anarchist victims in Spain, killed within the country, or kidnapped and liquidated elsewhere by Communists, was probably no more than 30 people. Trotskyist claims about wholesale murder of the POUM and anarchists seem to have reflected spite, in that the POUM had rejected the political advice of Trotsky and his few Spanish, as well as his international, followers. More important, however, both the POUM and, unquestionably, the anarchist movement, were deeply rooted in Catalonia and could not be done away with easily.

The third historical error, which continues to be repeated, is the belief that Nin himself, a Soviet functionary from 1921 to 1930, was a "secretary" for, or otherwise attached to the staff of, Leon Trotsky during the latter's period of state responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> Nin occupied a high post in the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern) as well as serving in the leading structures of the CI and the Spanish Communist Party. During the internal struggle in the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) he became a member of an International Commission of the Oppositional Center, but did not work directly with or under Trotsky. Victor Serge recalled, "In Moscow I took part in the International Commission set up by the Oppositional Centre, together with [Grigori] Zinoviev's spokesman [Moisei Markovich] Kharitonov, Fritz Wolf (who soon capitulated, which did not stop him being shot in 1937), Andrés Nin, the Bulgarian Lebedev (or Stepanov, a clandestine Oppositionist who betrayed us and later worked as a Comintern agent during the revolution in Spain) and two or three other militants whose names I have forgotten."<sup>4</sup>

Downgrading of Nin, considered a major revolutionary personality in his own right, to a bureaucratic position subordinate to Trotsky, reflects the ignorance of foreign authors who do not know of his prominence in the Catalan journalistic and labor milieux, even before his departure for Russia.

The late Catalan author Pere Pagès (1916-2003), known as Víctor Alba, who was my mentor in writing about the POUM<sup>5</sup>, had demonstrated inexhaustible energy in seeking to “rehabilitate” the party’s reputation by publishing books on it, even in Catalonia at the end of the Franco era. It was therefore unsurprising that two of the earliest volumes of republished documentation on the POUM, after Franco’s death, were issued in 1977-78 at his instance. The first was *La Nueva Era (The New Era)*, a collection of articles from a revolutionary anti-Stalinist journal printed in Spain from 1930 to 1936. More useful, however, was a compendium of all the basic theoretical and political documents of the POUM produced during the civil war, and titled *La Revolución española en la practica (The Spanish Revolution in Practice)*.<sup>6</sup> The latter book provided historians with their first primary source, after many years, on the activity of the party during the civil war.

#### **Opening of the Spanish archives**

The official process of archival release was slower. Unlike the former Communist governments, the post-Franco regime had no “reasons of state” that would block the opening of most of their holdings, especially on the civil war. The organisation and preparation of documents for scholarly use was carried out with admirable thoroughness, professionalism, and transparency – which made for a relatively long period of work by archival staffs.

Some archives were, nevertheless, subjects of controversy. For example, the Franco state had established a General Archive of the Civil War in Salamanca, to support a massive judicial investigation charging the civil war left with assorted crimes, and evidence from which was utilized in individual cases against opposition personalities after the war. The Salamanca facility included the archives of the Generalitat of Catalonia, which, like other Republican source materials, had been seized by the victors at the end of the war. The Generalitat demanded the reversion of these resources to its control, and after a process lasting some 20 years, in which both the city government of Salamanca and the conservative



Popular Party opposed the breakup of the collection, transfer of the materials from Salamanca to Barcelona was effected in 2006.<sup>7</sup>

Other institutions became involved in the debate, which was resolved by a decision of the Spanish legal system. These included the successor to the Catalan section of the PCE, now known as Initiative for Catalonia — The Greens (ICV), which called for restitution of the entire corpus of documents in Salamanca to all their original possessors. The CNT protested that its documentation should not be returned to the Generalitat, but to the anarchist organisation, and the Jewish Community of Barcelona, the archives of which had also been seized in 1939, similarly wanted them returned to its own handling rather than that of the Generalitat. But while different interests disagreed over the disposal of the archives, no attempts were disclosed to prevent scholars from using them freely, as have been seen in Russia.

At the same time, nevertheless, official files on Francoist executions during the civil war have not been opened, as secret police files on the Stalin-era purges have been handed over to family members of Russian victims — a practice that began under Soviet rule in the late 1950s. Materials describing recent surveillance of anarchists, Basque extremists, and others still considered enemies of the state have not been released in Spain, a practice different from that in such countries as Germany and the former Yugoslavia, where dossiers on the recruitment of informers and observation of dissidents against Communism have been made accessible to the general public and even, in the ex-Yugoslav case, printed and offered for sale.

In addition, some archives held abroad by left groups were transferred to universities and foundations in Spain. For example, the Centre for International Historical Studies (CEHI) at the University of Barcelona received a considerable collection of POUM documents, and even inaugurated a Maurín-Nin Hall dedicated to the party's main founders.<sup>8</sup>

In 1988, a major event took place, when the CEHI received, from the National Historical Archive in Madrid, the dossier of the Republican authorities on the 1937-38 trial of the POUM leadership (exclusive of Nin, who had been killed) by the Special Tribunal for Espionage and High Treason. The Special Tribunal had been established hastily by the Spanish Republican authorities in 1937. The POUM leaders were indicted for allegedly provoking the disorders in Barcelona

known as the “May events” of 1937 (described by Orwell on the basis of his eyewitness) with the aim of carrying out a military insurrection. They were further charged with desertion from the Aragón front in support of the Barcelona protests; subversive propaganda; illegal possession of secret military information; unlawful possession and trafficking in arms with the intent of organizing an uprising; smuggling money and objects of value to France; use of secret codes, and maintenance of relations and communications with suspicious foreigners. Some of the prosecutorial information read as if borrowed directly from similar documents in the Moscow purge trials.

The dossier turned over to CEHI also included interrogatory transcriptions taken down from Nin during his period of imprisonment; materials from the 1938 trial of the POUM military commander Josep Rovira i Canals (1902-68), charged with disloyal activities in the same matters treated by the earlier trial, and numerous ancillary memoranda on the POUM composed by secret police investigators. There was no evidence of who had killed Nin or where his body was buried.<sup>9</sup> The most sensational item in the dossier comprised investigators’ notes on none other than George Orwell himself (born Eric Blair and described in the document as “Enric”, a Catalan form of “Henry”) and his wife Eileen Blair. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell had somewhat light-heartedly described his pursuit by Spanish secret police agents in Barcelona. But the notes found in the POUM dossier revealed that the investigation of the Blair couple was anything but innocuous. The anonymous investigators described Eric and Eileen Blair as “pronounced Trotskyists],” which they most certainly were not; and liaison agents between the British Independent Labour Party and the POUM, also untrue.<sup>10</sup> The document finally included the phrase “Liaison with Moscow”, with no further explanation. The implication is clear: Orwell was a major target, and would probably have been liquidated or kidnapped and sent to Russia if caught. He was in much more serious danger than he ever admitted, or perhaps was unaware of how great a risk he faced. Discovery of the Orwell document caused a minor sensation in British media.

The printed volume based on the POUM dossier, titled *El Proceso del POUM (The POUM Trial)*, totaled 578 pages, and was incomplete at that.<sup>11</sup> Investigative notes on other foreigners were included in the documentary transfer but were



not published. The volume was, and remains, an indispensable source for historians of the Spanish civil war and biographers of Orwell.

### **The Legacy of Munis**

When Franco expired, Nin and Maurín, as well as Rovira and others who had been tried in 1937-38, were dead, along with most of the rest of the POUM leaders. Víctor Alba, although a courageous and tenacious defender of the party's reputation, had been a minor figure in the party youth movement and its journalistic efforts during the civil war. But two aggressive and disputatious figures involved in the POUM trial survived and continued publishing commentaries on historical events. These were Juan Andrade Rodríguez (1898-1981) and Manuel Fernández Grandizo Martínez (1912-1989), the latter known by the pen-name "G. Munis." Andrade had been a member of the POUM Executive Committee and was a prominent sympathizer of Trotsky. He compiled several worthwhile books based on primary sources, which were published posthumously.<sup>12</sup>

Fernández Grandizo, alias Munis, was born in Mexico but raised from childhood in the impoverished region of Extremadura — the only part of Spain where, before the civil war, Trotskyism was the dominant political trend. He had been the leader of the authentic Spanish Trotskyist group in the war, known as the Bolshevik-Leninist Section and comprising fewer than a dozen members. During the "May events" they distributed a leaflet on the protestors' barricades, as noted by Orwell. Fernández Grandizo appeared in the POUM trial as a witness, declaring that this group was unaffiliated with the POUM. He and several members of his group were tried in Barcelona in 1938 for the murder of a Russian infiltrator into the POUM, Lev Narvich, who assisted in the arrest of Nin and the other POUM leaders. Narvich had, in reality, been killed in an act of revenge by the POUM. But Munis and his comrades, after being held in exceptionally bad conditions, were found guilty, sentenced to death, and kept in prison until the fall of Barcelona to the Franco forces and their escape, along with many thousands of anarchists, POUMists, and other revolutionaries, across the French border.

As "Munis," Fernández Grandizo returned to his native Mexico and in 1940 delivered the main eulogy at the funeral of Trotsky. In 1948, he published a polemical volume on the failure of the Spanish revolutionaries, *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria: España 1930-39 (Signposts of defeat,*

*promise of victory: Spain 1930-39*). This incomplete and undocumented but exceptional work was republished in France during the Franco era and then reset and republished in Spain after the dictator's death.

Munis was strongly critical of the whole array of radical leaders during the war. Although from a Marxist perspective, he expressed respect for the anarchist CNT-FAI as the only significant revolutionary labour movement in Europe. His vigorous militancy and a certain cachet derived from his involvement in the "May events," as well as his unlimited stream of published commentary about events of the day, made his work attractive to young Spanish and some foreign radicals during the post-Franco transition. Volumes of his articles continue to be published in Spain; his last writings before his death were critical of Gorbachev as a false reformer. His case was unique; he was the last of the civil war revolutionaries to actively address contemporary issues in a traditional, intransigently Marxist idiom.

#### **Anarchist documentation**

Beside POUM and Trotskyist sources, a much larger corpus of anarchist documentation emerged in the post-Franco era. Of that mass of books and articles, one volume appears as uniquely valuable. It is related, in a specific and unusual manner, with recruitment by Franco's nationalist forces of Moroccan volunteers, based on the anti-revolutionary leader's former service in the sector of Morocco then occupied by Spain. While it is an extremely obscure topic in the historiography of the civil war, the more radical defenders of the Spanish Republic — anarchists, anti-Stalinist communists, and Catalan nationalists — gave serious consideration to support for a nationalist uprising in Morocco. The intent was to undermine the capacity of Franco to enlist Moroccan troops. The Catalan left were especially interested because their region had been convulsed for decades by radical opposition to Spanish military involvement in Morocco. The late Abel Paz (pseudonym of Diego Camacho Escámez, 1921-2009), the leading contemporary historian of Spanish anarchism, mined official Catalan as well as radical-left archives to show the serious character of the Spanish revolutionary attempt to provoke a rebellion in Morocco. In 2000 he published *La Cuestión de Marruecos y la República Española (The Moroccan Question and the Spanish Republic)*.<sup>13</sup> He reported that Simone Weil, the French philosopher then



sympathetic to the radical left, had gone to Spain when the civil war broke out, and learned that clashes had occurred in Morocco between Franco's legions and the local population. She spurred French anarcho-syndicalist Robert Louzon, who had lived in North Africa (and who was also associated with the early member of the French Communist Party, Pierre Monatte, and with Albert Camus) to go to Fez to investigate the situation. Louzon and a French Trotskyist, David Rousset, were in Fez and set up a meeting with the nationalist Moroccan Committee of Action. The Moroccans then journeyed to Barcelona for inconclusive negotiations, mainly with the anarchists, but with the involvement of the POUM and the French Trotskyist Jean Rous, through the Central Committee of Antifascist Militias. The latter was a near-"soviet" that exercised real power in revolutionary Catalonia's early phase.

But Paz also revealed that the Spanish anarchist movement had, beginning in the 1920s, formulated a variant on the Bolshevik vision of world revolution. That is, they reasoned that since Spain was the only country in Europe where anarchism dominated the left, the sole means to secure a local revolutionary victory would be to support an uprising in North Africa. The most interesting element in this project is that while the Spanish anarchists were famous for their irreconcilable opposition to the Catholic church, they did not consider their irreligion a barrier to approaching the Muslims of the Maghreb. In this, the anarchists were certainly more idealistic, and perhaps even more practical, than the Soviet Communists, who spread antireligious propaganda in the Muslim lands they ruled. But Franco won the war, and ultra-radical experiments in North Africa came to an end — at least those involving Western social ideologies.

### **Books and Films**

Post-Franco archival and related research produced television and film documentaries as well as books. Armed with an official request from the Catalan Communists, a team of investigative journalists from the Catalan public television channel TV3 went to Russia and visited the CI archives, to determine what could be confirmed about the death of Andreu Nin. The result was a prime-time documentary, *Operació Nikolai (Operation Nikolai)*, broadcast in 1992.<sup>14</sup> Four years later, a similar and longer documentary, *Asaltando los Cielos (Storm the Skies)*, was presented on Spanish national television, examining the life of Jaume Raimón Mercader del

Río, the assassin of Trotsky, and including interviews with Spanish Communist exiles in Russia.<sup>15</sup>

The effect of these broadcasts was devastating for the reputation of the Spanish Communists, in showing their responsibility for two of the most notorious political assassinations in 20th century history. In *Operació Nikolai*, Nin was restored to his proper reputation as a Catalan literary figure, and Soviet agents were clearly identified as the authors of the defeat of the revolutionary movement on the Republican side during the civil war. But *Operació Nikolai* did not name the agents who killed Nin, while *Asaltando los Cielos* described the dreadful effects of Soviet secret police service on the Mercader family, and the sufferings of Spanish Republican émigrés in Russia, sent to labor camps for alleged anti-Soviet activity.

In addition to the release of the dossier on the POUM trial, and broadcast of *Operació Nikolai*, a considerable program of academic and publishing activity has been accomplished by the Andreu Nin Foundation (FAN), created in 1987 (the 50th anniversary of Nin's murder) and which maintains a website including a monthly bulletin.<sup>16</sup> The FAN tracks the availability of archival resources as well as the continued publication of documents, memoirs, and scholarly works dealing with the movement. A sustained interest in civil war history has been demonstrated by publication of a tourist guidebook distributed by the FAN, describing the main sites of revolutionary action during the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Outside Spain, a publishing enterprise in English, dedicated to preserving the historical memory of Spanish anarchism, has been established by the Scots anarchist Stuart Christie, a former political prisoner in Spain. Christie's main work has been the publication in translation of the three-volume complete history of the CNT during the civil war by Josep Peirats Valls (1908-89), the outstanding anarchist chronicler, whose work is especially valuable for its transparency as well as its basis in primary sources. (Peirats' papers are held at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.)<sup>18</sup>

All such contentious works, however, as well as new analyses of the fate of the Spanish Republic, some of them based on archival research and discussed further on, have had less impact than a single volume of documents released from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) and the Russian Institute of General History of the Russian Academy of



Sciences, supplemented by the collection of Russian secret service messages intercepted and decrypted by the British, and known as “Mask.”

Mentioned at the beginning of this article, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, was edited by the American historians Ronald Radosh and Mary R. Habeck in collaboration with the Russian expert Grigory Sevostianov. It has been published in the U.S. in the “Annals of Communism” series, and in Spain, and has caused a literal revolution in studies of the civil war. It is the only volume in the “Annals of Communism” series with a visible impact outside the U.S.<sup>19</sup>

Comprising 538 English-language pages of documents and brief commentary, *Spain Betrayed* provided unimpeachable sources on nearly every significant issue in Soviet relations with the Spanish Republic during the civil war. The texts include a CI directive from Moscow to the Spanish Communists as soon as the military insurrection against the Republic commenced on July 17, 1936. This first such message sent to the PCE, and the first printed in the volume, settles the most contested question of civil war history: the intentions of the Soviet government toward their anarchist and other rivals in the Spanish revolutionary movement. Therein, Moscow stated that if the anarchist leadership refused to submit to unification demands by the Spanish Communists, the anarchists — then counting two million members, compared with a few thousand Communists — should be denounced as “strike breakers of the struggle against fascism in the working classes.”<sup>20</sup>

This blunt language dramatically but definitively refutes long-standing claims by the Spanish Communists and their apologists that the Communists worked for a benevolent unity in the Popular Front (FP), with the sole aim of a Republican victory. It should be noted, however, that the anarchist CNT did not affiliate with the prewar FP, and the very large and radical Spanish Socialist party, while a signatory to the FP electoral pact of 1936, refused to participate in the government produced by its victory at the polls. Somewhat paradoxically, the POUM had been drawn into the FP and gained a seat in the Cortes [national parliament] from Barcelona for its cofounder Maurín, who unfortunately was caught behind the Francoist lines at the beginning of the war and was eventually imprisoned.<sup>21</sup>

*Spain Betrayed* further revealed that less than a week after

the triumph of the left in the main cities of Barcelona, Madrid, and Bilbao, with revolutionary euphoria having swept the masses, CI leader Georgi Dimitrov called on the Communists to prevent radical measures in Spain, with the intention of supporting FP governments in France and Belgium, which were based on the integrity of the bourgeois order. While improvised leftist militias had already departed Barcelona for the front in Aragón, Dimitrov called for preservation of a Republican army of the ordinary kind. These aspects of Soviet and Spanish Communist policy have been central to historical debate over the fate of the Republic since the publication of works by Orwell and Borkenau, who described Communist policy as counter-revolutionary.

The documents in *Spain Betrayed* also outline the background for the delay in the decision of Stalin to directly support the Spanish left with arms and “advisers” — an action that did not begin until September 1936. The same collection includes reports by the main Soviet and CI personalities who went to Spain, including the writer Ilya Ehrenburg (1891-1967), the French CI functionary André Marty (1886-1956), the military intelligence (GRU) officer Vladimir Gorev, the leading Bolshevik activist, diplomat, and former Trotskyist, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseyenko (1883-1939), Iosif Ratner, a military attaché, and the economic administrator Artur Stashevsky (1890-1937).

But for a larger reading public, both in Spain and abroad, the most affecting revelations in the volume had to do with the destiny of the International Brigades (IB), the Soviet-recruited armed detachments sent to strengthen the Republican military. *Spain Betrayed* showed that Stalin’s purge apparatus had been extended to the ranks of the IB. One sentence leaps out of an anonymous, confidential report sent to Moscow in mid-1937: about the XIIIth International Brigade, it stated, “This brigade is not destroyed; it has been murdered.”<sup>22</sup> An exceptionally long, detailed, and candid report submitted to Moscow at the end of 1937 by the Soviet military intelligence agent Moshe Zalmanovich (Manfred) Stern, widely praised in Communist propaganda worldwide as “General Kléber” before his recall to Russia and disappearance in the purges, revealed that the XIIIth IB, with a large Balkan representation, “fled from the front.” The judgment of the Soviet officers in Spain on the XIIIth IB had been a subject of debate in memoirs and historical works prior to Franco’s



death; it was said that many from the ranks of the XIIIth IB had been executed.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of 1938, the Polish Communist and Soviet Army officer Karol Waclaw Świerczewski (1897-1947), known in Spain by the widely-used CI klichka or alias “Walter,” submitted a report to Moscow that was extremely severe in its criticism of the IB. Świerczewski confirmed that in the battle of Brunete, in mid-1937, IB troops had succumbed to “general panic and flight;”<sup>2</sup> the XIIth IB was ordered disbanded by the Spanish command. According to him, the French volunteers were demoralised, undisciplined, and dirty; the Germans were in somewhat better condition, but still “did not notice or see the depth of the disintegration;”<sup>25</sup> the Polish brigade personnel did not keep their rifles clean, used their bayonets as tent-stakes, and fraternised unacceptably with the Spanish troops, toward whom the Poles acted in an “uncomradely” way; the British and Canadians did not seem to know how to keep their weapons in decent order. A Spanish Communist brigade inspected by Świerczewski contrasted so starkly with the IB troops that the Soviet commander confessed that he was “embarrassed”. He further observed that the “internationalists live our own isolated life... we rarely allow the Spanish into our midst.”<sup>2</sup> American cigarettes were distributed to the British and Americans, while the Spanish went without tobacco; the foreign brigades were provided with their own distinctive food, but not the Spanish; the IB health facility at Albacete, southeast of Madrid, treated only foreigners. Desertion was commoner among the foreign IB than the Spanish, but went unpunished in the former case. At the same time, Świerczewski stated openly, “The internationalists had, and have, complete, absolute power, even though in the majority of the brigades and units the percentage of Spanish has reached the impressive number of 60-80 percent.”<sup>2</sup>

A second report by Świerczewski was submitted to Moscow in mid-1938, in which the Soviet officer described increased “international” desertion, Spanish discontent with the presence of the foreigners, and alleged sabotage. Świerczewski had adopted the hysterical idiom of the Moscow trial prosecutors in claiming the existence of a far-reaching conspiracy of fascists, “Trotskyists,” and foreign agents acting within the left forces.

These disclosures about the IB, whose reputation for heroism and selflessness had been embroidered for decades,

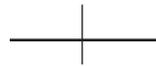
delivered a powerful blow to the image in Spain of the Soviets and other Communists in the civil war. This was not the least because much of them originated with Świerczewski, who became deputy defense minister in the Polish Communist regime after the second world war, and had the credibility of candor as well as Moscow's long-standing approval.

Finally, *Spain Betrayed* included a document that, for many in Spain, has resolved the still-continuing historical argument over the "May events" of 1937. An anonymous report written only weeks before the May combat, sent to General Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov (1881-1969), with the endorsement of Dimitrov, described increasing polarisation between the Communists and non-Communists on the left. Rather than wait for the crisis to turn into direct confrontation, the report recommended that the Communists "hasten it, and if necessary, provoke it."<sup>28</sup> This has been interpreted, especially by Catalan historians — and not merely the defenders of the anarchists and POUM — as proof that the "May events" were the product of a deliberate Communist plan conceived at the highest reaches of the Kremlin. In sum, *Spain Betrayed* demolished entirely the historiographical edifice on which a defense of Spanish Communist conduct in the civil war had been erected, and vindicated the critical authors who, beginning with Orwell, had accused the Soviet government of subverting the Republican cause.

#### **The Comintern in Latin America**

Because they spoke Spanish, many Latin American CI agents were sent to the peninsula during the war. In 2004, the Russian historians Lazar and Viktor Kheifetz, father and son, assisted by the Swiss historian Peter Huber, issued in Russia and Switzerland a limited edition volume, *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919-1943: Diccionario Biográfico (The Communist International and Latin America, 1919-1943: Biographical Dictionary)*.<sup>29</sup> Based in large part on archival research in Russia by the Kheifetz pair, this book revealed that Andreu Nin, once he had gone to Moscow, had become popular among the Latin American Communist leaders, and served as the Kremlin's expert controller of CI member parties from Mexico to Argentina.

Many more fascinating figures appear in the Kheifetz, Kheifetz, and Huber universe of Bolshevik colonization in Latin America. The incredible Iosif Romualdevich Griguliavicius was born in a Karaite family — members of a



heterodox Jewish sect — in Lithuania under the tsars in 1913, and died in Moscow in 1988. In between, his exploits included getting a Sorbonne degree, editing Communist periodicals in Polish, breaking Communist leaders out of jail in Brazil, and working in Spain as a Soviet assassin implicated in the murder of Nin. He was sent back to Russia before returning to the Western Hemisphere as an auxiliary in the murder of Trotsky; his task was to establish backup networks for that group of killers, in California as well as Mexico. Grigulevich, as he is more generally known, fled to California after the Trotsky slaying. His espionage tradecraft, and particularly his skill in reinventing himself, is so flamboyant as to seem doubtful. After World War II he was, using a false identity, named ambassador to the Vatican and Yugoslavia by the leftist but anti-Communist Figueres regime in Costa Rica! He used this post to plot the murder of Tito, although no attempt was carried out. In 1950 he returned to Russia where he took up an academic post. Grigulevich has gained a belated prominence in works on the history of Soviet espionage. In the same year the Kheifetz, Kheifetz, and Huber dictionary was published, a biography of Grigulevich by the Costa Rican journalist Marjorie Ross was published.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Other New Works**

A few other books in the bibliography of the Spanish civil war published after the death of Franco are worthy of special attention. Two outstanding volumes deal with what increasingly is a perennial theme of authors on the conflict, the “May events”. The first was printed in 2003 in Barcelona and dealt with the role of a much cited and little-understood anarchist grouping, the Friends of Durruti, mentioned by Orwell. The Friends of Durruti was considered the main node of anti-Communist militancy in the CNT-FAI, and was led by the journalist Santiago María (Jaume) Badius Mir (1904-80). A great deal of speculation about the group was put in print, in several languages, but little solid documentation apart from its own periodical, *El Amigo del Pueblo* (*The Friend of the People*), its “manifesto,” *Hacia una nueva revolución* (*Toward a Fresh Revolution*), and a small number of interviews with Badius.

A book titled *La Revolución Traicionada* (*The Revolution Betrayed*), authored by a young anarchist and situationist writer, Miquel Amorós, presents a definitive biography of Badius, and is an indispensable source for Spanish war historiography.<sup>31</sup> Amorós drew from all the relevant archives

throughout Spain and internationally. Badius was a child of the middle class and was pursuing medical studies when he was struck by poliomyelitis. Badius, the radical anarchist figure, and his friend the POUM military commander Josep Rovira, two of the most remarkable and best-remembered among their people, if secondary and least-studied figures in the civil war, had begun their political lives in Estat Català, the main nationalist cadre fighting for Catalan independence. Like many early 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalist movements, Estat Català has become firmly respectable in Catalan public memory. Badius formulated the exceptional proposition that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie formed separate nations in every country. But the movement drifted to the right during the 1930s, was excluded from the regional government of the Generalitat after the events of 1936, and was considered an equal enemy of the anarchists, POUM, and Communists. Its leaders, labeled as fascists, fled to France. Badius and Rovira evolved toward the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (BOC), a predecessor of the POUM led by Maurín, although Badius ended up firmly affiliated with the CNT-FAI.

A final, new and important accession to the bibliography of the Spanish civil war is a collection of letters by an American Trotskyist woman active in the POUM, Lois Cusick Orr (1917-80s), published with supplementary materials by her husband Charles Orr and edited by Gerd-Rainer Horn, a historian employed at Warwick University.<sup>32</sup> Lois Orr, as a strict Marxist, was hostile to Catalan nationalism; even offensively so, with a particularly provincial American manner. She worked in the English-language press and radio department of the POUM. On September 27-30, 1936, she wrote a letter to her family in the U.S., in which she noted that while all mail leaving the Spanish Republic was supposed to be censored, POUM correspondence abroad avoided the censor because the party sent a twice-weekly automobile to France to use the postal service there. In a sentence profoundly anticipatory of the totalitarian future of Communism and its collapse, while deeply affecting in the sentiments it evokes, Lois Cusick Orr wrote, "POUM does not believe in censorship".<sup>33</sup>

### Notes

1. See Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov: *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, New Haven 2001; *España Traicionada*, Madrid 2002.
2. See George Orwell: *Homage to Catalonia*, London 1938,



- reprinted and translated in many editions; **Franz Borkenau**: *The Spanish Cockpit*, London 1937; **Gerald Brenan**: *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Cambridge, UK 1943.
3. See, for example, **Bertrand M. Patenaude**: *Stalin's Nemesis*, London 2009.
  4. **Victor Serge**: *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, London 1963, p. 216. **Stepanov**, born **Stoyan Mineff** (1891-1959) and also known as Stefanov, was assigned the revolutionary alias "Moreno" ("dark") while active as leading Comintern representative in Spain. See the not-always-reliable work of **Branko Lazitch** and **Milorad M. Drachkovitch**: *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, Stanford 1986 (second edition.)
  5. **Víctor Alba** and **Stephen Schwartz**: *Spanish Marxism vs. Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M.*, New Brunswick, NJ, USA 1988.
  6. **Víctor Alba**, ed.: *La Nueva Era (The New Era)*, Madrid 1977; *La Revolución española en la practica) The Spanish Revolution in Practice)*, Madrid 1978.
  7. Anonymous: "Els papers de Salamanca són ja a Barcelona, segons el Ministeri de Cultura," ("The Salamanca Papers are now in Barcelona, according to the Culture Ministry," Europa Press [agency], Madrid, January 31, 2006.
  8. **Joaquín Maurín Juliá** (1896-1973), a former CI official, was the cofounder of the POUM with Nin. See CEHI printed catalogue: *História del POUM, Documents per el seu estudi (History of the POUM, Documents for its study)* Barcelona, 1985
  9. It should be noted that in both the main POUM trial and the Rovira trial the Spanish Republican judiciary found the defendants innocent of "high treason and espionage," but guilty of involvement in the "May events," resulting in minor penalties. Notwithstanding the argument of certain historians that the Spanish Republic had been completely taken over by the Russians, significant parts of the state remained independent of their control. The trivial sentences imposed on the POUM leaders illustrate this fact; in Russia or a completely Russian-dominated state, they would have been executed.
  10. **Víctor Alba**, **Marisa Ardevol**, et al., eds.: *El Proceso del POUM: Documentos Judiciales y Policiales (The POUM Trial: Judicial and Police Documents)*, Barcelona 1989, p. 75.
  11. **Víctor Alba**, **Marisa Ardevol**, et al., eds.: *El Proceso del POUM*, op. cit.

12. See, for example, **Juan Andrade**: *Notas sobre la Guerra civil (Notes on the Civil War)*, Madrid n.d. [1986?]
13. **G. Munis**: *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria: España 1930-39 (Signposts of defeat, promise of victory: Spain 1930-39)*, Madrid 1977; *Revolución y contrarrevolución en Rusia (Revolution and Counterrevolution in Russia)*, Llerena [Extremadura] 1999; *Internacionalismo, sindicatos, organización de clase (Internationalism, Trade Unions, Class Organization)*, Llerena 2009.
14. **Abel Paz**: *La Cuestión de Marruecos y la República Española (The Moroccan Question and the Spanish Republic)*, Madrid, 2000.
15. **M. Dolores Genovès**, director, and **Llibert Ferri**, investigator/screenwriter: *Operació Nikolai (Operation Nikolai)*, Barcelona 1992 (documentary film).
16. **Javier Rioyo** and **José Luis López-Linares**, directors: *Asaltando los Cielos (Storm the Skies)*, Madrid 1996 (documentary film).
17. See [www.fundanin.com](http://www.fundanin.com).
18. **Eladi Romero**: *Itinerarios de la guerra civil española (Guía del viajero curioso) (Spanish Civil War Itineraries – Guide for the Curious Traveler)*, Barcelona 2001.
19. See [www.christiebooks.com](http://www.christiebooks.com). **José Peirats**: *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, 3 vols., Hastings (UK) 2001, 2003, 2006.
20. **Ronald Radosh**, **Mary R. Habeck**, and **Grigory Sevostianov**, op. cit. For a selection of the “Mask” intercepts, see Nigel West: *Mask: MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, New York 2005.
21. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 8.
22. (Much detail on the internal nature of the FP was only available to foreign historians before 1975 thanks to the cited work of *Munis*.)
23. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 243.
24. See **Stephen Schwartz**: *Sarajevo Rose: A Balkan Jewish Notebook*, London 2005 for a discussion of the XIIIth IB.
25. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 437.
26. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 444.
27. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 453.
28. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 450.
29. *Spain Betrayed*, op. cit., p. 194.
30. **Lazar Jelifets**, **Victor Jelifets**, **Peter Huber**, eds.: *La Internacional Comunista y América Latina, 1919-1943: Diccionario Biográfico (The Communist International and Latin*



*America, 1919-1943: Biographical Dictionary)*

Moscow/Geneva 2004.

31. **Marjorie Ross:** *El secreto encanto de la KGB: Las cinco vidas de Iósif Grigulievich (The Secret Game of the KGB: The five lives of Iosif Grigulievich)*, San José, C.R. 2004.
32. **Miquel Amorós:** *La revolución traicionada (The Revolution Betrayed)*. Barcelona 2003.
33. **Lois Orr** with **Charles Orr**, edited by **Gerd-Rainer Horn:** *Letters from Barcelona*. London 2009. On the Orr couple also see Alba and Schwartz, op. cit.
34. *Letters from Barcelona*, p. 72.