Seventy years since the Spanish Civil War

Right wing attempts to rehabilitate Franco

Part Three

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The post-war period

The survival of General Franco's dictatorship following the end of the Second World War was assured by an unholy alliance of the imperialist powers, the Soviet Union together with that of the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español—PSOE) and the Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España—PCE).

The recovery from the global depression of the 1930s had required a bloody world war that resulted in the destruction of an enormous part of the productive forces, including the lives of approximately 60 million people.

The post-war reconstruction of Europe and Japan through the Marshall Plan and other investments depended on the financial and industrial might of American capitalism. In accordance with the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, the US dollar became the world currency, convertible into gold at $35 to the ounce. US-sponsored institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were set up to regulate economic relations between states and prevent a return to the protectionist policies that had shattered the world market in the 1930s. The Western bourgeoisie adopted policies of social welfare and reformism in order to reduce class conflict and prevent revolution.

The survival of capitalism in the post-war period depended above all upon the collaboration of the social democrats and especially the Stalinists, who imposed the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, signed by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, upon the European working class and prevented a revolutionary settlement with imperialism. In return for control of the so-called "buffer states" in Eastern Europe, the Kremlin bureaucracy pledged to suppress the resistance of the working class using the Communist Parties in countries such as France and Italy, and return power to the capitalists.

In Spain, towards the end of World War II, the Republican parties and the PSOE in exile had established a National Alliance of Democratic Forces—anticipating that the victorious Allied forces would march into the country after the defeat of the Axis powers, depose Franco and restore a bourgeois democratic system.

Based on the same perspective, the PCE initiated a guerrilla war in 1944 that claimed the lives of some 15,000 of its members. The PCE leadership, which a few years earlier had blamed the defeat of the Spanish Revolution on imperialism, was now "convinced that by establishing centres of struggle in the country and spreading panic among the ruling classes, a situation would be created of such a kind that the Allies would help us." (1)

However, with the advent of the Cold War, the imperialist powers now regarded the Spanish dictator as a bulwark against communism and pursued once more a policy of non-intervention. The Soviet Union sought only to neutralise Franco by preventing Spain from joining NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC, the forerunner to the European Union) and becoming part of a wider economic and military union threatening the Eastern Bloc.

In 1949, the year that NATO was created, Stalin advised the PCE to abandon its guerrilla war and instead seek to capture fascist and Catholic organisations and try to influence them along the path of bourgeois democracy.

The standard of living under the Franco regime remained one of the lowest in Europe, and despite legislation covering agrarian reform, agriculture remained very primitive. The economy was run on Falangist national autarkic principles, and Spain was excluded from Marshall Plan aid because of Franco's pro-Axis sympathies. The country remained in a deep economic depression, with soaring inflation, hunger and rationing. Meat consumption was half what it had been in 1926. Although state surveillance and brutal repression were ever-present, the working class remained combative, carrying out a series of strikes, including the 300,000-strong Barcelona general strike in 1951 that even drew in local Falangists and middle class layers.

Some temporary relief from the economic crisis was provided under the 1953 Pact of Madrid, when the US granted Spain $1 billion worth of aid in return for allowing American bases on Spanish territory. But by 1957, the country faced bankruptcy. An emergency austerity programme was negotiated with the International Monetary Fund by a new team of state technocrats led by Laureano Lopez Rodo, which began to overturn autarkic restrictions on the free market economy without making any provision for democratic rights.

Lopez Rodo declared the National Movement to be Catholic and monarchist and dropped all references to Falangism. The US also pressured Don Juan de Borbon, the son of the exiled King Alfonso XIII, to persuade Franco to restore the monarchy for which Franco said he had fought the Civil War.

In the event, a compromise was reached whereby Don Juan's young son, Juan Carlos, the present King of Spain, would be trained by Franco to become King while leaving Franco as head of state. However, this move provoked street battles by Falangists who saw their "fascist revolution" being undermined.

Spain's economy began to grow as a result of foreign aid and capital investment attracted by the repressive labour regime, the remittances from the more than 500,000 Spanish workers who had been forced to seek work

abroad and the enormous increase in tourists from northern Europe facilitated by cheaper air travel.

The collapse of Bretton Woods

However, the post-war boom, which had begun to benefit Spain, was itself coming to an end. The Bretton Woods system did not overcome the essential contradiction of the post-war restabilisation—the fact that the US was forced to rebuild its economic rivals in order to revive the world market and prevent revolution. By the 1960s, the export of American capital overseas had produced a dollar crisis, which signalled the breakdown of the post-war equilibrium and the decline of US hegemony. Unable to contain the crisis, the US government ended dollar-gold convertibility and destroyed the foundations of the Bretton Woods agreement.

The world economic crisis both provoked and was intensified by the resurgence of the international working class. The period between 1968 and 1975 was marked by the greatest revolutionary movement since the 1920s. The survival of capitalism throughout these turbulent years, no less than in the 1930s and after World War II, depended upon the treachery of the Stalinist, Maoist and social democratic bureaucracies and trade union leaderships, which sought to keep the working class tied to agitation and reformist demands.

In Spain, the Franco regime was in perpetual crisis and faced mounting opposition. The regime zigzagged between the brutal repression of student and worker unrest by police, Civil Guards and terror squads set up by the intelligence services, on the one hand, and offering concessions such as the minimum wage and large wage increases, on the other. The unrest reached a crescendo in 1969 with the declaration of a state of emergency. The regime also faced the growth of the separatist terrorist movement ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Homeland and Freedom) in the Basque country, largely as a result of its heavy-handed repression in the province. ETA enjoyed some popularity for its attacks on the police and military that culminated in its 1973 assassination of Franco's vice-president, Carrero Blanco. A series of blatantly rigged show trials and state executions of leftists and separatists provoked international condemnation and increased the regime's isolation.

Many former Francoist intellectuals deserted the National Movement and sought alliances with opposition parties abroad. In an attempt to stem this exodus, the regime relaxed press censorship and allowed the formation of "political associations" in the National Movement. For the first time, Franco's cabinet began to discuss the political difficulties in its meetings and pressured the dictator to complete the Organic Law, which detailed his succession, and to name a date for the accession of Juan Carlos.

As it became obvious that the Franco regime was in terminal crisis, the ruling elite once more turned to the PCE for salvation.Since 1956, the year Khrushchev made his secret speech denouncing Stalin, the PCE had pursued a policy of "National Reconciliation." PCE general secretary Santiago Carrillo argued that there was an "objective convergence" between the working class and the "modern" sector of Spanish capitalism that necessitated a bourgeois parliamentary system and democratic liberties. He insisted, "It is only after those liberties have been won that it will be possible to talk about prospects for socialism." (2)

The PCE also argued that the regime's corporate unions (syndicates) could evolve into democratically elected organisations and bring about democratic change. In 1966, leaders in the PCE (still working illegally) won an overwhelming victory in syndicate elections. Carrillo admits that the PCE deliberately worked to divert the underground workers councils (Comisiones Obreras, CC.OO.) that had emerged as the syndicates began to collapse following nationwide strikes in 1962 in a reformist direction and back into the fascist unions. For Carrillo, the greatest success for the PCE occurred when the state unions adopted as their own the PCE's minimal programme, which included a sliding scale of wages and equal pay for equal work.

However, the regime turned on the PCE, annulling the syndicate election results and outlawing the workers councils.

The European Communist Parties used the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to effect a further turn to the right. The PCE announced a "Pact of Liberty" that it claimed would bring about a rapprochement of the working class, the most liberal section of the army and the "dynamic bourgeoisie."

The transition to democracy

The PCE offered its help to the ruling elite. Carrillo appeared on a platform with one of Don Juan de Borbon's advisers to announce the formation of a Democratic Junta and declared it had the support of 200 businessmen. The PCE support for Don Juan did not stop Juan Carlos from recognising that the PCE might help ensure a peaceful transition after Franco's death and he sent Franco's nephew, Nicolás Franco Pascual de Pobil, to meet Carrillo and find out how the PCE would react when Franco died. Carrillo reassured him there was nothing to fear.

Franco died in November 1975, and the Spanish ruling class was thrown into crisis once again with massive strikes, demonstrations, student unrest and occupations. Juan Carlos was appointed King and swore allegiance to the National Movement. The new government, with Carlos Arias Navarro as prime minister, announced cosmetic changes to the Francoist regime and an austerity programme that sparked a series of strikes that Arias said he would crush. In Vitoria, the police opened fire on demonstrators, killing 7 and wounding 150 others.

The PCE and PSOE joined the Christian Democrats on a common platform. Dropping their opposition to the monarchy, they proposed talks on a "negotiated rupture" with the regime. In December 1976, Carrillo told new Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez of the Democratic Centre Union (Unión de Centro Democrático—UCD) and former general-secretary of the National Movement that the PCE was willing to participate in a government headed by Juan Carlos and would take part in a post-election "social pact." In return, Suárez effectively legalised the PCE, allowing its candidates to stand in the 1977 elections—but only as individuals.

Despite the widespread expectations that there would be a real change and a determination to exact justice on those who had participated in the Franco regime, the so-called "peaceful transition" to a bourgeois democracy was imposed on the working class without discussion and against the upsurge of militant struggles. In the 1977 election, both the PCE and PSOE omitted any reference to republicanism, class struggle or Marxism—all of which were in their programmes—in order to appear as respectable parliamentarians.

Similar processes could be seen during the discussions on other political, social and economic issues, with the PSOE's initial reluctance to support some proposals serving only as a left fig leaf for the PCE's cheerleading for the government. The PSOE's proposal to make Spain a republic was defeated. Carrillo supported the monarchy, saying his sole condition was the continued presence of Juan Carlos to lead the country to democracy. The PSOE initially proposed that the constitution declare Spain a secular state, but Carrillo warned that the "left" should not persecute the Church and make the clergy into martyrs.

The collaboration of the PSOE and PCE in rescuing Spanish capitalism

and stifling revolutionary opposition reached its height when all the major parties signed the 1978 Moncloa Pact to bring in the new constitution. The committee that worked in secret to draw up the constitution comprised three members from Adolfo Suárez's UCD, one member each from the PSOE, the PCE and the Francoist Popular Alliance of Manuel Fraga, and one representative of the Catalan nationalists. Carrillo claimed the constitution would "make socialist transformations possible," but the actions of the PSOE and PCE only allowed the survival of Franco's henchmen and their continued participation in the state apparatus.

The perfidious role of the Stalinist and social democratic left during the transition and since is exemplified by the fact that, after 14 years of PSOE government between 1982 and 1996, the heirs of Franco, the PP, returned to power.

The pact of silence over the fascist dictatorship agreed at the time of the transition and maintained to this day effectively absolved the PP of any association with Franco's crimes and encouraged it to oppose reparation for the victims of repression and to veto proposals to annul sentences handed down in Franco's political trials.

Why is Franco being rehabilitated?

The present intensive efforts to rehabilitate Franco are not merely an issue of historical revisionism, but express the advanced state of social and political antagonisms in contemporary Spain.

Despite the unanimity amongst the ruling elite regarding the pact of silence, it could not remove the underlying contradictions of capitalism that had seen the Spanish bourgeoisie resort to fascism in 1936. Those contradictions are once again intensifying, and the same unresolved issues are re-emerging.

Conditions are developing that must inevitably result in major class struggles, for which the Spanish ruling elite has no answer other than a turn to repression. Spain is in the grip of a major economic and political crisis brought about by its declining competitiveness and low productivity growth, the drying up of European Union subsidies and competition from the low wage economies in the new EU member countries in eastern Europe. For the last year, the government, trade unions and the employers' confederation have been in talks aimed at imposing labour and welfare reforms demanded by the international financial institutions.

For many years, Spanish governments sought to avoid an open confrontation with the working class over reforms, and the PP's efforts to reverse this policy aroused popular opposition that fed into opposition to its support for war against Iraq. The Spanish working class responded to the PP government's support for the United States' invasion and Prime Minister José María Aznar's right-wing economic and social policies with huge demonstrations against the war.

On March 11, 2004, three days before the planned general election, 10 bombs were detonated on commuter trains travelling into Madrid, killing 191 people and injuring 1,900 others. The PP government immediately sought to exploit the atrocity in order to retain political power. Despite evidence of Al Qaeda involvement, Aznar continued to claim the bombs were the work of the Basque separatist group ETA, so as to prevent the population drawing any connection between the attack and his government's support for the US-led war against Iraq.

As evidence of Aznar's lies began to emerge, mass protests erupted outside the PP's headquarters, with demonstrators denouncing his attempt to steal the elections, which then saw the PSOE swept to power in a popular revolt against the PP. Just days later, incoming PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero announced that Spain would withdraw its troops from Iraq.

Elected to power on a wave of hostility against the PP, Zapatero's government has no fundamental differences with the right-wing policies of its predecessor. Nevertheless, the PP has never reconciled itself with the outcome of the March 14, 2004, general election and has continuously denounced the election result as a "leftist coup."

During the election campaign, Zapatero promised that the mass graves would be dug up and justice found for those persecuted or killed under the Franco regime by the 30th anniversary of his death, but this has not happened. Since 2000, the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory has exhumed the remains of 500 people "without a single euro from the government," according to its leader, Emilio Silva. Instead, José Bono, Minister of Defence, invited representatives of the Blue Division to march alongside republican soldiers at the National Day military parade in October last year in a public display of "national reconciliation."

Most recently, several high-ranking military officers have threatened to mobilise their troops against the PSOE government should it agree to make any changes to the autonomous status of the Basque country and Catalonia. Rather than taking these statements with the seriousness they deserve, Zapatero, Bono and other government ministers continue to minimise their significance and repeat that they are the views of individuals.

The venom displayed by Spain's ruling elite is not directed so much at the PSOE, as at the Spanish working class. It has not forgiven or forgotten the millions of working people whose leftward and progressive movement ousted the Aznar regime and weakened the axis of support for Bush's so-called "war on terror." And it fears a far more politically independent movement by broad masses of the population in the future.

The history of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War demonstrates most clearly that no amount of militancy, bravery and self-sacrifice can replace the development of a socialist perspective and a party to fight for it. Only on this basis, can working people drive back the offensive of the right wing and overcome the betrayals of the old workers' organisations. This means learning all the lessons of the history of the workers' movement both in Spain and internationally, a task to which the International Committee of the Fourth International and *World Socialist Web Site* are pledged.

Concluded

Footnotes:

(1) Carrillo S. *Dialogue on Spain*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, page 92

(2) Carrillo S. *Dialogue on Spain*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, page 169