

# WSWS correspondent to address international conference on the Spanish Civil War

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*World Socialist Web Site* correspondent Ann Talbot is to address the International Conference on the Spanish Civil War, in Madrid on November 27-29, 2006.

The conference takes place 70 years after the civil war, at a time when the pact of silence that followed the death of the Spanish dictator General Franco in 1975 is being called into question. The civil war has become a burning political issue in Spain, as families of Franco's victims attempt to discover what happened to their relatives and a new leftward-moving generation comes to the fore in political life.

The invitation extended to the *World Socialist Web Site* to participate in the conference testifies to its reputation as a source of serious reporting of current political events as well as historical commentary and analysis from a Marxist perspective.

The conference is being coordinated by Professor Santos Juliá of the Spanish Distance Learning University (UNED). Santos Juliá, who is Professor of Social History and Political Thinking at UNED, is the author of *A History of Modern Spain* and *Historia de las dos Españas (History of the Two Spains)*. Keynote speakers at the conference include Sir Raymond Carr, author of *Spanish Tragedy: Civil War in Perspective*; Angel Vinas, author of *El oro español en la guerra civil*; Ronald Fraser, author of *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War*; and Gabriel Jackson, author of *Spanish Republic and the Civil War*.

Ann Talbot's paper is entitled "Republican Spain and the Soviet Union: Politics and Foreign Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9". It addresses the question of the political character of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the Republican government and explores the reasons that Republican Spain became dependent on the Soviet Union and what

the consequences of that dependence were. The received wisdom has always been that, for good or ill, Spain had to rely on the USSR because the Republic was internationally isolated and the Soviet Union was the only country that was willing to supply arms. Whether we regard the Soviet Union as a friendly ally or a predatory opportunist, the relationship was, therefore, inescapable. The paper will use newly available archival material to challenge that orthodoxy.

Talbot argues that although the Spanish Republic was isolated, it did not have to rely on a powerful patron. She points out that an isolated state can mobilise its own internal social resources as France did in the 1790s or as the Soviet Union did during its civil war. Both these states had experienced a revolution and could not expect foreign aid, yet both succeeded in defeating a coalition of foreign powers that provided military and financial backing to internal opponents of the regime.

Both countries were able to draw on the social forces their revolutions had unleashed. France discovered the *levé en masse*, the Soviet Union developed the Red Army. These were new types of army which depended for their motivation on the commitment of their soldiers to a new social order and system of property relations. Both wars were in that sense a continuation of the social revolution.

The decision of the Spanish Republican government to put itself so completely in the power of another state did not arise solely from the conjuncture of international relations, Talbot argues, but overwhelmingly from the internal social dynamics of Spain itself and the common interest of the leaders of the Spanish Republic and the Soviet bureaucracy in strangling the emerging social revolution in Spain.

Drawing on material now available from the Soviet

archives and recently released from British and US intelligence agencies, she demonstrates that the Soviet Union set out to crush opposition elements it identified with Trotskyism. It did so with a ruthless campaign of lies that portrayed its left-wing opponents as fascists and agents of the Gestapo and by the manufacture of forged evidence, kidnappings, torture and murder. Andres Nin, leader of the centrist POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) and Erwin Wolf, Trotsky's secretary, were both murdered by the Soviet secret police, the GPU, as was the Austrian socialist Kurt Landau. Moscow's objective was to suppress a developing revolution, to physically liquidate its leading representatives, to terrorize wider layers of workers and peasants and to prevent their revolutionary strivings from acquiring a politically conscious form.

The Spanish Civil War was one of the seminal events that determined the essential political characteristics of the twentieth century and, to the extent that the political questions that were posed in that century have still not been resolved, it remains one of the formative influences on the world in which we live in today. Had the Spanish revolution been successful, we would be looking back at a very different twentieth century and living in a very different world. Opening up the Spanish Civil War to discussion is therefore an important part of the development of the historical consciousness that is so vital to class consciousness.



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