

Spanish Stalinist leader Carrillo opposes Garzón indictment

Paul Bond

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The recent announcement of the first judicial investigation of the crimes of the Franco dictatorship revealed the barely-suppressed political contradictions within Spain. The Popular Party (PP), formed out of the remains of Franco's Falange, reacted with predictable hostility to the proposals from senior investigative Judge Baltasar Garzón. One PP senator described it as "reopening wounds that were happily closed." A legal challenge to the investigation has now led to the suspension of exhumations of mass graves pending further legal discussion.

The PP was not alone in opposing Garzón's proposals. Santiago Carrillo, the 93-year old former General Secretary of the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), also publicly criticised the move, which he describes as an "error." He has said it is "not the best way" of restoring the historical memory of the period under the dictatorship. In a metaphor that perhaps reveals more than he intended, he likened such a judicial move to a rifle where the bullet might leave through the butt rather than the barrel.

There has been a growing demand for a political reckoning with the Franco regime. At the end of the Franco dictatorship, complicated political treaties were established to prevent the working class from settling accounts with the fascists. An amnesty was introduced in 1977, enabling Francoist officials to remain in office without any threat of prosecution. Elements of Franco's Falange formed the parliamentary Popular Party (PP). Spanish capitalism was stabilised by 1978's so-called "peaceful transition to democracy." This was only possible thanks to the support and assistance of the social democratic Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), now in power under Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and the PCE.

The PSOE was brought to power in 2003 by popular anger at PP Prime Minister José Maria Aznar's support for the war in Iraq. It has been forced to make certain concessions towards the unresolved matter of Francoism's legacy such as the "Law of Historical Memory" which nominally rehabilitated Franco's victims.

This proved insufficient to suppress popular anger. Garzón's indictment indicates that the post-Franco arrangements are breaking up. As a result the Spanish population are facing political and historic questions that went unresolved in 1978, bound up with the betrayal and defeat of the Spanish revolution

by the Stalinist-led Popular Front government.

Carrillo personally embodies the PCE's history. Imprisoned for two years following the crushing of the 1934 revolt by miners in Asturias, he joined the PCE. He led the PCE in Madrid throughout the period of the revolution.

One reason for Carrillo's objections to Garzón's investigation is a renewed call that he be investigated for his part in the Paracuellos del Jarama killings. In November 1936 some 2,000 Nationalists were taken from Republican prisons in and around Madrid and murdered at Paracuellos. The killings were carried out by PCE members under the command of Carrillo's deputy, Segundo Serrano Poncela. Carrillo has always denied giving the order to his subordinate. In a new book he now claims he did everything possible to prevent the killings.

After the defeat of the revolution, he lived in exile until 1976. He became General Secretary of the PCE in 1960. He was elected to the Lower House of the Cortes at the first post-Franco election in 1977, shortly after the PCE was legalised again.

During the transition, Carrillo played a crucial role in preventing any settling of scores and thereby in ensuring the survival of Spanish capitalism. He warned against any outbursts of anti-clericalism, suggesting that the separation of church and state under the Republic in 1931 had given Franco a cause for his crusade. In this way, Carrillo ensured that the Catholic Church continued to play its pernicious and dominant role in Spanish politics.

Carrillo also paved the way for the restoration of the monarchy. In 1977 he promised that the PCE would raise no objections to the monarchy provided Juan Carlos became king. He later praised Juan Carlos' role in the transition.

Carrillo has made it clear that he is determined to continue defending Spanish capitalism and the compromise he negotiated in 1978. He told journalists recently, with all the problems that Spanish democracy still has, "the best regime possible is the one that we have."

Carrillo describes his new book as a contribution to the "maintenance of the spirit of reconciliation between Spaniards which culminated in the Transition." Retired colonel Julian Delgado has similarly called for all groups that participated in

the Civil War to leave the past buried in order to “save the democratic coexistence.”

Carrillo points out that during the dictatorship Republicans were subjected to widespread punishments for actions such as the Paracuellos killings. Investigating them now would be tantamount to punishing Republicans twice over.

That an investigation into the crimes of the fascist dictatorship could also address the killings of Nationalists by Republicans is possible in part because of the actions of the Stalinists during the conflict such as the Jarama massacre and, above all, because of the role played by both the PCE and the PSOE in protecting the Francoists after the dictator’s death. The official line, that “everyone was a victim” of the Civil War, as Zapatero put it, is an interpretation in agreement with the PP. Carrillo has also recently called the argument that both sides committed atrocities “the truth.” For the PSOE and PCE, this consensus prevents the possibility of any reckoning with the history of the Spanish revolution, and the way in which it was betrayed.

Beyond any personal implication, there is the threat of a wholesale political exposure. Any thorough investigation of the execution of Republicans would also reveal how the Stalinists were responsible for the betrayal of the Spanish revolution. Any investigation of unmarked graves is likely to throw up evidence of the scale of Stalinist collusion and responsibility for such murders. The right-wing newspaper *La Vanguardia* has already drawn this conclusion. If Garzón can treat Francoist crimes of 1936 as current, it wrote, then investigations can be conducted not just into Paracuellos and the killings of priests by Republicans, but also into the death of Andres Nin, the Catalan revolutionist who was dragged from a Barcelona prison and murdered by Stalinist agents.

That list can be extended to many others: Trotskyists, members of Nin’s centrist Party of Marxist Unity (POUM), anarchists and other dissidents.

From June 1936, when the Spanish working class rose up to resist an attempted military coup, a period of dual power existed in Spain. The Republican government was nominally still in power, but actual control was in the hands of workers. What the Spanish working class lacked was a party prepared to take power. The most militant workers were organised in the Anarchist union federation the CNT, which formally rejected any form of state power, including the workers’ state, but supported the Popular Front dedicated to the preservation of capitalism and a bourgeois state in Spain. The Trotskyists were a minority within the POUM.

Despite this period of dual power, the Stalinists denied that conditions existed for a successful proletarian revolution in Spain. Instead they claimed that Spain needed to conduct a bourgeois democratic revolution, and pursued collaboration with sections of the ruling class in the Popular Front government. Despite the opposition of the Trotskyists, and the party’s own criticism of the Popular Front, the POUM joined

that government alongside the PCE. The Stalinists denounced as fascist agents anyone who opposed the Popular Front.

This political disarmament allowed the Popular Front the opportunity to disarm the working class physically, and preserve bourgeois rule. When the May Days erupted in Barcelona in 1937, only a small group of Trotskyists, and the Anarchists of the Friends of Durrutti, called for the seizure of power. The CNT and POUM leaderships refused to call on workers to overthrow the government. The Anarchist leadership negotiated a ceasefire that allowed the government to regain control. The Stalinist secret police, the GPU, spirited leaders of the POUM like Nin away to their prisons. Nin was murdered for refusing to provide a confession that would link him to Trotskyism for a Stalinist show trial.

The persecution and harassment of revolutionaries continued internationally. The Stalinists were more afraid of a revolutionary movement of the working class than they were of a repressive bourgeois regime. Their main targets were the Marxists, including Leon Trotsky and his closest collaborators.

In Spain, the PCE continued its policy of repression after Franco came to power. Carrillo has been accused of ordering the execution of at least two members of the PCE (Gabriel León Trilla and Joan Comorera) during the 1940s. It is alleged that he also assisted the Francoists in detaining another PCE member, Jesús Monzón.

The “return” of Carrillo, as one paper termed it, is a clear indication of concerns within the Spanish ruling class about a leftward movement developing. When Carrillo voices his criticisms of Garzón today, it is from the standpoint that no revolutionary movement can be permitted to arise in Spain. He is concerned that the same mechanisms are not available now as in 1936 to crush any such development. By his own admission, the PCE almost does not exist, while the United Left (IU), the electoral bloc in which the PCE collaborated, is now in its “final stage.” He has expressed concern that there is no party providing a left cover for the PSOE.

Carrillo’s preferred option with regard to the historical legacy of Franco would have been for a joint declaration from both houses of the Cortes condemning Francoism and declaring that “a revolt against a democratic state cannot be justified.” Ostensibly aimed at the fascist regime, such a statement would serve to defend capitalism against any revolutionary movement that challenged the Spanish state. Carrillo has stated openly that it is not possible to fight capitalism now, as it was 80 years ago--although 80 years ago his party was also denying that it was possible to fight capitalism.



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