

Santiago Carrillo, butcher of the Spanish Revolution

Vicky Short
4 October 2012

The ex-General Secretary of the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), Santiago Carrillo, died on Tuesday September 18 at the age of 97.

A vigil was set up on Wednesday in the headquarters of Comisiones Obreras (CC OO), the trade union close to the Communist Party. Carrillo's body was cremated on Thursday and his ashes taken to be scattered over the Cantabric coast of Gijón (Asturias), where he was born.

Carrillo's life spanned nearly a century and, though initially animated by revolutionary sentiment as a young man, he became a bitter and ruthless enemy of socialism. He defended every crime committed by the Kremlin bureaucracy, not only within Spain but in the Soviet Union and the world over. Above all, as general secretary of the PCE, he aided and abetted agents of the GPU, the Soviet secret police, sent by Stalin in the kidnapping and murder of all those who were considered opponents of Stalinism—most famously the leader of the centrist Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), Andre Nin.

The son of prominent socialist and trade union leader, Wenceslao Carrillo, he started working in the socialist democratic Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) publication *El Socialista* when he was just 13. He joined the Workers General Union and the Socialist Youth, becoming its general secretary at the age of 18. After serving a two-year jail sentence for participating in a failed coup by the National Revolutionary Committee in 1934, he travelled to Moscow with a delegation from the Socialist Youth to negotiate a merger of the Socialist and Communist youth leagues that became known as the United Socialist Youth.

The merger significantly extended the Stalinists' base in Spain, with disastrous consequences for the Spanish revolution.

At the start of the 1936 revolution and the civil war that began with General Francisco Franco's fascist coup d'état against the elected Republican government, Carrillo joined the Communist Party. He embraced the Kremlin bureaucracy's theory of Socialism in One Country and its corollary—the perspective of a Popular Front with the bourgeoisie against fascism—through which any attempt by the working class in any country to overthrow capitalism and take power into its own hands was to be prevented by all means.

At the time Carrillo joined the PCE, the infamous Moscow Trials were taking place in Russia. Scores of leaders of the Russian Revolution were put through kangaroo trials. Stalin's victims were tortured, threatened with the annihilation of their families and broken to the point of extracting their confessions to all sorts of fabricated crimes. They were then executed.

Leon Trotsky was given central place in these frame-ups and sentenced to death in absentia.

In July 1937, Erwin Wolf, Trotsky's secretary, had been dispatched to Spain to intervene against the popular front policies of the Stalinists. Stalinist agent Marc Zborowski informed the GPU, which intercepted Wolf at the border and murdered him.

Many workers around the world joined the Communist Party because they thought it was the genuine representative of the Russian Revolution

of 1917. Carrillo was different. As the leader of the PCE, he had close ties with the Kremlin, was fully aware of its ruthless purges of the leaders of the Left Opposition, and actively supported its counter-revolutionary activities.

In an interview given in 1974, reported in Burnett Bolloten's "The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution", Carrillo said, "I had never regarded the Trotskyists as possible enemies until I went to the Soviet Union [in 1935]... Although I did not really regard the Spanish Trotskyists as being fascist agents, I accepted what I had never acknowledged before. Later came the Moscow Trials... with all those confessions, all those admissions of guilt. I must admit that I was convinced at the time that the confessions were genuine... I am therefore among those who believed that those people were counterrevolutionaries, agents of the enemy."

This is a considered answer 40 years after the fact. What the party that he led really thought was best expressed by PCE co-leader, Jose Diaz, speaking at a public meeting on May 9 1937, also quoted by Bolloten:

"Our principal enemies are the fascists. However, the fascists have their agents who work for them. Of course if these agents were to say, 'We are fascists and we want to work amongst you to create difficulties', they would immediately be eliminated by us. For these reasons they have to give themselves other names... some call themselves Trotskyists, which is the name used by many disguised fascists who talk of revolution in order to spread disorder. I therefore ask: If everyone knows this, if the [Republican] government knows this, why does it not treat them like fascists and exterminate them pitilessly?"

"...That is why I stated in my speech at the recent plenary session of the central committee not only that this organisation should be dissolved in Spain and its press suspended, but that Trotskyism should be swept out of all civilised countries, that is, if we really want to get rid of this vermin."

Diaz himself seems to have fallen foul of the bureaucracy, as the circumstances of his death by suicide some years later in the Soviet Union were suspicious. Many have expressed their belief that he also became an "enemy" and was eliminated by Stalin.

But it was on the basis of such lies that scores of working class fighters were murdered in Spain, their executions organised by Stalin's agents who went to Spain as communist "brothers" and worked within Carrillo's Communist Party to "exterminate" the Trotskyists.

Carrillo is alleged to have ordered the execution of at least two members of his own party, Gabriel León Trilla and Joan Comorera, during the 1940s while in exile. It is also alleged that he assisted the Francoists in detaining another PCE member, Jesús Monzón.

The PCE also spawned the assassin who murdered Leon Trotsky in August 1940 while he was in exile in Mexico—the Catalan Ramon Mercader.

Mercader and his mother had been recruited to the NKVD, forerunner of the GPU, and he had spent some time in Moscow in 1937 for specialised training in assassination. Carrillo denied any knowledge of the crime, but

when Mercader was released from jail in 1960, Carrillo and his cohort, Dolores Ibarruri (*La Pasionaria* as she is known to the Stalinists but who should be remembered as *La Assasinaria*), pleaded on his behalf that he be allowed to return to his native Barcelona. This was denied, and Mercader was sent instead to Castro's Cuba.

In a series of writings, Trotsky elaborated a revolutionary perspective for the Spanish working class. Had there have been a revolutionary party able to work with its international co-thinkers and firmly and consistently fight for this perspective against the Stalinists, social democratic and centrist parties, there is no question it would have laid the road to the victory of socialism. Its impact would have been felt far beyond Spain, and changed the course of European and indeed world history—then on the eve of the blood bath of a second imperialist war and the barbarism of Hitlerite fascism.

Carrillo's last defining action came at the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975. The king in waiting, Juan Carlos, recognising that the PCE might help ensure a peaceful transition after Franco's death, sent Franco's nephew, Nicolás Franco Pascual de Pobil, to meet Carrillo in Paris to find out how the PCE would react when Franco died. Carrillo reassured him there was nothing to fear.

In December 1976, following the death of the dictator, 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 allowed the PCE's candidates to stand in the 1977 elections—but only as individuals.

This "peaceful transition" to bourgeois democracy was consciously directed against an upsurge of militant struggles as the working class sought to exact justice on those who had participated in the Franco regime and to achieve real change. A few individual military heads associated with Franco were removed, but capitalism was maintained, the bourgeoisie kept their property and the fascists were given a political amnesty under the slogan of "forget and forgive".

Carrillo supported and worked with Stalinism in its ascendancy and attempted to distance himself from its many crimes only at its point of collapse.

In the 1970s, together with Enrico Berlinguer of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and Georges Marchais of the French Communist Party (PCF), Carrillo turned against the Soviet bureaucracy and declared at a Madrid meeting that he was now a "Eurocommunist".

Far from a reappraisal of past crimes, Carrillo and company were distancing themselves from Moscow only in order to more surely serve the interests of their own bourgeoisie. To do so they sought to widen their appeal to sections of the middle class by embracing feminism, gay liberation, and other identity issues and insisting on their "democratic credentials"—while distancing themselves from their past formal avowal of class politics. This did not, of course, mean breaking their alliance with the trade union bureaucracy as a mechanism for policing the class struggle.

Eurocommunism has been referred to as the prelude to Glasnost and Perestroika, the policies advocated by Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin that ushered in the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union.

When in 1981 an attempted coup took place and members of parliament were held hostage inside Congress, Carrillo reinforced the legitimacy of the monarchy by spreading the myth that King Juan Carlos had personally intervened to prevent a return to fascist rule. In fact the King had held back from opposing the coup until he realised that there was no support for it in the ruling class.

Hundreds of thousands of revolutionary fighters remain to this day buried in mass graves and their relatives are denied the right to recover their bodies. When the senior investigative Spanish judge, Baltasar

Garzón, initiated the first judicial investigation of the crimes of the Franco dictatorship in 2008, Carrillo, then 93, publicly criticised what he described as an "error." It was "not the best way" of restoring the historical memory of the period under the dictatorship, he said. In a metaphor that perhaps reveals more than he intended, he likened such a judicial investigation to a rifle where the bullet might leave through the butt rather than the barrel.

Any objective investigation of the crimes of Franco would have certainly backfired on the Stalinists. But in the event, Garzón was accused of breaking the 1977 Law of Amnesty, which pardoned the crimes of the Franco era. For probing the disappearance of 114,000 people during the Spanish Civil War and ensuing fascist dictatorship, he was debarred for 11 years.

On Carrillo's death, the Spanish bourgeoisie showed their full appreciation of their faithful servant, even as the media attempted to perpetuate the myth of the "historic communist leader" and "defender of working people". A statement of recognition and praise for Carrillo's services was read, and parliament gave him a standing ovation. Large numbers of dignitaries from the right, left and middle of the political spectrum filed past Carrillo's casket to pay their respects.

So eager was King Juan Carlos to show his appreciation of Carrillo's invaluable contribution to the return of the monarchy to Spain that he paid a visit, accompanied by the queen, to the house of the deceased, just two hours after his death had been announced. Carrillo had been "essential for the Transition and for democracy" and "a very dear person" the king said.

The right-wing Popular Party (PP) also sent top government representatives, including the hated vice president, Soraya Saénz de Santamaria, Foreign Minister José Manuel García Margallo, Minister of Employment Fátima Báñez, and Minister for Public Works Ana Pastor.

PP officials visiting the coffin included the general vice secretary of PP organisation, Carlos Floriano and the general vice secretary of the PP Studies and Programmes, Esteban Gonzalez Pons.

They too lavished praise on the memory of Carrillo. Referring to the necessity of having people like Carrillo to mediate today's gathering class struggles on behalf of the bourgeoisie, Pons said, "I wish that the generosity shown by Carrillo and others will accompany us always, especially in moments like these."

Gaspar Llamazares, the Stalinist ex-leader of Izquierda Unida (the umbrella organisation set up by the Communist Party to gather together the various middle class pseudo-left groups), was the first to be informed of Carrillo's death by his family. Carrillo "summarizes, like no one else, the Republic, the anti-Franco struggle, and the *stakes for reconciliation in a very delicate moment for Spain*," Llamazares said. [Emphasis added]

The last years of Carrillo's life have witnessed an offensive by the Spanish and world ruling elite to drive working people back to the social conditions that existed before the birth of the workers' movement.

But Carrillo's death marks the end of an historical era in which Stalinism was able to behead the revolutionary working class. Carrillo did everything he could to annihilate revolutionary socialism. But he failed. Stalin's crimes are now known for what they were.

In contrast, the struggle of Trotsky has been vindicated. In the midst of all the horrors and persecutions of the 1930s, he and his supporters founded the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

Not only has it survived unimaginable persecution, but today Trotsky's perspective is a guide for workers and youth all over the world amid a global crisis of capitalism and a resurgence of revolutionary class conflicts in Spain and throughout the world.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact