En Lucha's Andy Durgan: Historical distortions to justify political betrayal of Spanish workers

Part three

Dave Hyland
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This is the final part of a three-part article on the distortions of the lessons of Spanish history by En Lucha's Andy Durgan. The first part was posted November 7. The second part *was posted November 8.*

Durgan's attempts to disguise the role played by the workers' leaders are also confirmed by his assessment of the 1962 Asturian miners' strike. Once again, there is no acknowledgement of world developments between 1940 and 1962, as they were manifested in Spain.

Durgan implies that Franco's victory and the installation of a fascist dictatorship in April 1939 meant the end of the class struggle in Spain for a generation.

"After Franco's victory all trade unions and workers' organisations were banned. The repression unleashed during the war continued until the late 1940s", he summarises.

Conveniently for him, this means he doesn't need to confront the role played by social democracy and Stalinism in Spain during the Second World War.

Towards the end of the war, 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 Stalinist PCE initiated a guerrilla war in 1944 that claimed the lives of some 15,000 of its members. This was not directed towards mobilising the independent political power of the working class to overthrow capitalism and Franco's fascist regime, but at placing pressure on the Allied imperialist powers.

The PCE leadership, which a few years earlier had blamed the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, which it called "a war of independence against German and Italian intervention," on the anarchists and the non-intervention policy of Britain and France, 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." [7]

The survival of capitalism in Europe at the war's end depended above all upon the collaboration of the social democrats and especially the Stalinists, who imposed the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, signed by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston 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.

The imperialist powers left Spain as a rural economy under Franco's control. This was a punishment on the Spanish working class for coming so close to socialist revolution in the previous decade and out of the fear that they would launch another one. Although ostensibly cold shouldered internationally, Franco's regime continued to be fed with military hardware by US imperialism. With the advent of the Cold War, the imperialist powers regarded the Spanish dictator as a bulwark against communism and pursued once more a policy of "non-intervention", or more properly tacit support.

In 1953 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was created and Stalin advised the PCE to abandon its guerrilla war and instead seek to capture fascist and Catholic organisations, so as to try to influence them along the path of bourgeois democracy. 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.

Referring to the revolutionary upsurge in 1962, Durgan writes only that during the preceding 14 years, Spain "underwent unprecedented growth and was transformed both economically and socially.

"Economic development meant that workers flooded into the cities and industries. A new working class emerged relatively unscathed by the horrors of the Civil War.

"Throughout the 1960s there would be repeated clashes and strikes as this new working class strove to both improve its conditions and, increasingly, bring about democracy."

Durgan's central falsification lies in his assertion that all that was posed in Spain was a struggle for democracy. These years were in fact a development toward what was the most sustained period of revolutionary struggles in Europe since the 1930s. Between 1968 and 1975, capitalism was able to survive in a number of countries, Spain included, only because of the political disarming of the working class by its old organisations, together with the secondary role played by middle class tendencies such as the forerunners of the SWP/En Lucha that opposed the building of a revolutionary alternative to the labour bureaucracies.

The development of an internationalised world economy had indeed placed tremendous strains on the autarchic semi-isolated Spanish economy, forcing the bourgeoisie to open it up to overseas investment. Under the 1953 Pact of Madrid, the US granted Spain $1 billion worth of aid in return for allowing American bases on Spanish territory. Nevertheless, 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 López Rodó, which

began to overturn restrictions on the free market economy without making any provision for democratic rights.

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 and offering concessions such as the minimum wage and large wage increases.

Spain's economy began to grow as a result of foreign aid and capital investment—attracted by the repressive labour regime—the remittances from more than 500,000 Spanish workers forced to seek work abroad and the enormous increase in tourism from northern Europe facilitated by cheaper air travel. These mounting contradictions once more led to the outbreak of the class struggle, signalled by the huge strike wave that erupted in 1962.

Durgan replaces this class struggle analysis with one of a supposed "modernisation" of Spain, which means he can ignore the part played by the counter-revolutionary policies of the workers' leaderships and particularly the Stalinist forces that were responsible for enabling Spanish capitalism and Franco's fascist regime to survive.

Durgan goes into an account of how the 1962 strike developed and was organised until it involved 60,000 workers, despite the fact that "in Franco's Spain, striking was equal to military rebellion and was punished harshly. …"

… Yet strikers were able to organise effectively. The strike gripped 24 provinces for more than eight weeks", he notes.

"The Spanish democratic movement stemmed partially from the Asturian mining strikes. The strike wave had given the movement strength, momentum and hope that fascism in Spain could be beaten."

Instead, although limited gains were made in terms of wages and conditions, this general strike was subordinated politically to the national perspective of the Stalinists and the union bureaucracy.

As it became obvious that the Franco regime was in terminal crisis, the ruling elite had once more turned to the PCE for salvation. Since 1956, the year Communist Party of the Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev made his secret speech denouncing Stalin, the PCE had pursued a policy of "National Reconciliation."

The PCE argued that the regime's corporate unions (syndicates) could evolve into democratically elected organisations and bring about democratic change.

PCE General Secretary Santiago Carrillo admitted that the party deliberately worked to divert the underground CCOO workers councils, that had emerged as the syndicates began to collapse following 1962, in a reformist direction and back into the fascist unions. For Carrillo, the greatest success 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.

In 1966, leaders in the PCE, still working illegally, won an overwhelming victory in syndicate elections. However, the regime turned on the PCE, annulling the syndicate election results and outlawing the workers councils.

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." [8]

Carrillo and the PCE were, in the period dealt with so brusquely and uncritically by Durgan, formulating the perspective that was to provide the axis for demobilising the Spanish working class during the so-called "Transition to Democracy."

This centred on the *ruptura democratica*—a "democratic break" with the dictatorship through the means of a general strike. Ever since the early fifties and throughout his exile in France, Carrillo had been advancing his perspective of the peaceful national strike. This perspective was now included in the *ruptura*. As the PCE stated in 1973:

"The step from dictatorship to democracy has to happen through a real political revolution. Through our struggle, through the struggle articulated by the forces in favour of democracy, the task that we propose is to carry out a political revolution. ... The PCE's proposals will facilitate the step from fascist dictatorship to democracy ... with the least violence possible and the elimination of the danger of a new Civil War. ... On repeated occasions the communists have said that a National Strike could finish with the dictatorship.

"The concept of a National Strike goes further than that of a political general strike. ... The National Strike does not consist in crossing your arms, mimicking the anarchist dream about the general strike. It is not a question of simply paralysing work, organising the workers from every business, the locals from every neighbourhood, to intervene massively on the street... It's a question not only of stopping the country, but empowering ourselves on the street... building organs of struggle and power at every possible level to strengthen the pressure on the nucleus of dictatorial power until it is overthrown." [9]

Stripped of its left verbiage, this was an appeal to all the so-called "democratic" forces in Spain, including those around the Franco regime with the exception of its central "nucleus". After Franco died in his bed on November 20 1975, Carrillo began to ditch all talk of mass mobilisation and adopted a new strategy of *ruptura pactada*—a break with Franco negotiated at an elite level, in parliament, rather than by mass action. In the political firmament in the aftermath of Franco's death, the PCE united with the *Plataforma Democrática*, the social democratic-influenced opposition coalition.

This was the first step towards rapprochement with all the other capitalist parties in Spain. The PCE, which was to play a leading role in the development of Euro Communism during this period, had a central role in suppressing the revolutionary struggles of the Spanish working class and once again enabling capitalism to survive.

Durgan's distortion of these fundamental historical experiences is made necessary by developments in the class struggle and the sharpening class polarisation. With revolution once more on the agenda, Durgan acts as a Stalinist falsifier and relinquishes any intellectual and historical credibility that he may have once possessed.

To breathe even a word about the POUM or mention the name, Trotsky, or the GPU, or Stalin's crimes would cut across the attempts by En Lucha and the SWP to curry favour with the Stalinists and their orientation towards the middle class political swamp around the decaying labour bureaucracy.

In omitting any reference to Trotsky's historical struggle to develop a Marxist cadre in Spain in 1931-1939, Durgan speaks for a middle class tendency deeply hostile to Marxism and the fight to establish the political independence of the working class. History proves there was an alternative to the catastrophic dead end into which the Spanish workers were led in the past. That alternative is today represented by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Concluded

Notes:

[7] Santiago Carrillo, *Dialogue on Spain*, Lawrence and Wishart (1974), page 92

[8] *ibid.* page 169

[9] From "Proyecto de Manifiesto—Programa del PCE, 1973" in *PCE en sus Documentos 1920-1977*, ediciones hoac, Madrid, 1977 quoted in Patrick Baker, "The Spanish Transition to democracy—A Missed opportunity to the left?", Socialist History Society Occasional paper no. 11 (2000), http://www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk/BAKER01.HTM

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