

# Spain Betrayed

*The Soviet Union in the  
Spanish Civil War*

Edited by  
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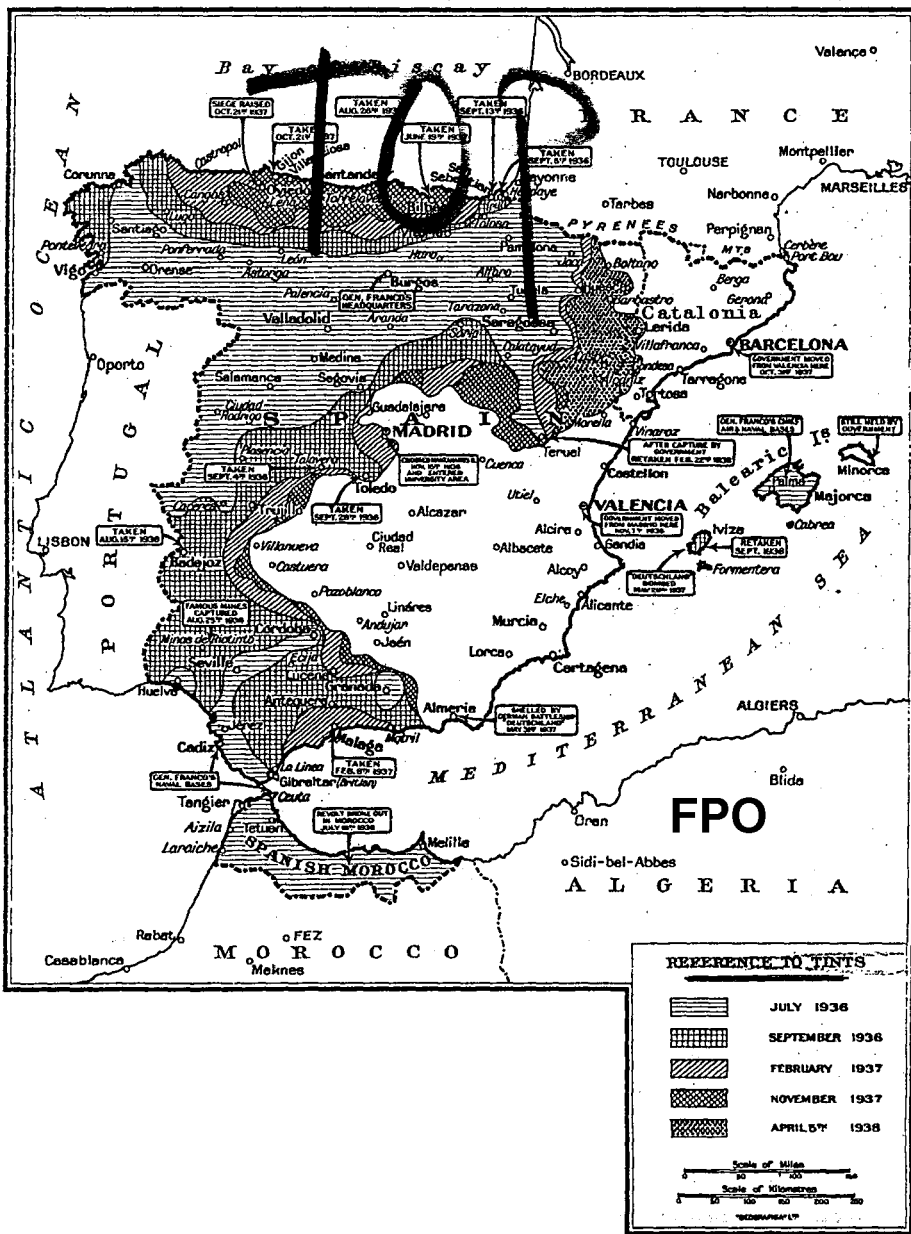
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RONALD RADOSH

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Franco's Advances in Spain up to April 1938.

"Atlantic to Mediterranean: Franco's Gradual Advances in Spain," reproduced by permission from the *Illustrated London News*, April 9, 1938, p. 607.



# Introduction

On 16 July 1936, a large part of the Spanish officer corps rose up in revolt against the legitimately elected Popular Front government of Spain. The coup by the rebellious generals led not to a successful takeover, but instead to a civil war, a battle in which the sympathies and solidarity of millions around the world were enlisted on one side or the other. Spain, a nation that had long been relegated to the sidelines of history, suddenly thrust itself on the world's attention. It became the focus of other nations' foreign policy—and also of a desire on the part of idealistic volunteers to come to the aid of the embattled Republic. From that time on, the Spanish Civil War became not just a part of history but a parable about the need to respond when the forces of tyranny attempt to crush progressive movements seeking democracy, social change, and freedom.

## The Significance of the Spanish Civil War Today

The fight to save the Spanish Republic in fact became the stuff of legend. Once thousands of brave young men, most of them organized by the communist parties in the West, rushed to Spain to join the battle on the behalf of the Republic, it was inevitable that Spain would become the symbol for what was later to be spoken of as “the good fight”—the kind of warfare that those on the right side wage to defeat the powerful enemies of democracy. The new modern enemy was fascism—the scourge unleashed on the world by Hitler in Germany

and Mussolini in Italy. Spain was fated to be the first nation in which the three great ideologies and political systems—democracy, fascism, and communism—would fight it out.

According to compelling legend that was born with the decisive defeat of the Republic and that echoes down to the present day, Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union led the effort to stop “fascism” in Spain. The Communist International (Comintern) issued orders to its cadres around the world to organize volunteers immediately from the national communist parties into military units that would fight alongside the Republican army. For these mainly young and idealistic volunteers, the Spanish conflict was a noble crusade against Hitler and Mussolini and their Spanish puppet Franco. Many years later the volunteers would describe themselves proudly as “premature antifascists,” those who had the prescience to understand what the rest of the West came to realize only after American entry into World War II. Survivors from the International Brigades would describe the effort to save the Republic as one of the noblest and most selfless undertakings of the international communist movement, under the aegis of the Soviet Union. History may have proved Stalin to be one of the worst tyrants and murderers of the twentieth century, but in Spain, the story goes, he stood on the right side and mobilized his weak nation and its international allies to save a democratic Republic.

It is this claim about the meaning of the war that led the British journalist and historian Paul Johnson to comment, aptly, that “no episode in the 1930s has been more lied about than this one, and only in recent years have historians begun to dig it out from the mountain of mendacity beneath which it was buried for a generation.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even as Johnson wrote those words in the 1980s, it was clear that for many intellectuals, Spain was a cause to be celebrated rather than explored anew. The late Alfred Kazin, one of the most distinguished American literary critics, described the Spanish Civil War as “the wound that will not heal”; he declared, therefore, that the “destroyers of the Spanish Republic would always be my enemies.”<sup>2</sup> For men of that generation, Spain was “their” war—the one noble cause that they could not let go. The journalist Murray Kempton explained the roots of such loyal conviction. It came from a “small segment of my generation,” Kempton wrote, “which felt a personal commitment to the revolution.”<sup>3</sup> Like Vietnam for the young men and women of the New Left in the 1960s, Spain, for those who came to adulthood in the 1930s, was a historical event never to be reexamined, which was to serve as a source of never-ending inspiration.

The truth, of course, is not so simple. The Spanish Civil War took place be-

cause indecisive elections in February 1936 revealed a nation divided; the irresponsible militancy of sectors of the more extreme Left fed the aims of the insurgent generals. Once civil war broke out, both sides were responsible for unspeakable atrocities. The intervention of Germany and Italy prevented Franco's defeat, even as Soviet military aid gave the Republic the means to beat back the initial advance by Franco's forces.

The problem was that the Soviet Union exacted a harsh price from the Spanish Republic for the delivery of that military aid. The British historian Gerald Howson has furnished overwhelming evidence showing the extent to which Stalin shortchanged and double-crossed the Spanish Republic. As a result of Howson's extensive research, no longer can it be claimed that the Soviet Union was a bastion in the struggle against Franco. Rather, Stalin in effect swindled the Republic out of several hundred million dollars in arms deals. This was done through a secret cooking of the account books. The Soviets faked the prices of arms—guns, planes, and tanks—in order to obtain the gold reserves of Spain. They accomplished it in the following manner. The official exchange rate was 5.3 rubles to the dollar, but the Russians created special exchange rates, favorable to themselves, for the weapons that they sold to the Spanish. Thus, the “coefficient” exchange rate of 2.5 rubles to a dollar for a Russian Maxim machine gun made the guns almost twice as expensive as it should have been for the Spanish to purchase with their gold. On two aircraft alone, Stalin stole more than fifty million dollars from the Republic. In addition, many of the items supplied were ancient and unusable, often delivered without ammunition. As Howson writes, of all the “swindles, cheatings, robberies and betrayals the Republicans had to put up with, this barrow-boy behavior by Stalin and the high officials of the Soviet nomenklatura is surely the most squalid, the most treacherous and the most indefensible.” One of course expected *opponents* of the Republic to try to do it in; but as Howson writes, by defrauding the Spanish Republican government of millions of dollars, “by secretly manipulating the exchange rates when setting the prices for the goods they were supplying,” the Soviets “belied everything they professed to stand for.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the price the Republicans paid for the Soviet aid was the very factor that led to the Republic's eventual demise. In exchange for military aid, Stalin demanded the transformation of the Republic into a prototype for the so-called People's Democracies of postwar Eastern and Central Europe. In addition to generals and supplies, Stalin sent the Soviet secret police (the NKVD) and the military intelligence unit (the GRU) to Spain. There the GRU established secret prisons, carried out assassinations and kidnappings, and func-

tioned under its own rules and laws, independent of the Republican government. Years ago, one of the first Soviet defectors from the NKVD, Walter Krivitsky, argued that “the Soviet Union seemed to have a grip on Loyalist Spain, as if it were already a Soviet possession.”<sup>5</sup> For years, Krivitsky’s account was deemed unreliable, suspect because of his status as a defector; but as the decades have passed, a consensus has emerged among historians that Krivitsky’s telling assessment was essentially correct.<sup>6</sup> E. H. Carr, the late British historian, whose sympathies were always with the Soviets, accordingly wrote in his last, posthumously published book that the Spanish Republic had become “what its enemies called it, the puppet of Moscow.”<sup>7</sup>

The most recent works on Spain, therefore, make clear that the Spanish government’s greatest supporters—including the Soviet Union, which controlled the participation of European leftist volunteers in the war—had mixed, if not completely sinister, motives for helping the Republicans. The point of view is hardly new: scholars have long argued that for its own ends, the Soviet Union, acting largely through the Comintern and the secret police, manipulated the Spanish Republic. The difficulty, however, has lain in proving the common allegation about Soviet intentions during the war. Until now we have been dependent on a few documents made available by Comintern members, some documentation from Spanish archives, and the memoirs of participants. Although many of these touched on the Soviet role, direct evidence covering the USSR’s intervention in Spain has been lacking. In 1991 and 1992, as previously closed Soviet archives began to be opened, it became possible to investigate the period anew. For the first time, an entire group of records dedicated to the Spanish Civil War came to light in the Russian State Military Archives. Searches in this and other depositories in Moscow unearthed a new batch of relevant Comintern, Politburo, and intelligence agency documents.

The significance of the new material cannot be overstated. We now have, for the first time, hard evidence that proves what many had suspected since the beginning of the Spanish Civil War: that Stalin sought from the very beginning to control events in Spain and to manage or prevent the spread of actual social revolution. Using officials from the military, intelligence, and the Comintern, Moscow attempted to take over and run the Spanish economy, government, and armed forces. Of course, Stalin did not find it easy simply to dictate events. He faced opposition from such men as Premier Francisco Largo Caballero, as well as other moderates in the Popular Front government. The Soviet advisers sent to Madrid thus found it more difficult than they expected to impose their will on the Spanish Republic; yet, using the possibility of aid as virtual black-

mail, these men would eventually succeed in implementing almost every important decision that Moscow dictated, while pushing out of power those Spaniards who tried to oppose them.

Some contemporary historians try to resist such conclusions. A British historian, Tim Rees, has argued that in reality the Comintern, and hence the Soviet Union, were “unable to achieve a high level of control over the PCE [Communist Party of Spain] and hence over developments through it.” Rees agrees about the general political development in the Republic as outlined by most historians, but he argues strongly that the Soviets exercised no “central direction” and that the PCE acted independently, merely seeking Comintern endorsement for its actions. Rees’s analysis mirrors that of the revisionist historians of American Communism, who in their works portray the American Communist party as composed of militants who responded to local conditions and cared little about the dictates from the Soviet Union and the Comintern. Rees’s observation about “the absence of Comintern guidance,” however, is shown to be false by the documentary material contained within these pages. Thanks to the regular flow of now decoded “MASK” documents<sup>8</sup> from the Comintern to the PCE in 1936 and to the intervention of Soviet officers and Comintern agents, Soviet influence and control over the Spanish Communist party was nearly total. Rees’s claim, for example, that the brutality shown by PCE cadres in the “campaign to suppress the POUM owed far more to feeling on the ground than any dictates from Moscow” is, in light of the huge amount of evidence to the contrary, simply untenable.<sup>9</sup>

Until the release of this new archival material, historians writing about the Spanish Civil War have tended to fall into two groups, some following Rees’s interpretation and others dissenting from his view. To point up the contrast, we can take as examples the work of two writers: the distinguished British historian Paul Preston, the author of numerous books and articles pertaining to the war, including his best-known work, published in 1986, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936–39*,<sup>10</sup> and the journalist-historian Burnett Bolloten, who as a young man sympathetic to the Communists covered the war for the American press, and who later devoted the rest of his life to a thorough academic study of the Communist role in Spain. Bolloten’s classic, completed shortly before his death, appeared in 1991, under the title *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*.<sup>11</sup> Examining these two works of history, readers can immediately see that each of the scholars, despite adhering to traditional academic norms of presentation, comes to the subject with a definite point of view. Preston, in his most recent revised edition of his major work on the war,

makes his sympathies clear from the start, when he dedicates his book to “the men and women of the International Brigades who fought and died fighting fascism in Spain.” The accolade makes it clear that Preston writes as one sympathetic to the general communist version of events. This is not to deny that there is much of great value in Preston’s work. He is fully aware of the most recent scholarship on the war, and when analyzing Stalin’s foreign policy and reasons for intervention in the conflict, Preston endorses the historical consensus that “Stalin helped the Spanish Republic not in order to hasten its victory but rather to prolong its existence sufficiently to keep Hitler bogged down in an expensive venture.”<sup>12</sup>

When Preston turns to the internal politics of the Republic, though, his bias in favor of the moderates of the Front leads him to calumny people who favor a different interpretation. One of the central questions facing the Republic and the opponents of Franco was whether the war should be fought to preserve a middle-class republic or to inaugurate social revolution—this was the question that caused the most profound rift between the Communists and moderate Socialists on the one hand and the anarchists and the revolutionaries in the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unity) on the other. Preston, however, writes that Cold Warriors in the West used this debate “to disseminate the idea that it was the Stalinist suffocation of the revolution in Spain which led to Franco’s victory,” and he further charges, without evidence, that works presenting this point of view “were sponsored by the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom to propagate this idea,” and that the result was “an unholy alliance of anarchists, Trotskyists and Cold Warriors.” The rhetoric this historian engages in bears a striking resemblance to the canards and attacks launched by the Soviet Union and the PCE against their ideological enemies at the height of the Civil War. At the very least, the accusation serves to cut off analysis and debate, by dismissing interpretations contrary to Preston’s own as discredited Cold War views. Of course, it skirts the issue of whether the other interpretation has any merit.<sup>13</sup>

Bolloten, by contrast, wrote the most complex account so far of how the Communists gained hegemony in the Republic. In contradistinction to other scholars, Bolloten argued that in fact an actual social revolution had taken place in Spain, one that, as historian Stanley Payne puts it in the introduction to Bolloten’s grand work, was completely “pluralist” and authentic. Whereas outsiders saw the events as “a contest between democracy and fascism,” Bolloten (and Payne) portrayed it as something of greater substance, a war that took place within an actual revolution that broke out within the Republican

zone. The aim of the Communists, according to the thesis that Bolloten develops in exhaustive detail, was to expand their power gradually and gain influence over the army, police, and political apparatus. Because this was the focus of his work—earlier versions appeared first in 1961—Bolloten was regarded as attempting “in some fashion to impugn or besmirch the Republican cause.” As Stanley Payne notes, although Bolloten refuted the Francoist charge that a Communist plot to overthrow the Republic existed in 1936, he was nonetheless accused of having written his work at the behest of the CIA—precisely the charge that Preston still repeats.<sup>14</sup>

If the foregoing discussion indicates anything, it is that the Spanish Civil War remains to this day a highly charged issue. It is history, but to those who are writing it, as well as those who have a romantic or political attachment to the events, the issues are still vital and worth fighting about. There is one overriding question that historians address in different ways, according to their individual political sympathies. Were the Communists and the Soviet Union correct in maintaining that the only issue was to fight the war, or were the POUM and the anarchists right when they argued that the only way to fight the war successfully was to carry out a genuine social revolution? Historians answer it in two ways. First, once again, let us see what Paul Preston says:

The ultimate issue was to do with the primacy of war or revolution. The view argued by the Communist party, the right wing of the Socialist Party and the bourgeois Republican politicians was that the war must be won first in order to give the revolution any possibility of triumphing later. For the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, the more or less Trotskyist POUM and the left wing of the PSOE, proletarian revolution was itself the essential precondition for the defeat of fascism. After 1939, Spanish Republicans engaged in bitter polemics. The position put forward by the Communists and their allies was that the Spanish Civil War was fought between fascism and a popular, democratic anti-fascist Republic. In this view, popular revolutionary movements were an obstacle which not only hindered the central task . . . but also threatened to bring down on the head of the Republic an alliance of the conservative Western democracies with the Axis powers. The contrary position was [that] only a full-scale proletarian revolution could destroy the capitalism that spawned fascism.<sup>15</sup>

Preston’s explanation of the difference between the Spanish Communists’ approach toward the war and that taken by the revolutionaries is written in such a manner that the reader can reach but one conclusion: that the position taken by Moscow and the Communist Party of Spain is the only one that makes sense. Preston acknowledges that the Communists ignored the dilemma

that the Republic's unique weapon was "popular enthusiasm," which tended to disappear as the Republic advanced solely the goals of the upper middle class; but he argues that the revolutionary forces ignored the international situation and the conventional military might of the Francoist forces. Preston recognizes that when the Republic eventually lost the war, it was easy for the defeated revolutionary forces—the POUM, the anarchists, and the Trotskyists—to argue that had the Republic not adopted the Communist position, Republican troops would have been able to win. He argues, however, that the evidence proves the Communists to have been correct, and he points to the "indisputable perception of the Communists that once the uprising had developed into a civil war, then the first priority had to be to win that war."<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars have challenged that argument. Robert Alexander takes up this analysis directly:

There can be little doubt about the fact that this unremitting drive to establish in Republican Spain a replica of Stalin's Soviet Union greatly undermined the morale of those fighting and working for the Republican cause. Certainly, creating a situation in which large numbers of Republican officers and men feared more the Stalinists who were in their midst, than they did the Franco troops on the other side of the trenches, did not stimulate those soldiers' will to carry on the struggle against the Rebels. Since most of the members of the Republican forces were workers and peasants who had participated to one or another degree in the Revolution of the early phase of the war, the efforts of the Stalinists to destroy that Revolution also could not be anything but a negative contribution to the war effort. Similarly, those efforts certainly increasingly raised troubling questions in the minds of the workers and peasants in the rearguard about whether their sacrifices for the struggle were any longer worthwhile.<sup>17</sup>

The present collection of documents provides new and sometimes startling data that help shed light on these and other controversial areas of the Spanish Civil War. The archives generally confirm the view of events held by one of the groups of historians—including such luminaries as Víctor Alba, Antony Beevor, Burnett Bolloten, Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, E. H. Carr, Gabriel Jackson, Stanley Payne, and Stephen Schwartz. For many years, and working independently, these scholars have traced the duplicitous maneuvers of the Soviet Union in the Spanish Republic during the Civil War. That our findings substantiate their research only deepens our respect for those who got so much right without access to the information now at our disposal.

The documents that we offer also shed light on many of the disputed episodes of the war. These include the timing of the Republican request for as-



sistance from the Soviet Union; the civil war within the Civil War (the fighting in Barcelona in May of 1937); the rise and fall of the International Brigades; the internal workings of the Comintern and its influence on Spain; and much else. Readers will find many documents that detail the involvement of the top Soviet leaders, including Voroshilov and Stalin, as well as major figures in the Comintern, in the unfolding of events in the Spanish Republic. The documents included here address the entire spectrum of Soviet diplomatic, military, economic, and political policies in Spain. They show us what the Soviet leaders thought about their involvement, how they viewed their role in the war, and what they envisioned for the future of Spain.

The most important aspect of the archival evidence is thus not startling new revelations, but rather the more complete understanding of Soviet and Comintern participation in the war and the politics of the Spanish Republic that the documents provide. As some historians have long suspected, the documents prove that advisers from Moscow were indeed attempting to “Sovietize” Spain and turn it into what would have been one of the first “People’s Republics,” with a Stalinist-style economy, army, and political structure. Yet the documents also reveal a hitherto unknown incompetence on the part of many Soviet advisers, as they tried to influence and ultimately control the Republican government. In the same way, the speeches and reports from Comintern officials, while demonstrating their desire to obtain a complete hold over the Spanish Communist party, also reveal the problems that they had achieving total control. In the end, the documents suggest that the Soviets achieved so much in Spain not because of their overwhelming efficiency, but rather because they were more competent and united than their hapless opponents.

In some ways, then, this volume fits into a larger body of work that appeared at the end of the twentieth century: works that attempt to make sense of the part that Communism and the Soviet Union played in the twentieth century. Two recently published books in particular make the same connection between the meaning of Communism and the Spanish Civil War that is made in this volume. Both created a stir, particularly in France, where the Communist movement had gained a foothold because of the role that Communists played in the Resistance during World War II. One of these, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, edited by Stéphane Courtois and a group of distinguished scholars of the Left, attempted a worldwide analysis of the effect of Communism in different countries and presented a compelling portrait of Communism as inherently an “evil” system. The other, by the late historian François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism*

*in the Twentieth Century*, is a lengthy essay by France's leading historian of the French Revolution, himself a former Communist, assessing the mythology and impact of Communism on the entire West and its intellectual life.

The provocative reevaluations of the nature of Communism and the Spanish Civil War in these books are confirmed by the documents in this volume. Furet, in a brief but thorough and exceptional summary of the Republic's tempestuous chronology, offers a sober evaluation of Stalin's goal, which was, he writes, "to put republican Spain under the Soviet influence and to make it a 'friend of the USSR,' an expression that implied leaving the bourgeoisie in place so long as it was pro-Soviet." Such a goal, he explains, was both defensive and offensive, and could serve "either as a basis for negotiations in case of a setback or as a chance to move toward a Soviet-style revolution of the sort that would occur in Central and Eastern Europe after World War II." Furet notes that though pressure from the Communists may have unified the military organization, it also destroyed the foundations of authentic Spanish antifascism. With the crushing of the popular revolution, the destruction of the POUM, and the alienation of the left and right wings of the Socialist party, the "flame of the Spanish Republic [was] extinguished." Nonintervention was a charade, he emphasizes, and Western policy allowed the Soviets to blackmail the republican government more easily. But Moscow's antifascist logic was false; its version of antifascism "went so far as to kill republican energy under the pretext of organizing it, just as it compromised the republican cause under the semblance of defending it." In the Soviets' unique fashion, the concept of solidarity and antifascism "perpetually concealed the pursuit of power and the confiscation of liberty."<sup>18</sup> Stéphane Courtois and Jean-Louis Panne offer much of the same analysis in their essay for *The Black Book of Communism*. The Communists' goal, they write, "was to occupy more and more positions in the Republican government so as to direct policy in accordance with the interests of the Soviet Union." Their essay, however, deliberately concentrates on the ugly details of the brutality of the NKVD in Spain, during its lengthy effort to wipe out all self-proclaimed "counterrevolutionary" elements, especially the anarchists and the leadership of the POUM. Agreeing with Furet, Courtois and Panne conclude that "Moscow's intervention was intended solely to promote Soviet interests while pretending it was essential for the struggle against fascism." Stalin's real goal, they write, "was to take control of the destiny of the Republic. To that end, the liquidation of left-wing opposition to the Communists—Socialists, anarchosyndicalists, POUMists and Trotskyites—was no less important than the military defeat of Franco."<sup>19</sup>

It is good to see Paul Johnson's hope that the lies and obfuscation surrounding the history of the Spanish Civil War are finally being subjected to the light of day. Our book, we hope, is part of the process and joins the Furet and Courtis volumes, as well as those of Víctor Alba, Stephen Schwartz, and Robert Alexander, in setting the record straight. By providing the next generation of scholars with the tools necessary to reexamine the role of the Soviet Union and Communism in Spain, the documents offered in our book will help curb the tendency to turn the conflict into a modern-day legend. It may have been true, as Furet wrote, that "the history of the Spanish Civil War was covered with a blanket of silence and lies that would remain in place throughout the twentieth century."<sup>20</sup> Thanks to the material we have found in the Moscow archives, as well as the pioneering work of the scholars we cite, in the new century such an outcome is no longer possible.

## Historical Background

The attempted coup that began the Spanish Civil War was the culmination of long-standing tensions and social strife that no government had been able to address satisfactorily. The divide between rich and poor in Spain was immense, and the powerful Catholic hierarchy did little to ameliorate conditions. The result was that destitute peasants and dissatisfied workers supported either radical anarchism or socialism, buttressed by a bitter anticlericalism, while liberalism in Spain tended to be more extreme than in most of Europe. Yet the wealthy landowners and certain areas of the country, especially the north, maintained a staunchly conservative outlook that precluded any serious reconsideration of the nation's social ills. Many Spaniards in fact had monarchist leanings and believed that their country's salvation lay in native Spanish traditions and a strong centralized government. Meanwhile, nationalist movements in the Basque provinces and Catalonia encouraged these people to think of themselves as distinct from the Castilians who ruled in Madrid, and as deserving of more autonomy or even outright independence from the central government. Even apart from other considerations, though, the fact that most of Spain's industrial capacity was centered in these regions of the country would make even liberal Spanish regimes resistant to granting any but limited autonomy to the provinces.

As a result, political instability prevailed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period was characterized by numerous military

coups, a short-lived republic, and monarchies with varying amounts of political power. Many workers and peasants responded by joining or creating their own unions and associations, most of which were either anarchist in nature, like the anarcho-syndicalist National Labor Confederation (CNT) and later the more radical Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), or socialist, like the General Workers' Union (UGT). To a lesser extent, the workers and peasants supported various radical, socialist, and communist parties. In 1923, on the heels of military defeats in Morocco, the constitutional monarchy that had lasted since 1874 was set aside by a military *pronunciamento*, which dismissed the parliament (Cortes) but retained King Alfonso as the nominal head of government. The ensuing dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera lasted until 1930, when growing discontent allowed the king to ask for his resignation. Not long thereafter, continuing unrest pushed Alfonso into exile and ushered in the Second Republic.

From the first there were signs that the new republic, dominated by the Spanish form of radical liberalism, faced serious problems. Anticlerical provisions in the new constitution, along with strikes, agrarian revolts, and burning of churches by anarchists and attempts to rein in the power of the army, appalled Catholic and traditionalist Spaniards. In November 1933, a general election gave power to a center-right coalition, which set about undoing the "damage" done by the previous government. Social unrest increased dramatically and came to a head in an Asturian revolt of October 1934 that was brutally suppressed by the army, led by Generals Francisco Franco and Manuel Goded. This in turn outraged both the liberal Republican parties and the socialists, who for the first time agreed to work together in the Popular Front (P.F.), which they formed to combat the rightist coalition. In new elections held February 1936, the P.F. won overwhelming control of the Cortes, even though it obtained less than half of the popular vote.

It was not obvious at first that this would lead to civil war in Spain. Immediately after its electoral victory, the new P.F. pursued a moderate course. Socialists did not dominate the first cabinets; Manuel Azaña, leader of the Republican Left, became prime minister (and later president). Limits were placed on the influence of the Catholic Church and large industrialists and landowners, and social services were introduced to help the large working-class majority in the cities as well as the unemployed poor. This was, however, too much for conservatives and too little for the anarchists and socialists who supported the P.F. Radicals in the front began to talk about the need for a "dictatorship of

the proletariat,” an end to all private property, and the inevitability of a Spanish revolution to rival that which had taken place in the Soviet Union.

In certain sections of the country, peasants and workers had already acted to take matters into their own hands. Demanding immediate social justice, peasants seized the property of landowners, and anarchists again proceeded to burn down churches, that visible symbol of the power and wealth of the Catholic hierarchy. Large cities and rural areas alike suffered crippling strikes, and radical youth marched in huge demonstrations. Traditionalists and conservative Spaniards were frightened by these events, which suggested to them that even more than in 1931, the country was headed toward a Bolshevik future. Throughout the summer, Left and Right carried out politically motivated assassinations, and the country slid inexorably toward chaos.

As Spain descended into lawlessness, a large portion of the officer corps became convinced that only they could save Spain from ruin at the hands of those they collectively termed communists. Generals Emilio Mola and José Sanjurjo organized a well-coordinated rebellion to overthrow the Republican government quickly and painlessly. Unfortunately for their plans, the rebels failed to achieve their goal immediately, and thus the path was opened for a prolonged and bloody civil war, as well as something more than just an internal conflict. When both Nationalists and Republicans realized that they needed outside assistance, each side appealed to its “natural” ally in the world’s political spectrum. Soon after the fighting began, General Francisco Franco, at first just one of many supporters of the revolt, sent emissaries to Hitler and Mussolini asking for their help in transporting troops. For their part, the Republicans turned to the democracies of the West, especially those whose governments—like the one in France—had moved to the left. With the Soviet Union standing alone as the world’s first socialist nation, the Spanish Republic also requested aid from Stalin. The Fascist and Nazi leaders decided to intervene early, and they gradually escalated the nature of their assistance from transportation to direct military involvement. Mussolini contributed the largest number of men and a great deal of matériel. Hitler sent a sizable contingent of pilots—the notorious Condor Legion—as well as his best tanks and aircraft. Stalin was not far behind. By late autumn of 1936, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union were all deeply involved in the Spanish conflict, and they would remain so until the war’s end.

The internationalization of the war would have far-reaching consequences. In addition to ensuring that the conflict would be lengthier and deadlier than it

might otherwise have been, the spread of hostilities also divided the societies of Europe, and the United States, into two opposing groups. On the one side were those who feared either a “Sovietization” of Spain and the eventual absorption of the country into the Soviet sphere or a broadening of the war into a general European conflict. These “moderates” would not support the intervention of Hitler and Mussolini; they also eschewed any aid for the Republicans and favored what they called a policy of nonintervention. The British government, dominated by men who thought along these lines, worked hard to ensure that the great powers agreed on a nonintervention treaty and then implemented it as fully as possible. The United States, and eventually France, would also decide that partisan involvement was far too dangerous and that isolating Spain was the only practical way to contain the conflict. On the other side stood the majority of the European Left, which saw the war as an attempt by “international fascism” to impose its ideology and system through open battle. For these forces, the Spanish conflict was actually a side door to a military struggle against Hitler and Mussolini. As for the Soviet Union, which was soon to supply arms and “advisers” to the Republic, it pursued a dual goal. Any intervention was to take place within the framework of the overall Soviet policy of seeking alliances with France and Britain. Hence, Stalin would provide enough military aid to allow the Republic to defend itself, but not enough to frighten or outrage the West. Moreover, his aid included internal intervention in the policies of the Republic; intervention meant to gain control over the war and to prevent any elements of the Spanish far Left—including anarchists and revolutionary Communists—from fomenting social revolution. Such a step, Stalin believed, would strike fear into the minds of the leaders of the conservative West; it had to be avoided. The Communists in Spain, acting under Soviet guidance, would become a bulwark against revolution, collectivization, and social disorder, while seeking to manipulate and control events for their own ends.

# 1936

## Moscow and the Comintern Set the Stage

THE FIRST FEW MONTHS of the Spanish Civil War set the stage for all that would follow. From the beginning of the July uprising through December 1936, the battle lines between Nationalists and Republicans were drawn; international actors made their decisions to intervene or not; and the internal dynamics of the Republic, the interplay among the diverse parties, unions, and factions within the “Loyalist” camp, took shape. Perhaps the most vital foundation laid during this first critical period was the response of international Communism to the events in Spain. Nowhere is this more dramatically illustrated than in the MASK intercepts, the encrypted telegrams that Comintern and other Soviet authorities in Moscow sent to their subordinates throughout Europe. The very day that the war began, Moscow sent the Spanish Communist party directives for responding to the “alarming situation.” **Document 1** exemplifies both the tone that the Soviets, and the Comintern, took in dealing with their Spanish comrades and the principal policies that the Communists would adopt in responding to the crisis. Although the telegram described these as “proposals” and advice, the imperative tone taken by Moscow made it clear that



there was little room for argument or maneuver by the small and relatively powerless PCE (Communist Party of Spain). As for the content of the “proposals”: the word from Moscow was that the party had at all costs to preserve the Popular Front, “as any split there would be utilised by the Fascists in their fight against the people.” Unity was vital not only in order to present a unified front to the enemy—it also created the impression that the steps the Comintern desired emanated from the entire Spanish polity rather than just the Communists. Therefore, the PCE was to “endeavour to get all parties of the Popular Front to agree on the most important measures [that is, the measures that the party considered the most important] and to carry them out as measures of the Popular Front.” The PCE would do this using all of the means at its disposal—demonstrations, resolutions, and delegations of workers and peasants—to pressure the government into agreeing to Communist strategies for winning the war.

Not surprisingly, these strategies coincided with Soviet policy. Thus, the directive to push the Republican government to deal as firmly as possible with anyone who aided the Nationalists (internal “enemies of the people,” the aristocracy, and even parliamentary leaders) and to marginalize the anarchists fit in with Stalin’s aspiration to purge political and class enemies. The political atmosphere in the Soviet Union at the time may have made this aim even more urgent for the Comintern. Just as the war in Spain began, Stalin was embarking on the show trials of his last important opponents, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and eventually Bukharin.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to purge the Spanish military and other institutions of “adventurers, terrorists, conspirators, and Fascist rebels” began at about the same time and continued until the defeat of the Republic. The only changes over the next three years were to the definition of “enemy of the people” and in the lengths to which the party would go to be rid of such enemies.

The attitude toward the anarchists is especially significant. Spanish anarchism had very deep roots in both the peasantry and the growing industrial working classes. Inspired by the Russian founder of modern anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin, Spanish anarchists abhorred organized parties of any sort; yet they also formed the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI)—that dominated the larg-

est workers' union, the National Labor Confederation (CNT). Because of their opposition to the state, no matter what its form or composition, the anarchists contested Stalin's vision of the Communist regime.<sup>2</sup> This attitude, combined with their widespread appeal and influence among the poor, meant that the anarchists constituted the largest threat to the PCE and the Comintern in Spain. The Spanish Communists had stormy relations with the anarchists, and the Civil War only exacerbated tensions between the two groups. Throughout the conflict, Soviet and Comintern advisers would decry the "subversive" activities of the anarchists, and particularly their refusal to curtail revolutionary activities or to allow the formation of a regular, disciplined army. Document 1 confirms, however, that their hatred of the anarchists was not inspired solely by the syndicalists' activities. Describing them as little better than pawns of the fascists, it shows that the Communists had determined to destroy the anarchists from the very beginning of the war, before their opponents had articulated, let alone put into effect, their wartime policies.

Linked to this demand, and no less intertwined with Soviet policy, was the order to pursue the unification of the Communist-dominated General Workers' Union (UGT) and the CNT. With the adoption of the Popular Front platform in 1935, Communists worldwide were instructed to work with any leftists except the "Trotskyists" (a code word for all "enemies of the people"). The demand to establish a single union also stemmed from a new understanding of how to construct a socialist state: not through open revolution, but through the absorption of independent unions or parties into a single entity controlled by the Communists. After World War II, a similar strategy would result in the creation of the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe. **Document 2**, sent out just a few days later, also held out the possibility of forming a new government that would include Communists. This too was part of the Popular Front strategy, but one that was less desirable to Moscow and the Comintern in Spanish circumstances. In this telegram it is clear that the PCE was to join the government only if the current regime continued to vacillate in its attitudes toward the rebels and the war. One reason for the hesitation over direct participation was a desire to present Republican Spain to the rest of

Western Europe as a democratic bourgeois state rather than a revolutionary Communist regime. Only thus could Spain hope to win support from France or Britain in its struggle to defeat the Nationalists.<sup>3</sup> These three tactics—purges, the unification of Socialists and Communists, and direct participation in a bourgeois government—formed the basis for subsequent policies that the Comintern, the PCE, and the Soviet advisers followed throughout the war in Spain.

Despite the urgency expressed in these telegrams, there was every reason for Spanish Communists to believe that the government would quickly suppress the uprising. Rebel troops had seized only a few cities in the extreme north and south of the country, while Loyalist forces managed to hold the largest urban areas. Without reinforcements from Africa, where the majority of Nationalist soldiers were apparently trapped, the rebellion seemed doomed. The earliest reports by the PCE on the situation in Spain, exemplified by **Document 3** and **Document 4**, reflected their optimism. It also showed what they hoped would come of this attempt to extinguish the Popular Front: a further development of the bourgeois revolution, and “the realisation of the revolutionary democratic programme,” which would include the seizure of private property and the application of revolutionary law. They saw too that this was a key opportunity to increase the power and influence of the party and might result in their direct participation in the government. Like the Comintern, they viewed the anarchists, who would have to be dealt with through “revolutionary law”—that is, executions—if they continued their “acts of provocation,” as the one black spot. It should be noted that one of the authors of this message was not even Spanish. “Luis” was the code name for Vitorio Codovilla, an Argentinean Communist who had been sent to Spain earlier in the decade as the Comintern representative to the PCE. His signature on this document and others, and his later actions, would show that he was much more than just an observer, however. In time he would virtually run the PCE, treating the Spanish “comrades” as second-class citizens in their own party.

The next three pieces of evidence show that the Comintern (or ECCI) was not so sanguine about the future of the conflict. Comintern members saw, more clearly than their Spanish comrades,

that the uprising might not be easily crushed and that a prolongation of the conflict would radically affect PCE behavior during the crisis. On 23 July, a meeting of the ECCI was held at which the secretariat discussed how Communists should react to events in Spain. There has been much speculation about the timing of this Comintern response to the war. Hugh Thomas used Nationalist sources with Communist confirmation to suggest a joint gathering of the secretariats of the Comintern and Profintern on 21 July and another on the 26th. But he knew no more than anyone else what was discussed and decided in these meetings.<sup>4</sup> E. H. Carr thought that the ECCI secretariat had not assembled until mid-September to define its approach toward the Spanish events.<sup>5</sup> In fact, only after this meeting on 23 July would the secretariat issue its first substantive directives for the PCE. **Document 5**, Dimitrov's report at the meeting, reveals the reasoning behind Comintern and Soviet policies and the concrete measures they wanted taken. His most important conclusion was that Spain was not *yet* ready for a true revolution. The party should not act precipitately, as if the war were already won, he stressed, and therefore "we should not assign the task, *at the present stage*, of creating soviets and seeking to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain" [emphasis added]. The Communists had to strengthen the democratic republic "*at the present stage*" by destroying the fascists; once "our positions have been strengthened, then we can go further" [emphasis added]. The Spanish comrades had to resist the temptation to "rush ahead and get carried away" and instead should work on tasks suited to "the present moment" and the current strength of the Communists. Then, even more clearly, Dimitrov argued that if the army had managed to seize the Madrid garrison, conditions would have been ripe for a true seizure of power. The Communists could have "overthrown the Azaña government early in the morning, issued a manifest from the new government, a real republican democratic government." Because the Popular Front had managed to hold on to power, though, the Communists had to work with them, not against them. The very careful use of these terms, as well as the injunction to "act under the semblance of defending the republic," supports the contention of some scholars that the Communists purposely disguised their true objective, social revo-

lution.<sup>6</sup> They would do this in the first place by pretending that their ultimate goal was merely a bourgeois democratic regime and in the second by concentrating on winning the war with the Nationalists *first*. Afterward, anything was possible.

The result of this meeting was **Document 6**, a telegram instructing the PCE on the proper course to take in the developing war. The secretariat once again stressed that the party should not get carried away with schemes that could be realized after victory. The document then repeated most of the instructions given in Document 1 and discussed at the Comintern gathering. The two major additions (given as Points 5 and 6) are striking and deserve special attention. At the end of his report, Dimitrov had hesitated over whether the Spanish Communists should support a regular army or a people's militia. Although it was obvious that the Spanish people needed an armed force of some sort, it is unclear from his discussion which type of force he thought would best serve the Republic. He ended his report by mentioning that he would ask "the comrade secretary" (that is, Stalin) if he had any comments on these points. The telegram, sent the next day, apparently reflected Dimitrov's remarks as amended by Stalin. Point 6 endorsed the use of a regular army, along with the militia, as the proper response to the rebellion and to enemies "from without and within." This endorsement paved the way for the creation of the People's Army, a force that the Communist party would come to dominate. Perhaps even more important is Point 5, which shows that the Comintern, and Stalin, still viewed the PCE's potential inclusion in the Republican government with extreme caution. As earlier, the party was told not to participate simply in order "to preserve the unity of the Popular Front." Much stricter conditions were also laid down for direct participation, which could occur only if it was "urgent and absolutely necessary" to win the war. As we shall see, this point would become significant when the new Largo Caballero government was formed in early September.

Still, the Comintern and Moscow realized that they could not allow the PCE to advocate openly the policies outlined by these documents. The next piece of evidence, **Document 7**, adds to our understanding of why the Communists in Spain, after their first enthusiastic involvement in the heady revolutionary days of July and August, suddenly declared their support for a bourgeois

democracy and portrayed themselves throughout the war as moderates. A few scholars, such as Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, have believed the party line that the Communists were in truth the “champions of moderation and loyalty to the Republican regime.”<sup>7</sup> Víctor Alba, too, concluded that the slogans were reality; the Communists wanted first to suppress and then to appropriate the revolution.<sup>8</sup> Most others have thought that the primary reason for this change of course, whether real or only apparent, was a desire to win over the Western democracies by calming their fears about the nature of the Spanish government.<sup>9</sup> This document confirms that, in addition to the desire to defeat the rebellion first and then worry about further developing the revolution, the Comintern advocated this tactic as the only way to obtain help from Britain, France, and the United States. They correctly assumed that none of the Western nations, including the usually sympathetic France, would give aid to a government that they even suspected of being Communist. It is interesting to note that both Document 1 and Dimitrov’s report of 23 July directly contradicted Points 2 and 3 of this telegram: the PCE had, in fact, been ordered to support the confiscation of the land belonging to the Church and to the large landowners “directly or indirectly” involved in the rebellion. Later events were also to prove that only one part of Point 1, the struggle against “anarchy,” was the literal truth.

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## Document 1

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

Nº. 6485/Sp.

Date: 22nd July 1936

From: Moscow

To: Spain

Nº: 266–275

Date: 17th July 1936

MEDIDA and B.P.

After considering the alarming situation in connexion with the Fascist conspiracy in SPAIN, we advise you:—

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## Document 1 *continued*

1. To preserve intact, at any cost, the ranks of the Popular Front, as any split there would be utilised by the Fascists in their fight against the people. Therefore you must endeavour to get all parties of the Popular Front to agree on the most important measures and to carry them out as measures of the Popular Front. Having done this you must use all forms of pressure on the Government—meetings, resolutions in the Assemblies, delegations of workers and peasants to the Government to negotiate etc; in order to bring about a decisive rebuff for Fascism, and to negotiate energetic steps on the part of the Government against the insurgents.

2. Demand the immediate arrest of those parliamentary leaders who (one group)<sup>10</sup> the Republican Government and have this carried out immediately without further hesitation. Rid the army, the police and the organisations of authority from top to bottom, from the enemies of the people. Deprive the aristocracy (?) who are behind the conspirators, of all rights of citizenship and confiscate all their goods. Expel them from the country and prohibit their press (?).

It is necessary to set up a special court for adventurers, terrorists, conspirators, and Fascist rebels and to apply the maximum penalty on these including (?) confiscation of their goods.

3. To do now what you have omitted to do before, due to lack of firmness on the part of your allies in the Popular Front, that is to say, taking full and immediate advantage of the present alarming situation, create, in conjunction with the other parties of the Popular Front, alliances of workers and peasants, elected as mass organisations, to fight against the conspirators in defence of the Republic and at the same time to develop the formation of the workers' and peasants' militia.

4. It is necessary to take preventative measures with the greatest urgency against the putchist attempts of the anarchists, behind which the hand of the Fascists is hidden.

With this end in view, and taking as a basis the declaration of the administration of C.N.T. on solidarity, the C.G.T. [U.] ought to propose to C.N.T. the immediate construction in the centre and locally of joint committees to fight against the Fascist insurgents and to prepare the unification of the syndicates.

If the anarchist administration should refuse this proposition, you must take up a stand, together with all the organisations linked up with the Popular Front, against the anarchists as strike breakers of the struggle against fascism in the working classes.

At the same time you must establish broad social legislation, with extensive rights reserved in the unified C.G.T., so that the workers which have interests (2 groups) syndical organisations: conclusion of collective contracts.

. . . (Next 10 groups too corrupt to decypher [*sic*])—which is important in the fight against the fascist conspirators: (several groups corrupt) for our campaign and under pressure of the masses (2 groups) the necessity of a law for

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## Document 1 *continued*

handing over the land of the land-owners and the church to the peasants as a retort to the seditious attempts to establish Fascist dictatorship on the part of the reactionaries.

Such measures will be a decisive blow to fascism, will undermine its material foundation, will arouse among the peasants' sons in the army enthusiasm and desire to defend the republic, thus making the Republican regime inviolable against the fascists.

Please let us know your opinions on our proposals.

DIOS MAYOR

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## Document 2

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

N°. 6484/Sp.

Date: 22nd July 1936

From: Moscow

To: Spain

N°. 268-271

Date: 20th July 1936

DIAZ and LUIS.

We are intensely anxious that the Party should activate all (one group) forces to crush the counter-revolutionary rebellion in a decisive manner, and to defend the republic.

The joint action of all the forces of the Popular Front, the equipment of the masses, the fraternisation of the people with the army and its combined action against the counter-revolution, the support of every means of the Government's measures against the rebels—these are the conditions of victory.

Vacillation by the Government might break up the cause of the Republic.

For this reason, if the Government, in spite of the mass support of the Popular Front, is going to vacillate, it will be necessary to raise the question of forming a Government to defend the Republic and to save the Spanish people with the participation of all parties of the Popular Front, Communist and Socialist.

In order to get the active participation of the masses in the fight against the counter revolution, it is necessary, together with the other organisations of the Popular Front, to begin creating a committee of defence of the Republic of all anti-Fascist organisations and of the working population locally.

DIOS, Mayor



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## Document 3

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

N°. 6509/Sp.

Date: 23rd July 1936

From: Spain

To: Moscow

N°: 267-270

Date: 21st July 1936

DIOS and MAYOR.

MADRID is entirely in the hands of the militias and Government forces. In the rest of the country they are reducing the last (two groups) of the rebellion. The popular militias are arming throughout the country. Those, together with the forces loyal to the Government, constitute the army of defence of the democratic republic. The militias are considered as official organisations and the militia men receive salaries. Various columns of the militias left MADRID to attack the fascist armies of TOLEDO, SARAGOSSA, VALLADOLID and BURGOS.

In the majority of cases they are already applying the revolutionary law and confiscating enemy goods.

The forces of the Popular Front and the Government are closely united and the enthusiasm of the people is enormous.

We are convinced that we shall crush the enemy decisively, and that this will be the first step in the realisation of the revolutionary democratic programme.

The one black spot are [*sic*] the anarchists who are pillaging and burning. They have been warned (4 groups), but if they persist in acts of provocation, the revolutionary law will be applied.

LUIS and DIAZ

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## Document 4

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

N°. 6517/Sp.

Date: 23rd July 1936

From: Spain

To: Moscow

N°: 274, 275

Date: 21st July 1936

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## Document 4 *continued*

MAYOR and DIOS.

The political situation can be summarised as follows:—

Until now the Government has been identified with our policy of the Popular Front and with the revolutionary steps which are being taken.

The hatred against fascism and the military party is (one group) that it carries away even the most timid to justify any kind of revolutionary measure, but it is quite clear that the measures which will be taken will raise us, within a very short time, to the Government of the Popular Front, in the conditions of a huge development of the bourgeois democratic revolution, in which event we think we ought to take part.

Give us your opinion.

LUIS, DIAZ

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## Document 5

RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1101, ll. 21–23

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Secretariat ECCL. 23/7/36

Spanish Question

DIMITROV. I believe that the policy carried out so far is correct. We cannot permit our comrades to approach the development of these events as if we were anticipating the destruction of the rebels and we were rushing ahead. We should not, at the present stage, assign the task of creating soviets and try to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain. That would be a fatal mistake. Therefore we must say: act in the guise<sup>11</sup> of defending the Republic; do not abandon the positions of the democratic regime in Spain at this point, when the workers have weapons in their hands, that this has great significance for achieving victory over the rebels. We ought to advise them to go forward with these weapons, as we have done in other situations, seeking to maintain unity with the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants and the radical intelligentsia, establishing and strengthening the democratic Republic at the present stage through the complete destruction of the fascist counterrevolutionary elements, and then we can proceed from there, resolving concrete questions.

In other words, comrades, we believe that in the present international situation it is advantageous and necessary for us to carry out a policy that would preserve our opportunity to organize, educate, unify the masses and to strengthen our own positions in a number of countries—in Spain, France, Belgium and so on—where there are governments dependent on the Popular Front and where the Communist party has extensive opportunities. When our positions have been strengthened, then we can go further.

We have been interested for some time in having a democratic regime like this, so that through the general pressure of the masses and the Popular Front

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## Document 5 *continued*

in a number of European countries (among which are the fascist countries—Germany, Italy, and so on), we [could] influence the mass of workers. The example of Spain shows how the masses operate, how the proletariat, the petty-bourgeois, radical intelligentsia, and peasants can form a common democratic platform against reaction and fascism. We have a number of examples in European circumstances where the masses, through the policy of the Popular Front, under pressure from fascism and reaction, are strengthening their position and are shaping conditions for the final victory of the proletariat. This is a somewhat different path than we had imagined earlier. But this path is closer to the German and Italian proletariat.

We should be able to influence the masses of these countries a great deal, and therefore the struggle in Spain has immense significance. It seems to me that we must push this point, and we hope that we will in fact be victorious over the enemies of the Popular Front, who desire the destruction and discrediting of the Popular Front.

It must be said that the Spanish comrades have a lot of temptations. For example, *Mundo Obrero* has appropriated *Acción Popular's* wonderful building. This is fine. But if our [people] begin to confiscate factories and enterprises and wreak further havoc, the petty bourgeoisie, the radical intelligentsia, and part of the peasantry may move away, and our forces are still not sufficient for a struggle against the counterrevolutionaries. Therefore, we must place before the proletariat and the broad working masses those tasks that suit the concrete conditions of the present moment, that suit the strength of the party, the strength of the proletariat. Do not rush ahead and get carried away.

This question is also connected with the army. The army is smashed to pieces. The [rebellion] began in the army units in Morocco. If the garrison in the center had been seized, we might, in the Bulgarian or Greek way, have carried out a revolution in twenty-four hours, overthrown the Azaña government early in the morning, issued a manifesto from the new government, a real Republican democratic government, and so on. The Popular Front actually has the predominant position in Madrid.

From this comes the question that is before our comrades: Is it expedient to replace the army, which is in reality disbanded and destroyed, with a people's militia? It is necessary to create a people's Republican army and to attract to it all of the officers and generals who have remained loyal to the Republic. But to put in a people's worker-peasant militia in place of the army actually means to follow a different line. That is a different policy. An army is necessary in the cities as the state's armed organization. There ought to be a Republican army, [and] that entails a purging of the elements of the old army that are shirking their duties, [and] a use of the army's command staff that is not treasonous. The Spanish people are in need of an armed state force. This question requires some serious thought. We must be more far-sighted than petty-bourgeois politics, which join with us today and can change tomorrow.

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## Document 5 *continued*

That is one question. The other question concerns the confiscation of land. Some people say: Let's seize the land, appropriate the land of the landowners and the Church. I think that this is correct. The land of the largest landowners must be taken, regardless of whether they participated in the rebellion or not; this land must be distributed to the peasants and thus disrupt the landowners, [who] say that this does not concern them because they still have their land. The property and land of all the landowners who directly or indirectly participated in the rebellion must also be confiscated. Another position is now impossible.

I am asking the comrade secretary if there are any doubts about this question or any comments. This will be helpful for our Spanish comrades.

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## Document 6

MASK Intercept<sup>12</sup>

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MOST SECRET.

N<sup>o</sup>. 6524/Sp.

Date: 24th July 1936

From: Moscow

To: Spain

N<sup>o</sup>: 279-283

Date: 24th July 1936

DIAZ.

Your information is insufficient; it is not concrete but sentimental. Once again we ask you to send us serious and effective news. We urgently recommend you to:—

1. Concentrate on the most important business of the moment, that is to say, on the rapid suppression and definite liquidation of the Fascist insurrection, and do not let yourselves be carried away by schemes which can be realised after the victory.

2. Avoid any measures which might break up the unity of the Popular Front in its fight against the insurgents.

3. We warn you not to deviate, through exaggeration, with respect to our own forces and the forces of the Popular Front, and do not minimise the difficulties and new dangers.

4. Do not (one group) [run ahead of], do not abandon the positions of the democratic regime and do not [exceed the limits of a struggle for a truly democratic republic].

5. As much as possible do not let the Communists (?) take direct part in the Government. It is opportune not to participate in the Government as, in this

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## Document 6 *continued*

way, it will be [easier] to preserve the unity of the Popular Front. Only participate in the Government if it is urgent and absolutely necessary in order to crush the insurrection.

6. We consider it inopportune, at this moment, to bring up the question of replacing the regular army by the popular militia, as it is necessary to concentrate all forces, the militia as well as the troops loyal to the Government, in order to suppress the rebellion, all the more so as, in the present struggle, it will be the new republican army, fighting side by side with the militia, which will be the support of the Republican regime against enemies both from without and within. [Attract loyal Republican officers to the side of the people in every way possible and get rebel units to go over to the side of the Popular Front. It is essential for the Government to declare amnesty for those who immediately abandon the ranks of the rebels and go over to the people's side.]

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## Document 7

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

N<sup>o</sup>. 6595/Sp.

Date: 4th August 1936

From: Moscow

To: Spain

N<sup>o</sup>: 297-300

Date: 31st July 1936

For the purpose of facilitating real and effective help for the Spanish people, and in order to paralyze the campaign in the reactionary world press, we advise you to intervene with the Government that it may make a declaration as follows:—

(1) That the Spanish people, under their Republican government, are fighting for the defence of the democratic republic, for democracy, for republican order against Fascism, anarchy and counter-revolution.

(2) All the confiscations that take place now are not directed against private property in general but against those taking part in the rebellion.

(3) The Government must also declare that the Spanish people and its Government appreciate the religious feelings of the people, and that the only reason why certain monasteries were occupied during the struggle was that they were strategical military positions of the rebels.

(4) The Government guarantees the interests of foreign citizens in Spain and the inviolability of their property.

Moreover the Government will carry out all agreements made with other

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## Document 7 *continued*

countries, but states, in the name of the Spanish people that (groups missing: ? it denies) the validity of any international agreement made on the part of the rebel adventurers.

The workers' organisations affiliated to the Popular Front should make similar declarations.

Secretariat

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### Early Political Maneuvers

Over the next several months the Spanish Communist party faithfully carried out the instructions sent to it from headquarters in Moscow. Almost all the Communist leaders, including the head of the JSU (the Unified Socialist Youth), Dolores Ibárruri (“La Pasionaria”), José Díaz (the head of the party), and Jesús Hernández (a prominent party member), repeatedly denied that the PCE wanted anything more than the defeat of the enemy and the restoration of a bourgeois democracy throughout Spanish territory.<sup>13</sup> But not everything in the political sphere went the way that the Communists, whether in Moscow or Spain, hoped. On 25 July four of the small leftist parties in Catalonia, including the Communist party of Catalonia, came together to form the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC). Within a few days the new party had joined the Third International, and throughout the war the PSUC acted in concert with the PCE as the arm of the Comintern in Catalonia. It has always been assumed that the Comintern (and the Soviets) approved of this move and perhaps even maneuvered to have it carried out as part of an overall plan to dominate politics in Spain. As Víctor Alba points out, the PSUC followed PCE directions from the outset, a situation that seemed only to confirm this interpretation.<sup>14</sup> It also fit well with the Communist policy of seeking to unite leftists, a policy illustrated in Document 1. **Document 8** shows that this view of events is not, in fact, correct. In agreeing to merge with the three other parties, the Catalan Communist party had actually acted on its own, “contrary to the instructions given.” The PCE leaders thought that the move was a “serious mistake” but saw no choice other than to accept the action and to work on the “ideological enlightenment” of the new grouping. Fortunately, the Catalan Communists had apparently made mem-

bership in the Third International one of the conditions for their participation in the party, and the PSUC was soon under Stalinist discipline within the Comintern.

The justifications the Catalan Communists gave for their decision are also quite revealing. Like the PCE and the Comintern, the Catalans thought that unity was the best way to deal with the danger represented by the anarchists and also “to strike a serious blow at the Trotzkyites.” The linkage of these two groups is significant for later events. “Trotskyism,” here as elsewhere, meant any enemy of Stalin or the international communism that he dominated. In Spain the Soviets and the PCE specifically applied the term to the Workers Party of Marxist Unity (POUM), an anti-Stalinist Socialist party that had only a few thousand members, mostly in Catalonia. Trotsky had actually repudiated the POUM, and it was not connected at this point with his movement. The majority of its support resulted from the undoubted credibility of its leaders, Andrés Nin and Joaquín Maurín. Although the anarchists and the POUM did not like each other and never worked together, their anti-Stalinist attitudes meant that the Communists saw them as one and the same. Both were viewed as major threats to Communist power in Spain, and especially in Catalonia. Throughout the war, the Soviets, the PCE, and the Comintern would work to exclude them from power and limit their influence among the workers and peasants—and eventually would turn to outright murder.

Several weeks after the creation of the PSUC, the PCE found itself forced to make a decision that had even greater consequences. The Giral administration, unable to deal effectively with the rebellion, collapsed, and President Azaña asked Francisco Largo Caballero to form a government on 4 September. Largo Caballero was a well-known leftist Socialist who had earlier in the year been praised as the “Spanish Lenin” by the PCE and others. In a rather strange move for a man who would soon show his complete independence from Moscow’s control, Largo Caballero refused to form an administration without the participation of the Communists. Although the PCE was willing to join a Popular Front government as early as 21 July, subsequent instructions from Moscow, as shown by Document 2, made the Communists at first refuse to accept Largo Caballero’s invitation. Very shortly thereafter, though,

the PCE changed course and decided to participate in a bourgeois government; it was the first European Communist party to ever do so.<sup>15</sup> **Document 9**, in connection with other evidence from the archives, shows that the Largo Caballero government was not the favored option and that the permission they received to join the Popular Front was given reluctantly, and then only on condition that Giral remain as the head of the government.<sup>16</sup> This explains why Díaz felt it necessary to write that “despite our efforts, we were not able to avoid a Caballero government.” The comment is also important to consider in evaluating the events of the next several months. Even before they became disaffected, the Communists already had reservations about a Largo Caballero government, reservations that would explode into open confrontation in the spring of 1937.

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## Document 8

MASK Intercept

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MOST SECRET.

N°. 6579/Sp.

Date: 31st July 1936

From: Spain

To: Moscow

N°: 302–305

Date: 30th July 1936

MAYOR DIOS

Contrary to the instructions given, the comrades directing our party in CATALONIA have formed, together with the Socialist union, the Catalan proletariat party and the Socialist federation, a Socialist Party—(the last ten groups of this part missing).

The comrades say that they did this as a symbolical act in order to render the armed fight against fascism more effective, and to present a solid front against the untimely behaviour of the anarchists, and also to strike a serious blow at the Trotzkyites [*sic*].

They say—(next 30 groups corrupt) secretary VALDES. The Communists have not got a majority on the committee, although there are comrades identified with our party.

We consider this action was a serious mistake, but in view of the critical sit-



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## Document 8 *continued*

uation, the only thing to do is to accept it, [to] increase the work of ideological enlightenment in the heart of the new party, and to make thorough preparations for the congress.

A comrade will leave here to obtain better information.

DIAZ LUIS

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## Document 9

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 852, l. 46

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To Com. Voroshilov

From Madrid we have received the following telegram (dated 4/9) from Com. Díaz, the secretary of the C.P. of Spain, and Com. Duclos, the secretary of the C.P. of France.

“Despite our efforts, we were not able to avoid a Caballero government. We succeeded in placing Giral as minister without portfolio and also an expansion in the Esquerra cabinet in Catalonia and among the Basque nationalists. Number of Republicans of all shades—4; three Socialists of every tendency, two Communists. *CNT* is making a declaration about supporting the government and is taking part in the commission’s work. We found out . . . through very great difficulties, which might have important political and military consequences. To prevent that, we are acting to put an end to the government crisis today. Everyone emphatically insisted on the participation of the Communists in the new government, and it was impossible to avoid without creating a very dangerous situation. We are taking the necessary measures to organize the work of our ministers.”

G. Dimitrov

8/9/36

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## The Soviets Intervene

Throughout these political machinations the Republican forces and the Nationalists battled on. By September the rebels had managed to expand the area that they controlled from the two strips of land in the extreme north and south of the country to include almost half of Spain’s territory. Rather surprisingly, given the Nationalists’ feelings about foreign influence, they had relied on assistance from abroad for this success. The request for aid came very early in the conflict. Franco, in July just one of several conspirators, controlled the Moroccan troops, the best-armed and led units of the Spanish army. Most of these

forces were, however, trapped in Africa during the first week of the uprising. Fearing that the Republicans would crush the rebellion in detail while its salvation sat idle in Morocco, Franco sent messengers to Hitler and Mussolini asking for aid. After some initial waver- ing, both decided to support his cause. Airlifts of nationalist troops, conducted mostly by Italian and German aircraft, brought in the reinforcements from Morocco and allowed the rebels to break out of their confinement in southern Spain. Over the next several months the scope of Italian and German intervention would expand to include tanks and other war matériel as well as several thousand regular troops and scores of pilots.

While Franco was appealing to the Nazis and Fascists, the leaders of the Republic realized that they too would need help from the outside world. Arguing that Popular Front governments had to stand together against the fascist threat, José Giral asked France for aid on 19 July. Léon Blum, for both ideological and strategic reasons, agreed and promised to send matériel to Republican Spain. French suppliers also had a long-standing relationship with the Spanish military and were, in fact, in the process of shipping aircraft to Spain. One week later, convinced by the British refusal to intervene, an internal furor created by the rightist press, and the possibility that the war might spread and cause another general European con- flagration, the Blum cabinet reversed its decision. The French shortly afterward proposed and then strongly promoted a policy of noninterference in Spanish affairs.<sup>17</sup> The conservative British gov- ernment was even less open to aiding the Republicans, and it never seriously considered intervening in the Civil War, while the Ameri- cans determined to uphold their neutrality laws from the very start.

At some point during the first few months of the war, the Soviet Union, in contrast to the Western democracies, decided to assist the Republic. In September, shipments of food from the “Soviet peo- ple” arrived openly at Spanish ports and T-26 tanks took part in battles near Madrid in late October. It is unclear exactly why the Soviets determined to help the Spanish, and the available docu- ments are not helpful on this point.<sup>18</sup> A desire to aid ideological comrades, fears about encouraging aggression if the Nationalists were not stopped, and a willingness to support France’s strategic position all may have played their part in the decision.<sup>19</sup> What the

archival materials do help to clarify is the precise timing of both the Spanish request for aid and the Soviet decision to intervene. Some scholars have argued that it was only after the West abandoned Spain that the Republicans were forced into the Soviets' arms.<sup>20</sup> **Document 10**, a letter from Giral addressed to the Soviet ambassador in France, contradicts this view. The date on this correspondence is especially important. On the evening of 25 July the French cabinet met to decide whether to honor Blum's promise and send the aircraft to Spain. For the reasons already discussed, they changed their minds about intervening in the war; yet the first promise to send aircraft was actually honored, and thus it was only after several days had passed that it became apparent to the outside world that the French had altered their policy. This letter, then, was sent when the Republicans still thought that they could count on the French for at least the aircraft, if not more substantial aid. It was not Western inaction that forced the Spanish government into the Soviet sphere; the Republicans had already decided to request Soviet aid, not realizing how dependent they would become on the Russian bear.

As for the Soviet response to this request, the general consensus among scholars has been that Stalin determined to intervene only in late September or early October. Most historians have discounted the allegation by Walter Krivitsky, an NKVD agent who defected to the West during the war, that Stalin and the Politburo met in August and decided then to send weapons.<sup>21</sup> These scholars point out that Stalin elected to join the rest of Europe in signing a nonintervention agreement and actively participated in the Non-Intervention Committee, which met in London. Both these instruments were supposed to prevent a widening of the war by restraining the great powers from sending men or weapons of war to either of the belligerents in Spain. The Soviet Union, they argue, sent food and other humanitarian aid in September, and shipped only tanks, aircraft, and other military matériel after 8 October.<sup>22</sup> On that date the Soviet delegate to the committee, Ivan Maisky, warned that the Soviet Union would henceforth feel itself bound to the agreement to no greater degree than any of the other participants. This was an obvious reference to Italy and Germany, whose violations of the agreement were by this time too blatant to ignore. The apparent hesitation on the part of Stalin after 18 July, and his sudden change

of policy, have required some explanation. Historians point to Stalin's desire to work with the West against fascism—the developing policy of “collective security”—and the purges then taking place, which may have distracted his attention from Spain.<sup>23</sup> In addition, military dispatches from the front lines suggested that the Republicans would collapse if they did not receive immediate and massive aid.<sup>24</sup> Then there were the reports from the first Soviet advisers on the scene, which emphasized the lack of modern technology in Spain and the dangers that this represented.<sup>25</sup> All these considerations, added to the blatant disregard that Hitler and Mussolini showed for the agreement, may have convinced Stalin to push beyond small arms and begin sending tanks, airplanes, and greater numbers of men in early October.

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## Document 10

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 991, ll. 56–59

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Chairman of the Council of Ministers  
Madrid, 25 July 1936  
To the Ambassador of the USSR in France

Dear Sir:

The government of the Republic of Spain needs to supply its army with modern armaments in significant quantities to conduct the struggle against those who began and are continuing the civil war against the legal authority and constitutional government and who are being supplied with weapons and ammunition from abroad in abundant quantities. The government I head, knowing what sorts of means and availability of military matériel are at the disposal of the USSR, decided to appeal to you to notify your government about the desire and necessity, which our government is experiencing, for supplies of armaments and ammunition of all categories, and in very great quantities, from your country.

Taking the opportunity, etc.

Signature: José Giral

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## The Advisers Begin Their Work

The Soviet Union responded to the Spanish request for aid with more than just weaponry. In August and September the first men arrived in Spain to help organize the war against the Nationalists. By late November, there were more than seven hundred Soviet military advisers (most of whom doubled as GRU workers), NKVD agents, diplomatic representatives, and economic experts in Spain. Before the outbreak of the war, Spain and the Soviet Union had not even maintained diplomatic relations. These were restored in late August with the arrival of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko and Marcel Rosenberg, the consul in Barcelona and the ambassador to Spain respectively. The military advisers were under the leadership of Yan Berzin (real name, Pavel Ivanovich Kiuzis Peteris), who was the head of the GRU until he left for Spain. He was aided by Grigory Shtern, the chief military adviser; Vladimir Gorev, military attaché; Nikolai Voronov, the official in charge of artillery; Boris Sveshnikov, adviser for the air forces; and Semyon Krivoshein, the commander of the tank units. The economy was to be put right by Artur Stashevsky. The Comintern, which already had representatives such as Codovilla in place before the war broke out, also sent dozens of its own people to help the Republicans. These included men like André Marty (who organized the International Brigades) and Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader. Within a few months all of the International Brigades would have Comintern or regular Red Army officers as their commanders.

The major unanswered question is how exactly the Soviet Union (and the Comintern) conceived of the role of these men in Spain. From the new evidence it is clear that almost from the start, the Soviets saw themselves as much more than just “advisers,” although they would continue to use the title throughout the war. They believed that they were in Spain to help win the war, whatever the cost. If it meant seizing control of the army, military operations, the Spanish economy, and eventually the Spanish political system, they were willing to do so. They complained about the incompetence of the Spanish, expected them to follow Soviet advice entirely, and would force out of power those who stood in the way. Comintern officials had a more ambiguous relationship with their Spanish

comrades and the Spanish government. On the one hand, they often decried the interference of the Soviets in Spanish affairs, complaining that it left very little room for the indigenous Communists to develop their own party and run their own war. On the other hand, they agreed that the Spanish were incompetent in both political and military matters and understood all too well the desire to take control into one's own hands. This ambiguity would allow independent-minded Comintern representatives to act as the Soviets did, gradually taking over the PCE and important sectors of the war effort.

#### ILYA EHRENBURG

The dispatches that these men sent back to the Comintern Secretariat and to Moscow constitute our best evidence of the way that the Soviets and Comintern viewed the war in Spain and of the political maneuvering that went on behind the scenes. One of our first glimpses of Soviet thinking about Spain comes from three letters by Ilya Ehrenburg, a reporter and writer. Ehrenburg was much more than simply an *Izvestia* correspondent, however. He in fact used his nonthreatening position to talk frankly with the highest officials in Spain and to determine their views of the political and military situation. In three pieces of correspondence, in particular, given here as **Documents 11, 12, and 13**, he focused primarily on the political situation. He then reported back to Rosenberg, who sent Ehrenburg's letters on to Stalin and other Politburo members. Ehrenburg's meetings with Luis Companys y Jover, the president of the Catalan generalitat, revealed to Moscow the growing split between Catalonia and the government in Madrid. The friction between the two centers would create some of the biggest headaches for the Soviets, who naturally preferred to centralize authority, preferably in Madrid. One of the strongest reasons for suspicion of the Barcelona administration was the strength of the anarchists and "Trotskyists" (POUM) in Catalonia. From these letters it is clear that the Soviets saw their relationship with the anarchists as close to open warfare. In the first letter, Ehrenburg described Juan García Oliver, one of the best-known anarchist leaders, as "frenzied," "intransigent," "raving." He reported that FAI members purposely kept

ammunition away from the Communists and committed other “petty tyrannies.” He commented in the second letter about the anarchists’ lack of responsibility when it came to industry. The one positive note was Companys, who seemed more willing to support the Soviet Union and work against the anarchists. Ehrenburg thought that he should be sent “a steamship, even if it held only sugar,” to soften his heart. The postscript to the letter in which this quotation appears showed that his advice to García Oliver had also produced concrete results.

Within a week the situation once again looked grim. In his third letter, Ehrenburg wrote that the war was not going well and that the anarchists, infiltrated by German intelligence agents, were at least partially responsible for the defeats and demoralization at the front. The “Trotskyists” had contributed to the problem by undermining the party in Catalonia, attracting away good leaders like Maurín, and carrying out “provocative activities.” Meanwhile, the weak and disorganized party was incapable of improving matters. One reason was the interference of someone Ehrenburg called the “real” leader of the PCE. From the document it is obvious that it was one of the foreign Communists sent to advise the PCE, very probably either Boris Stepanov (as the Bulgarian Comintern representative in Spain was called) or Codovilla, who had signed the earliest dispatches from the PCE to Moscow.<sup>26</sup> Ehrenburg accused this man of taking the place of the Spaniards in the party, damaging the reputation of both the party and the Comintern, and hindering the formation of an independent Spanish leadership. Similar accusations would be made by other Soviet and Comintern officials, but Moscow would do nothing to rein in men who were, after all, simply following orders. Ehrenburg thought that the only bright spots were that Largo Caballero and Prieto listened to “everything that we say,” and that it might not be necessary to merge the Socialist and Communist parties immediately. The Communists already had so much influence inside the UGT that he did not see any need to rush into uniting the two parties at that point in the war.

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## Document 11

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 852, l. 150

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*Secret.*

To Com. *Stalin*.

Copies: to Comrades Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov.

At the request of Com. Rosenberg, I am forwarding to you copies of three letters from Ehrenburg in Barcelona to Rosenberg in Madrid, which arrived in yesterday's diplomatic pouch.

/N. Krestinsky/

*9 Copies. vr/mm*

1–5—to addressees

6—to Com. Litvinov

7—to Com. Stomoniakov

8—to Com. Neiman

9—file

Copy N° 5.

[ll. 156–159]

17 September

Dear Marcel Israelevich [Rosenberg],

To add to today's telephone conversation, I report: Companys was in a very nervous state. I spoke with him for more than two hours, while all he did the whole time was complain about Madrid. His arguments: the new government has not changed anything; slights Catalonia as if it were a province, and this is an autonomous republic; sends instructions like to the other governors; refuses to turn over religious schools to the generalitat; demands soldiers and does not give out any of the weapons bought abroad, not one airplane, and so on. He said that he had received letters from the officers commanding units on the Talavera-Ávila front requesting that they be recalled to Catalonia. He very much wanted a Soviet consulate in Barcelona but thought that Madrid had shelved that question. He said that they had succeeded in conveying the gold to France, but the Spanish government in Paris suggested to the French banks (?) that they not take the gold. He cited dozens more examples. He said that the economic adviser that they sent to Madrid ought to state all of their claims. That issue still needs to be resolved. As yet, neither Caballero nor Prieto has managed to find time to receive him. And so on. He explained that if



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## Document 11 *continued*

they did not receive cotton or hard currency for cotton within three weeks there would be a hundred thousand out of work. He very much wanted to trade with the Union.<sup>27</sup> He believed that any sign of attention being paid to Catalonia by the Union was important. As for the internal situation, he spoke rather optimistically: the influence of FAI was decreasing, the role of the government growing.

Gassol, the minister of education, also accused Madrid of contempt for Catalonia.

The head of Companys's cabinet (I forget his name) assured me that FAI was weakening.

According to him, the day before yesterday the Guardias de Asalto and the Guardia Civil openly spoke out against the CNT (I ought to note that the Communists, confirming this fact, attribute it to his growing influence over the UGT). It is worth mentioning that the black-and-red flag<sup>28</sup> was taken down from the courthouse yesterday. The anarchists threatened to start a row but gave it up.

I spoke with García Oliver. He was also in a frenzied state. Intransigent. At the same time that López, the leader of the Madrid syndicalists, was declaring to me that they had not permitted and would not permit attacks on the Union in the *CNT* newspaper, Oliver declared that they had said that they were "criticizing" the Union because it was not an ally, since it had signed the non-interference pact, and so on. Durruti, who has been at the front, has learned a lot, whereas Oliver, in Barcelona, is still nine-tenths anarchist ravings. For instance, he is against a unified command on the Aragon front; a unified command is necessary only when a general offensive begins. Sandino, who was present during this part of the conversation, spoke out for a unified command. They touched on the question of mobilization and the transformation of the militia into an army. Durruti made much of the mobilization plans (I do not know why—there are volunteers but no guns). Oliver said that he agreed with Durruti, since "Communists and Socialists are hiding themselves in the rear and pushing the FAI-ists out of the cities and villages." At this point he was almost raving. I would not have been surprised if he had shot me.

I spoke with Trueba, the PSUC (Communist) political commissar. He complained about the FAI-ists. They are not giving our men ammunition. We have only thirty-six bullets left per man. The anarchists have reserves of a million and a half. Col. Villalba's soldiers only have a hundred cartridges each. He cited many instances of the petty tyrannies of FAI. People from the CNT complained to me that Fronsosa, the leader of PSUC [*sic*], gave a speech at a demonstration in San Boi in which he said that the Catalans should not be given even one gun, since the guns would just fall into the hands of the anarchists. In general, during the ten days that I was in Catalonia, relations between Madrid and the generalitat on the one hand, and that between the Communists and the anarchists on the other, became very much more strained. Companys is wavering; either he gravitates toward the anarchists, who have

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## Document 11 *continued*

agreed to recognize the national and even nationalistic demands of the Esquerra, or he depends on the PSUC in the struggle against FAI. His circle is divided between supporters of the former and of the latter solutions. If the situation on the Talavera front worsens, we can expect him to come out on one or the other side. We must improve relations between the PSUC and the CNT and then try to get closer to Companys.

In Valencia our party is working well, and the influence of the UGT is growing. But the CNT has free rein there. The governor takes their side completely. This is what happened when I was there: sixty anarchists with two machine guns turned up from the front, as their commander had been killed. In Valencia they burned the archives and then wanted to break into the prison to free the criminals. The censor (this is under López, the leader of the CNT) prohibited our newspaper from reporting about any of this outrage, and in the CNT paper there was a note that the “free masses destroyed the law archives as [part of] the accursed past.”

A meeting of Catalan writers is now taking place with Bergamín, who came with me. I hope that on the intelligentsia front they succeed in uniting the Spanish and the Catalans. Tomorrow a mass meeting with ten thousand people will be held with this goal, at which I will give a speech from the secretariat of the International Union of Workers for the Protection of Culture.

As this letter has several vital corrections for what I gave you for Moscow, please send this as well to Moscow.

Day after tomorrow I am leaving for Paris. If you wish to communicate anything, please do it through our embassy.

Heartfelt greetings,  
Ilya Ehrenburg

Postscript by Com. Rosenberg:

Thanks to dependence on the Spanish market, the vain attempt at an “independent” Catalonia has been held up by “dependence” on the general Spanish economy.

M.R.

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## Document 12

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 852, ll. 160–162

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18 September

Dear M. I.,

Today I again had a long conversation with C. He was calmer. His point: Robles was indulging the anarchists. It was hard to come to an agreement

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## Document 12 *continued*

with them. The plan of the “advisers” was not an ultimatum but a desire. He proposed to form a local government in this way: half Esquerra, half CNT and UGT. He said that he would reserve for himself finance and the police. After my words on the fact that the anarchists’ lack of personal responsibility would interfere with manufacturing, he declared that he “agreed” to put a Marxist at the head of industry. He called Oliver a fanatic. He reproached the PSUC for not answering the terror of the anarchists with the same. On the conduct of the Catalan militia in Madrid, he said that that was the FAI-ists and that the national Guardia and the Esquerrists would fight anyone. He said that Madrid itself wanted the CNT militia, while not hiding the fact that the latter left to “establish order in Madrid.” He advised sending them back from Madrid. He said that when Tardiella arrived (no doubt I’ve gotten the name mixed up—he’s the one that went to Madrid) he would gather the CNT and the UGT and suggest forming a new government under his presidency.<sup>29</sup> He assured me that the *consejos* in that form would preserve the facade of a constitutional government. The whole time he cursed the FAI. He knew that I was going from him to the CNT and was very interested in how the FAI-ists would converse with me. He requested that I communicate the results [of the conversation] with him. He complained that the FAI-ists were against Russia, were carrying out anti-Soviet propaganda, or more accurately, carried out, but that he was our friend, and so on. A steamship, even if it held only sugar, would soften his heart.

With the CNT I spoke with Herrera. He was much more modest than Oliver. On stopping the anti-Soviet outbursts: he immediately agreed with me. On the advisers, he stands with his (!) Madrid government; party, Marxist. It is necessary to create a true workers’ government, and so on. All the same, at the end of the visit, when I pointed out to him the diplomatic fallout from a break with constitutional succession, he gave in a little. But at this point all sorts of international anarchists descended on us and I left. The following is interesting: attacking the Madrid government, Herrera cited the same facts that Companys did yesterday—the delay with the two wagons, the story about the gold, the refusal to supply Catalonia with weapons, and so on. Moreover, he spoke with the tone of Catalan patriotism. Undoubtedly there is close contact between the generalitat and the CNT. The question is to what conclusion Companys will come.

Today in the *Solidaridad Obrera* an appeal by the CNT was printed with a call to protect small proprietors, peasants, shopkeepers, and so on. A favorable fact.

As for the trip by lawyers to the Union, that is either stupidity or desertion. We’ll clarify it.

The great writer Bergamín (a Catholic antifascist) is personally handing you a letter. Snuggle up to him.

Miravittles told me that the FAI-ists are already starting to talk about a

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## Document 12 *continued*

“desperate defense of Barcelona,” and so on. Herrera, among the other things he said, accused Madrid of doing away with the landing on Majorca, as the fascists will start to bomb Barcelona.

Sincerely yours,  
Ilya Ehrenburg

There is a mass meeting today. Tomorrow morning I leave for Paris.

18 September

The mass meeting went off with a great deal of enthusiasm. The majority were CNT; however, when I spoke, I managed to get everyone to give a round of applause for the Union and the Spanish Republic. I appealed for unity. The council of the antifascist militia is now meeting. The members promised me that they would implement a conciliatory policy on the question of reorganizing the Catalan government.

The “tourists” are honest but stupid.

Yours,  
I. Ehrenburg

18.

Addendum to the telephone conversation and letter:

Although Oliver was intransigent, I know that yesterday he nevertheless said in the *Sol. Obrera* to stop the attacks against the USSR. And indeed, two telegrams from Moscow were printed today in the *S.O.* with favorable headlines. So the conversation was not in vain.

I. E.

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## Document 13

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 852, ll. 151–155

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N° 13 26/9/36

vkx N° 5186

30/9/36

Top Secret!

In such dynamic circumstances, when the comparatively small strength of the rebels is preparing to cut Madrid’s rail communications and when everything depends on the morale of units which, under the influence of a new political enthusiasm, may yet, in the face of the direct danger threatening Madrid, reveal a capacity to resist which up to this time they have seemed in-

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## Document 13 *continued*

capable of—it is difficult to predict the further development of the struggle.

Only in the course of the civil war's development will the weight of the industrial north, now cut off by the front line and equipped with a certain amount of weaponry shipped recently from abroad, reveal its influence on the outcome of the struggle.

There are still a lot of unknowns, including such extremely vital factors as the internal situation in Portugal itself, which since the beginning of the rebellion has become a virtual base for the rebels; the situation in Morocco; and finally, such nontrivial factors as the size of further deliveries and resupplies of airplanes and tanks for the rebels on the part of Germany and Italy.

This last factor will play a paramount role for a reason that has already been noticed repeatedly—the lack of military experience among the Spanish workers and the resulting weak resistance in the face of modern military technology.

Inexperienced units panic not only in the face of an air bombardment, but also when faced with machine guns and other types of automatic weaponry.

The classic example showing that the militia is still not capable of decisive action is the story of the capture, or rather the noncapture, of Alcázar.

The demoralization of units is also explained in part by the deaths of the best self-sacrificing elements of the proletariat, which fell in street battles during the first days of the rebellion in Madrid, Barcelona, and other cities.

I will not dwell on the fact that the anarchist tradition, deeply sown in the consciousness of Spanish workers, even if they have not directly joined with the anarchists, plays its own negative role.

Undoubtedly one of the main tasks is to attract to the revolution's side, at this stage, the healthier elements from among the anarchists. It is characteristic that in the last conversation that I had with Galarza, the minister of the interior (a Socialist), he mentioned that his attempt at cooperation with the anarchist labor federation had produced positive results, and that lately several of the confederation leaders had begun to recognize that many alien elements were interspersed among their members. One of the anarchists' "idols," who provokes great doubts of a nonideological sort, is Juan López, who is now the boss of Valencia and who, by the way, directed some "compliments" at me in a speech delivered at a demonstration.

I will not again go over the diversionary work insinuated into the periphery of the anarchists by German intelligence, which I mentioned in my previous dispatch.

The question of possibly merging the Socialists and the Communists into one party (as in Catalonia) does not have, according to my preliminary impression, any immediate, current significance since the Socialist party, as such, at least in the central region, does not make itself much felt and since the Socialists and Communists act in concert within the framework of a union organization—the General Workers' Union—headed by Caballero (ab-

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## Document 13 *continued*

breviated UGT), the activity and influence of which far exceed the limits of a union.

Except for La Pasionaria, the leadership of the Communist party consists of people who do not yet have authority on the national level. The party's real general secretary was an individual about whom I wrote you. Because he occupied just such a position not only within the Central Committee but also outside it, he besmirched the reputations of two institutions with all the people in the Popular Front. However we evaluate his role, in any case, the fact that he himself took the place of the leadership hindered the formation, from the leadership cadres, of independent political leaders.

The Communist party, which has attracted some of the more politically conscious elements of the working class, is, all the same, insufficiently organized and politically strong to take on even to the slightest degree the political work for the armed forces of the revolution. In Catalonia, about which I can judge only through partial evidence, the party is significantly weaker and undoubtedly suffers from the provocative activities of Trotskyists, who have won over several active leaders, like, for example, Maurín. Undoubtedly the party is still incapable of independently rousing the masses to some kind of large-scale action, or of concentrating all the strength of the leadership on such an action. What is more the example of Alcázar has been in this connection a notoriously negative test for the party. However, I will not give a more definite evaluation of the cadres and strength of the party, since this is the only organization with which I have had insufficient contact.

What are our channels for action in this situation? We support close contact with the majority of the members of the government, chiefly with Caballero and Prieto. Both of them, through their personal and public authority, stand incomparably higher than the other members of the government and play a leading role for them. Both of them very attentively listen to everything that we say. Prieto at this particular time is trying at all costs to avoid conflict with Caballero and therefore is trying not to focus on the issues.

I think it unnecessary to dwell at this time on the problem of how an aggravation in class contradictions might take shape during a protracted civil war and the difficulties with the economy that might result (supplying the army, the workers, and so on), especially as I think it futile to explore a more distant prospect while the situation at the front still places all the issues of the revolution under a question mark.

In this kind of circumstance, such as I have touched on above and which I went into in my summary telegram, there is no need to prove that supplying [the Spanish] with technology may turn out to have a huge influence on the final outcome of the civil war. It is clear that however significant the temporary successes of the rebels may be, they have in no way guaranteed a definitive advantage. The steadfast military cadres of the revolution will be forged in the very process of the civil war.

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## Document 13 *continued*

In this letter I have managed to touch superficially upon only some of the questions relating to an analysis of the entire situation—I will leave my summary telegram at the base.

25/9/1936[Rosenberg]

x) As I have already informed you, the syndicalist form of power proposed by the anarchists actually amounts to the creation of rev.[olutionary] com.[mittees] from the anarchist confederation of labor (CNT) and the union organization headed by Caballero (UGT) with a fictitious Republican adjunct to that. This formula in the provinces is nearly always put into effect in the bloc CNT with UGT, and in Castile as the bloc UGT with CNT.

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### ANDRÉ MARTY

André Marty's experiences in Spain supported Ehrenburg's analysis of the party. Marty's reputation was as a strict Stalinist, suspicious of virtually everyone and willing to shoot anyone that he suspected of deviations or treachery.<sup>30</sup> The two documents in this chapter lend credence to this contention, while adding a few nuances. He thought, for instance, that the Communists were quite capable of making mistakes on their own, quite apart from the insidious sabotage of the anarchists and "Trotskyists." He also believed that it was wrong to take control over the PCE away from the Spanish, but on this point he would find no more of an audience than Ehrenburg did. In **Document 14**, a report to the Comintern on the condition of the PCE, Marty detailed exhaustively the weaknesses of the Communists and the difficulties that they faced in trying to respond to the war. Although the party was growing at a "very rapid pace," it was actually doing very little and planning even less for the future. It apparently had no concrete policies on military matters or the unions, and the agrarian line, though correct, was not publicized. He viewed the PSUC, formed without the permission of the Comintern, with great suspicion and thought its policies "erratic" and its leaders suspect. He reserved his most severe criticism, however, for the leadership of the PCE. The Central Committee no longer existed, the work of the Politburo was "terribly primitive," and the only capable Spanish leader was ill. Instead "Codo" (short for Codovilla) had taken over running the party,

which he apparently viewed as his own personal preserve. The Hungarian representative Erno Gerö imitated Codovilla as well, taking the place of the Spanish Politburo members. It is significant that, though Marty severely criticized both these men for their high-handed actions, he also was frustrated by the poor functioning of the Spanish government and the PCE. He understood all too well the advisers' desire to seize control and run the country themselves. The appraisals of the Communist party made by Marty and Ehrenburg confirm the accusations of historians such as Víctor Alba that the PCE, completely subordinated to Moscow before the war began, did not have an independent life during the conflict.<sup>31</sup> Instead, it was the international Communist movement that ran the party, using mouthpieces such as Dolores Ibárruri ("La Pasionaria") to give the illusion of Spanish control. Erno Gerö was in fact rewarded for his attitude toward the Spanish comrades. As Marty mentioned, he was ordered to Barcelona to oversee the PSUC in early October. There he directed that party from behind the scenes, as Bolloten writes, "with extraordinary energy, tact, and efficiency."<sup>32</sup>

The day before he gave this report, Marty had presented a longer summary of the general situation in Spain (**Document 15**). In contrast to the report on the PCE, which had a more limited distribution, here Marty said very little about the Communists' weaknesses and instead stressed their increasing political influence and successful policies. There were two areas for concern—the subversive anti-Communist activities of the anarchists and Largo Caballero—which he thought were linked. From this report and others from Soviet advisers, it is clear that by early October the honeymoon between the Communists and Largo Caballero was already over. Marty, like the rest of the foreign representatives and advisers in Spain, had decided that Largo Caballero was not going to implement Communist policies and was far too favorable toward the anarchists. The Spanish leader also did nothing about the "treachery" that was going on in the state bureaucracy and military apparatus. Only when he "changed for the better" and began to pay more attention to the Communists did Marty find anything good to say about the man who had once been called the Spanish Lenin. Meanwhile, the anarchists continued unchecked their "wrecking"



(sabotage) in industry, agriculture, and the army. Marty had to admit several times that the anarchists enjoyed a great deal of prestige and that their proposals were extremely popular, but this was owing to good campaigning and propaganda, not to the true support of the people.

Like other Communists, Marty distinguished various strata among the anarchist leaders and their masses. There were a few “good” anarchists and many “bad” anarchists, and the Communists hoped to be able to encourage the first, while working to destroy the latter. The most ominous warning that Marty gave throughout his report was that the “bad” anarchists were gathering weapons and were better armed than the Communists. He also mentioned a report by Codovilla that the anarchists (working with Largo Caballero) had prepared a coup in August to overthrow the government. None of the scholars who have studied the Civil War mention any such preparations, and it seems unlikely, given a whole variety of factors.<sup>33</sup> In light of the events of the following May, however, it is significant that in October 1936 the Communists already anticipated a use of force by their main political enemies. Marty’s most important statement on his views of the anarchists and the future of Spain came at the very end of the report. There he noted that “to fight with [the anarchists] in the face of fascism—this [would be] the end. This means that we should not stop at conceding something to them, and after victory we will get even with them, all the more so since at that point we will have a strong army.” Throughout the war, the Communists never lost sight of what they needed in order to shape postwar Spain. Their insistence on control over the Spanish police, army, and secret services made chilling sense and is yet another reminder that similar tactics would be used in postwar Eastern Europe.

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## Document 14

RGASPI, f. 495, op. 74, d. 199, ll. 61–64

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14 October 1936

Secret

Remarks About the CP of Spain

André Marty

In the period from 18 July to 1 September, the members of the party were absorbed with the armed struggle. Thus, all of the work of the party was reduced to military action, but largely in an individual sense, rather than from the standpoint of political leadership of the struggle. At best, the party committees discussed urgent questions (the collection of weapons and explosives, supplies, questions of housing, and so on) but without setting forth perspectives [for the future] or still less following a general plan.

Beginning on 18 July, many leaders headed the struggle and remained at this work later, during the formation of the columns. For example, Cordón is the assistant commander of the Estremadura column; Uribe, the deputy for Valencia has the same position in the Teruda column; and Romero is in the column that is at Málaga; del Barrio is in the column at Saragossa. But it must be said that only a very few of the leaders have the requisite military abilities (I do not mean personal bravery). Thus, of the four just mentioned, Cordón is a brilliant commander, del Barrio is quite good, and the rest are worthless from a military point of view.

The political activity of the party has been reduced to the work of the leadership (editorship of the newspapers, several cells, démarches to the ministries). Party agitation, not counting what is carried out in the press, has come to naught. Internal party life has been reduced to the discussion of important, but essentially practical and secondary, questions.

Meanwhile, recruiting has moved and continues to move at a very rapid pace. The influx of new members into the party is huge. For the first time intellectuals and even officers are being drawn into the party (I am not talking about those like Asen[s]io, whose declaration about admittance was, apparently, dictated by personal ambition).

But on the other hand, the party has not worked on military matters. Comrade CODO declared, “Not being a military man myself, I cannot give you my opinion.” But already the most active elements from the middle cadres began in July to set up militia units which subsequently were transformed into the Fifth Regiment. The general staff of the Fifth Regiment, consisting of workers or officers who are Communists or sympathizers—this is the best thing that we have in the entire fighting army. As the Politburo has not given anything but general directives, it is understandable that friction has ensued. For the

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## Document 14 *continued*

first time, in the middle of September, the general staff heard a political report by MIJE. They were extremely satisfied.

The Central Committee no longer exists. Several members of the CC were killed; others were expelled or removed for various reasons. Around the Politburo (see the details in the report to the secretariat from the 10th) only a few members of the CC remain (URIBES [*sic*], ROMERO, and so on).

Even at the moment of the formation of the ministry, the P.B.'s understanding consisted solely of the need to defeat the enemy, the need to make war.

Thus, Comrade CASTRO, who as the commander of the Fifth Regiment enjoyed colossal authority, was removed and named director of the Institute of Agrarian Reform. We lost ten days on that, searching for a new deputy for Lister's regiment. The CPF, in agreement with the PCE, sent Comrade Gayman for work in the military commission, at the disposal of the PCE. In the course of twenty days, the party secretariat, and in particular Comrade CODO, had not given him any directives and had not used any of his work. When I arrived in Madrid, he was already ready to leave.

Beginning with the first days of September, the external agitation of the party (mass meetings) began progressively to develop. Simultaneously with that, mainly through the help of Gerö, we changed the line in *Mundo Obrero*: instead of [one on] a sacred optimism, we began a campaign on the need to organize the war. Three CC instructors were sent to the Levant to strengthen the party's organization and for the political leadership of the new military units, which are forming with the Fifth Regiment. At the end of September we set up the organization of the party organs in the military units on the following basis: a front committee, with the rights of a provincial committee, which will lead the Communist groups and the political sections<sup>34</sup> that are being set up in the new units; behind them is the provincial committee, responsible for the political sections and groups in the units that are in their territory.

This decision was very well received by the party and the comrades that are in the army. But all the same, this directive has still not been put into effect; such an organization has only begun. The internal activity of the party: this continues to be very weak and limited to the resolution of routine questions, but the political problems have not been discussed and are not being discussed now.

**THE PARTY LEADERSHIP.** The current leadership exists only in Madrid and Valencia. In addition, the leadership in Valencia is very weak politically, which is reflected in the newspaper (*Verdad*). In all of the provinces of the Levant, our influence is very strong both in the cities and in the villages. But with the exception of the provincial committees in Alicante and Murcia, all of the rest of the committees are very weak. The Cartagena Committee works very well from a practical point of view (thanks to the influence of the workers of the naval arsenal and the sailors, both of whom are under our influence. The commander of the cruiser *Núñez* is a Communist, a sea mechanic for

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## Document 14 *continued*

twenty-eight years). Our party is still very young in this entire area, and it still needs to learn everything.

CATALONIA. Our party (the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia—PSUC—in Comintern) is not united. It continues to remain [merely] the sum of the four component parties from which it was created. From the point of view of the Communist [party], despite the fact that the leadership is in our hands, it does not have an ideological backbone. There is significant friction from this. Despite this fact, [the party's] correct policy vis-à-vis the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie enhances its powerful influence daily. The PSUC is the third party in Catalonia (after Esquerra and the CNT). A majority of the members of the party are members of the UGT, which has significantly increased the number of its members. Unfortunately, the erratic policy of the party, especially on the question of cadres, gave the opportunity to raise SESÉ to the head of the UGT—a man who is suspect from every point of view (see the protocols of the Catalan Commission at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern International in September 1935). Arlandis (see the same document) continues to remain in the leadership. He is constantly in France under the pretext of buying weapons and refused to carry out a party resolution (P.B. PCE) that recalled him to Madrid. The leadership of the Socialist party in MADRID (the Workers' Party of Spain) continues to work in the PSUC, and it often happens that the local groups direct their letters to it instead of writing to the CC PCE. On the other hand, Caballero is striving to seize the leadership. Fifteen days ago in Madrid he handed three million pesetas to COMORERA, the general secretary of the PSUC, for whom we sent to discuss the question of Catalonia, and we heard this information about him.

The party's union policy. Nothing practical has been done. The CNT continues to follow an ever increasing number of UGT declarations, but generally for political reasons. Our groups assemble but do not work on the problems of everyday demands. In general, our activists remain in the UGT (the work is easier). It is my opinion that the struggle for the unification of the unions is becoming a pressing task. I proposed that the unions that are under our influence appeal for unification with two aims: 1) unity of the working class to defend the interests of the workers against the employers; 2) unity in production to defeat fascism. Mije in principle accepted this proposal on unification (without pointing out the aims) at a large mass meeting organized by the party in Madrid on 27 September. This proposal elicited very strong applause, but I would have preferred that this had been done as I proposed. It is my opinion that union work requires radical restructuring.

This will give us the opportunity to smash the sectarian attitude of our party toward the anarchists in the workers' committees.

Agrarian policy. In general the policy is correct (see the decision by the Ministry of Agriculture on the question of land), but it has not been popularized in the villages. They do not demonstrate the deep difference between our

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## Document 14 *continued*

line and the methods of the anarchists. And in this area a colossal work still must be accomplished.

Life of the party. The organization of several regional conferences is foreseen. The Asturian conference should have taken place on 4 October. The Politburo could not send anyone (Pasionaria, who was selected, could not get an airplane). Thus I do not have any information about how it went. But it seems that MANSO, our deputy (leader since October 1934) was completely outdone by the Socialists. I have not heard anywhere that the question about the future leadership of Asturias is being discussed.

Work of the P.B. Terribly primitive. I managed to go to three meetings, for unfortunately these meetings are conducted in circumstances which allow nonresident comrades to remain at the meetings and hear everything that is discussed there. The same kind of sickness exists in the P.B., and in many party committees. They are discussing one question, a thousand others are joined to it, and finally no exact decisions are resolved on, nor are there any methods offered to put such decisions into effect, nor is it indicated who is responsible for carrying them out.

Despite the fact that a mass of secret documents are strewn about the tables, I never saw any written decisions from either the secretariat or the Politburo.

The only person capable of leading the P.B. and making decisions is DÍAZ—the general secretary. Unfortunately, the state of his health is such that he ought not to work.

Proposals:

It is necessary to define more precisely the policy of the party on the following questions:

a) Economic measures (industry and agriculture) and social policy in the current circumstances. (The party has still not spoken on such measures as commandeering, committees of workers' control that have been put into effect by the anarchists; the organizations have not received any kind of directives on these questions.) What must be undertaken in order to carry this out and to popularize it (the creation of a large agitprop department)?

b) Organizational measures of the party (1. usual organizations in the Republican zone and organizations in the military units, 2. illegal organizations in the zone occupied by the fascists, and 3. finances of the party).

c) The strengthening of the leadership in every organization and the appointment of a new Central Committee.

At the current time it is without doubt difficult to convene a party congress quickly, but then, it is possible to conduct a provincial conference relatively easily (even including Catalonia) and a party conference.

Remarks about the dispatch of representatives and instructors to Spain.

I was very surprised on my arrival in Madrid by the work of Codo. There is no other term for this than "ka" [*sic*]. He does everything himself. He works in the former office of Gil Robles (the party is housed in the former building of

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## Document 14 *continued*

CEDA). At 9 o'clock in the morning, he receives everyone and right there decides all the questions himself. Before his arrival in September, he wrote many of the editorials for *Mundo Obrero* himself.

This kind of conduct, it seems to me, completely contradicts the directive of the Seventh Congress and of Comrade Dimitrov. The result of this is that the members of the party have been turned into nothing but executors [of orders], they completely lose any feeling of responsibility, and [this] impedes the organizing of cadres. Thus, for example, Com. Checa, upon whom has been laid responsibility for organizing the police, spends three-quarters of his day signing passes, searching rooms, and dealing with petty problems.

Codo views the party as his own property. On his return from Moscow, he gave a very concise report; I feel now that it was nowhere near complete. In particular, he said absolutely nothing about the criticism put forward here.

In my opinion this kind of behavior is intolerable. Either he ought to be a member of the Spanish Communist party, in which case he can be appointed general secretary, and then only if he changes his work methods.

Or he remains a representative of the Comintern, and in that case, he ought not to take the place of the secretary of the party, he ought to act through the councils and not take the place of the party's leadership under any circumstances.

By the way, it was not surprising to me that when coming here, on the way here and on the way back, he sat each time in Paris for five days, despite the serious situation.

Comrade Gerö imitates him on a lesser scale, but in the same vein. After his departure from here, Comrade Gerö arrived in Madrid before I did. He took a post and imitated Codo's working methods, perhaps to a lesser degree. In particular, he did not write articles for the newspaper himself but inspired those who did write them. I pointed out to him in a very comradely way that it was not good to take the place of the P.B. members. So, for example, he alone heard the reports from the regional, district, and so on, secretaries and issued directives. Comrade Checa, the secretary of the organization, was never present at these conversations. To my remarks, Comrade Gerö declared to me that now was not the time to be occupied with experiments. I believe that his methods, although it is true that they are not as authoritarian, are just as bad as Codo's methods.

Of course, it is clear that when you are in Madrid and you see the sabotage of the government bureaucracy, the indisputable delays in carrying out directives by the organs of the party, you try to take control into your own hands. But all the same I believe that this method is not good. First, because one should not take the place of the leadership. Second, because we are lessening the authority of the Politburo by giving directives personally to the regional secretaries and other individuals. And finally, because by doing this, we are delaying the development of cadres.

As for me, I am content that I am making my own proposals. In the best case

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## Document 14 *continued*

about 40 percent were accepted. I am convinced that the best method is to persuade patiently. This method, in my opinion, will have the greatest results. Even on the general staff of the Fifth Regiment I never gave any directives and never approved directives, even if I myself was in agreement with them. I always asked that these directives be approved by the P.B., or at the least by responsible members of the Politburo.

Comrade Gerö, carrying out the directive that was received from here, is now in Catalonia. I think that he will not take the place of the party leadership in Barcelona, thanks to the peculiarities of that party (groups of leaders, consisting of the former leadership of the four parties), but in Madrid matters are very much amiss.

3 copies

1 copy to Com. Manuisky

2 copies to Com. Moskvin

22 Outgoing N° 985/0

11 Oct. 1936

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## Document 15

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, ll. 70–107

*Top Secret*

To Comrade Voroshilov K.E.

Accompanying this is a stenogram of a report just given by Com. Marty (when he arrived from Madrid) at a meeting of the secretariat of the Comintern on 10/10/1936.

17/10/36

[signed] /D. Manuisky/

*Secret*

(6) la.

17/10/36

### On the Situation in Spain

Report by Com. André Marty at a meeting of the secretariat of the ECCI  
on 10 October 1936

In this report I will touch on three topics: the political situation in the country, the military situation, and also the near-term prospect.

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## Document 15 *continued*

### 1. *Political Situation*

I left Madrid on 2 October, at a moment fraught with tension for Spain's political and military situation.

The Caballero government, set up on 3 September, met with enormous enthusiasm both at the rear and at the front. Now that government is just as discredited as the Giral administration was then.

The government is losing its authority by showing weakness toward the anarchists, who are destroying industry with their experiments. To this must be added the distress that the military defeats have caused the people.

The breakthrough at Talavera led to the fall of Giral's government. Now the situation at the front is worse. In the last few days of September, Torrijos fell, leading to the surrender of Toledo. On 9 October the enemy seized two important points—Navalperal and Santa Cruz del Retamarro. The fall of Toledo created panic in Madrid. The people were convinced that the enemy would be in the capital within a few hours. And if the fascists had that minute thrown a column of armored cars and a cavalry squad at Madrid, the city might have been taken by them without a fight.

The government is also losing its authority because they were unable to make any changes in providing supplies for the country. Despite the fact that Madrid still has lines of communication open with the richer areas of Levant, there are not enough sugar, milk, coffee, potatoes, beans.

#### A. *Weakness and Indecisiveness of the Government*

The internal discord within the Caballero administration has not ended. Caballero is a sort of bad union bureaucrat. Prieto is undoubtedly a capable man, but he is completely absorbed in thinking about how to play dirty tricks on his "friend" Caballero. The newspapers *Claridad* (Caballero's organ) and *El Socialista* (Prieto's organ) excel in attacking each other. The other ministers go along. Only the two Communist ministers use all their might to weld together the government with concrete proposals directed at strengthening the struggle against fascism. Unfortunately, many of these proposals, because of Caballero's opposition, are rejected and, even if they are adopted, are not put into effect. One serious and helpful man in the ministries is the Left Republican Just (the minister of social work). The minister of internal affairs (a Socialist from Caballero's group) is a very energetic man. Del Vayo, the minister of foreign affairs, also has clear and correct purposes. But the work methods of these people are extremely primitive. Prieto, the minister of the navy and aviation, does all the technical work himself at the ministry: he calls up the various institutions himself, dictates to the typist, hunts for people—and this is one of the best organizers.

Anyone can walk into the building of the War Ministry unimpeded and unchecked. At the reception for the ministry there is always a crush: officers, militia commanders, union workers helping everyone there, some-



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## Document 15 *continued*

times on highly secret matters. The ministry workers dictate to typists there. As a prime example: the minister's secretary is not in the military, but is a union worker. Women workers for the MOPR go into the minister's office without permission. Of course this kind of situation does not protect the interests of the work done by the minister of security. And we were very happy that the work for fortifying Madrid was given to the Ministry of Social Work under the leadership of Just [a Communist] and not to the War Ministry headed by Caballero.

Azaña, the president of the Republic, is fully aware of his situation, but his power is limited by law and he is the kind of man who can never let himself step outside the bounds of the law.

This is a rough characterization of the government's work, which has not been able to use the enthusiasm of the masses or to create a genuine antifascist unity. One of the reasons for this disorder, in my opinion, is that it has never given the masses an answer to the question, What are we fighting for? The government says that the goal for the struggle is victory over fascism. That kind of formula may unify all the revolutionary elements, but it is beside the point for the rest of the population. From my point of view, that kind of formulation is insufficient.

### *B. On the Situation in the Machinery of State*

The machinery of state is either destroyed or paralyzed. In the best-case scenario it just does not have any authority. Every step is [marked by] treachery. It is absolutely obvious, for instance, that provincial governors and the higher officer corps are betraying us.

Thus the civilian and military governor of Málaga came to the conclusion that to protect the city from the enemy, it was necessary to pull back all forces as close as possible to the city. They thus left all the high ground unprotected and allowed the enemy to cut off communications to the city. From the very beginning of the fascist rebellion, the workers' organizations in Málaga asked the government to replace both governors, but neither Giral nor Caballero would agree to this demand. The result is that these wreckers,<sup>35</sup> who have no authority among the population, destroyed the city's defenses.

The governor of Valencia allowed a "steel column" of anarchists, who had remained in positions without authorization, to enter the city. The anarchists began to disarm the Republican militia and the Guardia Civil; they paraded around the city militia men who had been stripped of their clothing. Only the Communists managed to put a stop to this disgrace and disarm this unrestrained gang. This time the governor was removed from his post.

The lack of discipline in parts of the state, which has treachery lodged within, means that the antifascist elements in the government that are dedicated to us remain half paralyzed. We must pay very serious attention to the machinery of state.

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## Document 15 *continued*

### *C. The Situation in Industry*

The anarchists set up worker control everywhere, transforming the workers into factory owners. The movement for worker control began in Catalonia, then spread to the Levant and gripped Madrid. Even foreign enterprises—for example, a branch of the French Renault factory—are in the hands of workers' committees. Almost all private enterprises, even those whose owners did not go over to the rebels, went into the hands of workers' committees. The social services in the large cities are in the same situation: trams, gas, electricity. All automobiles have been requisitioned by workers' organizations.

I will give the example of the decision by the anarchist CNT (National Labor Confederation) and FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation), which are always linked with each other. The decision reads: "The workers of all branches of industry must quickly begin the sequestration of all enterprises through their collectivization. This should be done in the shortest possible time, after which workers' councils will be elected, which will direct industry with the help of the appropriate technical personnel.

In the absence of such personnel, demands will be handled by the FAI's Technical Control Committee.

There should be a representative of the Economic Council in the councils."

I have in my hands decisions showing how this socialization will take place. Here, for example, is a copy of an act on sequestering gas works and electric stations.

...

What is the danger here? The danger is that these decisions nearly always affect the interests of small and midsize industry, small and midsize trade, and even small shops. In Barcelona all bakeries, small bread shops, chocolate factories, and so on, were nationalized. This movement has swept through the provinces. In Madrid they even nationalized the beauty shops. The owner of a beauty shop will have equal pay with his or her workers. The anarchist organization in Madrid, and with it all anarchist newspapers, are promoting the slogan of equal pay. In Catalonia this slogan has already been put into effect.

...

We see then that the Committee of Workers' Control will not only regulate the conditions of work but also control the entire life of the enterprise. These committees exist not only in Catalonia but also in many large cities of the Levant and even in Madrid.

The anarchists are very active and are trying to carry out this same kind of work in the south. During the war, they declare, we need to intensify production and at the same time carry out a social revolution. The anarchists do not miss any chance to emphasize their constructive capabilities. They do not tire of writing about that in their papers. I dwell at length on this question because the anarchists have a decisive influence for the entire country and even for Madrid, where the government is located.

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## Document 15 *continued*

### D. *The Agrarian Question*

A very popular anarchist slogan is on the reconstruction of agriculture: "We need to destroy the economic base of fascism." Under this slogan, all the anarchists are agitating for the collectivization and nationalization of land. In all their decisions, in all their press, they insist on the need for collectivization, so that "the peasants can catch up with what cuts them off from the industrial workers." They extol all the advantages of collectivization.

A congress of Catalan peasants which representatives of two hundred unions attended decided that:

"All sequestration of land will be under the control and direction of unions and the cultivation of their collective means favorably affects, in the first place, the unions and, in general, all workers."

In this decision, as in a whole series of other documents and pronouncements, they stipulate the need to implement collectivization voluntarily, the need to treat the small property owners with respect, not to hurt their interests, and so on.

In fact, it happens that even in Catalonia, where small landowners (*rabassaires*) are very widespread, the anarchists are attacking them. Their land is subject to requisition. Requisitioned land either is not paid for at all or is paid for with vouchers, which are worth precisely nothing. Villages are often hit with fines.

What are the results of this kind of policy? I personally visited Murcia, a rich area famous for its gardens. Noticing that the peasants when meeting did not greet each other with the Republican salutation, as in all the other villages, I ask the secretary of the provincial party committee what this meant. He answered me: "The situation here is very difficult. The peasants say that earlier they paid the landowner and now they pay the union, meaning that nothing has really changed."

### E. *Problems in Catalonia*

The comrades know that the new Catalan government is completely independent from Madrid. But, until lately, power in Catalonia rested, essentially, not in the hands of the Catalan government, but in the hands of the Central Committee of militia, led by the anarchists. This Central Committee advanced the slogan of the creation of committees of workers, peasants, soldiers, and militiamen. Not long ago the CC militia was disbanded, but all its members went into the government.

The current Catalan government consists of three Left Republican councillors, three representatives from the CNT, two from the Unified Socialist Party (formed as a result of the merging of the Communist and two Socialist parties in Catalonia), one from the peasant's union (*Rabassaires*), one from the Workers Party of Marxist Unity (Maurín's group, uniting with the Trotskyists; their representative in the government is Nin), one from the Independent Party, one representative from the petty-bourgeois party *Acció Catalá*. We have two

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## Document 15 *continued*

portfolios in this government: the Ministry of Communal Economy and Labor and the Ministry of Social Work. The program of the new government does not differ at all from the anarchist program that was published in the *Solidaridad Obrera* from 29 October:

...

Thus, in short outline, the characteristics of the country's economic situation. The workers manage the enterprises but do not know how to run them. In actual fact, the anarchists are in control of everything.

The anarchists in Barcelona say: We are working on the war. They turn out armored cars, but they are so heavy that they can move only on flat terrain and very quickly break down. And so far the anarchists have wastefully consumed all the raw materials they found at the enterprises. But the reserves are coming to an end, and they are being forced to buy from abroad, mainly from France. Their legations go abroad with gold and valuables that they have seized. And often they just buy all kinds of trash. In Barcelona, meanwhile, the impression is created that they are very active and energetic. The workers are actually working hard and even many foreign specialists, who are not in any position to understand this complicated social mess, are won over by the enthusiasm of the masses. Thus, for example, one aviation engineer—Serre—the technical director of a French company, Air France, who was in Barcelona for three days to study the possibility of repairing and producing airplanes, declared to me, "Everything is going well in Barcelona. I spoke with the workers' committee, with the engineers; they will repair and even produce new machines." After I checked, it turned out that factory could not do anything in less than a month. All sorts of rogues and frauds have flocked to the workers' committees with the most fantastic proposals. The engineers do not dare to object, because they are afraid that they will be shot as saboteurs. The result is that Catalan industry is almost paralyzed by the anarchists. The little that they still manufacture remains in Catalonia itself; the anarchists give nothing to Madrid.

### *F. On the Position and Activities of the Anarchists*

Which forces play the main role in the current situation? Only two forces are present: the anarchists and the Communists. The Socialists have withdrawn to the background, owing to internal discord and incapacity to seize the initiative.

The prestige of the anarchists has grown appreciably. In Barcelona itself this coincided with their active role in the suppression of the rebellion of 18–19 July. It was then that the prominent anarchist leader Ascaso died. One of the leaders of the anarchists, Durruti, leads operations on the Aragon front; the other leader, García Oliver, commands the militia forces in Barcelona. Both of them are always at the fronts. The prestige of the anarchists has also grown in Madrid. In general, the anarchist union enjoys no less influence than Caballero's union. The influence of the anarchists has also grown among

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## Document 15 *continued*

the peasants. But they are especially strong among the sailors of the navy. There are also many officers connected with the anarchists, but part of the officers go along with us. The anarchist militia is better armed than ours, since the anarchists appropriated weapons everywhere that they could. They have not only rifles but machine guns, as well.

Com. Codovilla told the presidium how the anarchists, together with Caballero, at the end of August prepared a coup to overthrow the government. After Caballero came to power, they quieted down somewhat. At first they supported the new government, but when they became convinced that Caballero was not ensuring victory, they began a campaign even against Caballero's government. A plenum of all regional organizations of the CNT was held on 18 September. The plenum adopted a resolution demanding the creation of a national defense council, in which there would be representatives from all the proletarian organizations fighting against fascism: five delegates from the General Workers' Union, five from the National Labor Confederation, and four from the Republicans. The chairman of the defense council would be Largo Caballero. In that resolution there was not one mention of the Communists. But two days later a delegation from the anarchists came to the CC of the Communist party, declaring that they had nothing against the Communists, but since the Communists were in the UGT, they could receive representation on the council through that union; they said that they had reached an understanding with the Socialists to divide positions [on the council] between them.

In the same resolution the plenum of the CNT regional committees advanced demands for the reorganization of the ministries and their conversion into departments; for the creation of a unified people's militia on the basis of universal military service; for control over militias by the councils of workers and militiamen, created by the General Workers' Union and the National Labor Confederation; for the creation of a unified military command in the form of a military commissariat, appointed by a national council from among representatives of the three sectors that are fighting against fascism. Concerning the economy, the resolution envisaged the socialization of banks; the socialization of property of the Church, which controls large amounts of land, of large industrial enterprises, of wholesale trade, of transport, and of all enterprises whose owners were involved in the rebellion; workers' control over industry and private commerce; the use by workers' unions of all the socialized means of production and exchange; freedom of experimentation in the villages, the implementation of which would not hinder the normal economic life of the country; [centralized] planning for large-scale industry and agriculture. At the same time, they resolved to call a plenary meeting in ten days of CNT regional organizations, to decide the question of putting into action the adopted resolution.

On 25 September the CNT held four large mass meetings in Barcelona,

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## Document 15 *continued*

Madrid, Valencia, and Málaga. The meetings were very successful, since the anarchists came with concrete proposals. In Madrid, López, a very popular anarchist from Valencia, declared in his speech (and this was printed in all the newspapers), "There is one party that wants to monopolize the revolution. If that party continues its policy, we have decided to crush it. There is a foreign ambassador in Madrid who is interfering in Spanish affairs. We warn him that Spanish affairs concern only the Spanish." This was the first public speech by the anarchists [directed] against us and against the Soviet plenipotentiary. About this I need to say that, while attacking the "disloyal" Soviet plenipotentiary, López did not utter one word about the destructive work done by the German, Italian, and Portuguese ambassadors against Spain.

Not one of the organizations decided to give an immediate answer to the anarchists' resolution/ultimatum. All were waiting for a change at the front, counting on the fact that even the most insignificant victory would allow them to avoid giving an answer. The president of the Republic refused to receive a delegation from the CNT, and Caballero would not receive them, either. The only party that approved the anarchists' proposal without reservations was the small Federal Republican Party, which does not play any role at all. On 25 September the Socialists formally replied that the question posed by them concerned the government and that the government ought to answer it.

The General Workers' Union responded on 26 September. In the answer they said that the unions agreed to the formulation of the question on unity but that they did not agree to change the constitution and so on. Our answer was published in *Mundo Obrero* on 29 September. We said that we welcomed everything in the anarchists' proposal that furthered the achievement of unity, discipline, and real coordination of all forces. We agreed that it was necessary to quickly recruit all antifascist forces for the organization of struggle and victory. Believing that the decision of the CNT plenum will rally all of the organizations who are responsible before the masses and before history for the final victory over fascism, we propose calling a meeting of the representatives of all organizations and parties to come to the desired agreement.

At the same time, we introduced a number of practical suggestions, which anticipated the involvement of the anarchists in all important existing government organizations, to heighten, in this way, their feeling of responsibility toward the common cause.

On the following day the CNT newspaper published an article in which it was said that the Communists completely agreed with the anarchist proposals. This is evidence of the fact that our answer on unity, on the use of the proposal made by CNT, awoke a response among the anarchist masses.

The anarchists published a new appeal on 29 September, less provocative in tone. But at the same time, an article was published in their paper whose headline said that only counterrevolutionary parties could be against the CNT proposals. From that day on, the anarchists have tirelessly repeated,

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## Document 15 *continued*

“Why is everyone so slow to create a national defense council? This silence aids the enemy.” *Solidaridad Obrera* has strengthened its assault on the government, attacking the Basque nationalists, the Catholics, and so on.

We have to take all of this into consideration. The anarchists have under their control, either directly or indirectly, all major industry and part of the agriculture of this country. They contrast the creation of a national defense council with the Council of Ministers. But the thought of creating such a council finds a wide response even among the masses that are not under the anarchists’ influence. We must find the right tone for discussions and conversations with the anarchists. The antagonism between the anarchist and the Communist workers in Spain is very great. It is especially dangerous now, because both sides are armed.

At the same time, we must not see all anarchists as one solid mass. Among their leaders we must differentiate three groups. Some, like Durruti and Oliver, are fighting with weapons in hand against fascism. They understand that without unity they will be defeated. They are for the introduction of military discipline, for unified command, which contradicts anarchist “theories.” These leaders reflect the mood of their masses who understand the seriousness of the current situation. The second group is represented by López, who spoke out against the Communist party and the USSR. All kinds of foreigners have joined that group, like our old acquaintance Pierre Besnard and Emmy [*sic*] Goldman, who is passing herself off as English, but who is really a Russian Jew. I must say that anarchists from every corner of the world are thronging to Barcelona now. This second group consists of old politicians, people who consort with Lerroux, who has now officially gone over to Franco’s side.

Finally, the third group—manifestly provocateurs, fascists calling themselves anarchists. We discovered in Madrid a secret store of weapons, belonging to these “fascist-anarchists.” Yet, as we are fighting the anarchists, publicly proving that among them are many fascist provocateurs, it is dangerous, for the anarchist demagogues try to stir up their masses against us.

We must distinguish two strata among the anarchist masses: the majority of them are honest Spanish workers who exert influence both on the “left” Socialists and even on the Communists. These people honestly believe that they are called to carry out a social revolution. With these people we must secure a united front, even if we have to make serious concessions. The second stratum are the lumpen proletariat: all the thieves, bandits, prostitutes are declaring that they belong to the anarchists, because only thus can they get the weapons necessary for their dark deeds. They make short work of our people. Not long ago in Valencia they killed one of our workers—a transport worker. The funeral of the murdered worker turned into a powerful demonstration, in which fifty thousand people participated. On that day the anarchist organization was forced to broadcast on the radio that the anarchists had nothing to do

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## Document 15 *continued*

with the murderers. This shows that, under pressure from the masses, the leaders of the CNT are beginning to understand the necessity of getting rid of their dark, criminal element. This understanding makes easier the task of creating a united front between the anarchist and the Communist workers.

### G. *The Role and Influence of the Communist Party*

I have already said that the second basic force in Spain was our party. The political influence of the Communist party has exceeded all expectations. A month ago the president of the Republic, Azaña said, "If you wish to have a correct evaluation of the situation, if you wish to see people who know what they want, read *Mundo Obrero*." I will cite a small fact that characterizes the composure and self-possession of our party in circumstances where often chaos reigns all about, where people lose their heads over the smallest trifle.

On 20 September in Madrid a small demonstration took place, devoted to the Fifth Regiment of the people's militia in connection with the naming of a new company commander—Lister. At three in the afternoon an officer of the general staff burst into the center of the demonstration and cried out in despair, "The front on the Tajo has been broken through—everyone is running! Give me two battalions, or the enemy will be in Madrid by this evening." The political commissar of the company, Com. Carlos, who was at the demonstration, rebuffed the terrified officer and, calming the demonstrators, assured them that there was no reason to panic. The demonstration went on in the strictest order.

Only our party knows what must be done. The slogans of the party are quickly taken up and reprinted by all the newspapers. [ . . . ]

Our party was the first seriously to pose the question of rapprochement with the Catholics. We drew in a former minister during the monarchy, a prominent figure in the Catholic movement, Ossorio y Gallardo, for a speech on the radio to address Catholics. For the first time on our radio, a priest spoke, who began his speech with the statement: "A priest is speaking with you. I greet the people of Spain with a clenched fist raised high. Long live the Republic! Long live the Spanish people!" Then he began arguing with the pope, proving to the latter that he was poorly informed about the situation in Spain. This speech by a priest produced a strong impression and called forth a great response.

Our party took the right position vis-à-vis the Moroccans. All the papers were constantly cursing the Moroccans. We made the first attempt to win over the Moroccan people. With this goal in mind, we put on the radio an Arab public speaker. It is possible that the Moroccans did not understand him since he spoke in the literary language, which is different from the common Arabian language. But the first step was taken, and it had significant consequences. The anarchist organ began to write "about our brothers, the Moroccan soldiers." And we made it so that captured Moroccan soldiers could freely walk the streets of Madrid without risking their lives.



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## Document 15 *continued*

Our party supplies cadres for the police. The party guarantees the protection of the arrested during interrogation.

But the main strength of the army has been directed toward the creation of what has become the pride of the People's Army—the Fifth Regiment of the militia. The Fifth Regiment, enjoying well-deserved military glory, numbers twenty thousand warriors. All the commanders of the regiment are Communists—either Communist workers or officers of the old army who are committed to us.

The party is carrying out a great work, but there are still significant weaknesses. In the first period from the beginning of the rebellion until the beginning of September, the large role of the party often faded away. The party did not appear as an independent power. That is why the CNT was able to come forward as the savior of the situation, with its ideas about the national defense council. The party has been carrying out a colossal work, but the masses do not feel that our party is an all-uniting force that is capable of changing the situation. Now the party is organizing large mass meetings, organizing appearances by its ministers. The first few days in September, a large gathering of Communists was called in Madrid, which, in point of fact, was the first inner-party gathering since the beginning of the war.

The leadership of the party has little studied military affairs, declaring that we are not military men. There was some friction with the military leadership of the Fifth Reg., which complained about the lack of attention from the party. The party, not infrequently forgetting that cadres decide everything, did not devote much attention to training cadres. There are not enough experienced, expert Communists. After our comrades entered the government, we put Communists into the Ministry of Agriculture and into the Ministry of Education. But this “expenditure” was repaid, for we have the opportunity to use these ministries for our agitation and for other goals of our own.

Our party in Catalonia merged with two existing Socialist organizations. The unified party is not strong enough and often it backs down before the anarchists and supports its political slogans.

The leadership of the party is represented by the Politburo alone. Outside of the members of the Politburo and the four to five other members of the Central Committee, the rest of the members were either killed at the front or expelled from the party.

A few words about individual leading workers of the party.

The general secretary of the party is *Com. Díaz*—an excellent comrade, a very good Bolshevik. But he suffers from an extraordinarily serious illness of the liver and the doctors have forbidden him to work for more than one hour a day. Of course he does not obey the doctor's orders and works a great deal. He is head and shoulders above the rest of the members of the Politburo. He is a very concrete and practical man—quite a rare phenomenon among the

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## Document 15 *continued*

Spanish. At meetings of the Politburo he renders concrete everything proposed and on the spot gives directives on how to put into action the decisions that are adopted.

*Com. Mije* is very overworked. He is the political editor of *Mundo Obrero*. He spends not less than an hour and a half every morning at work on the paper. He maintains the connection between the party and the War Ministry, where he must be two times a day for meetings with Caballero or with the general staff. He is also responsible for the Madrid party committee, for the Madrid committee of the people's front. In general, he works not less than twenty hours a day.

*Com. Checa* is the organizational secretary for the country and for the army, responsible also for the work of the Communists in the police. He gives directives for conducting the interrogation of those under serious arrest.

Ministers *Hernández and Uribe* are both busy with work in the ministries, visit the fronts, travel in the provinces for propaganda.

*Com. Cordón* is the military assistant of the chief of the Estremadura column. He travels to Madrid only once every ten days, when he can get away from the front.

*Com. Pasionaria* carries out propaganda and work among women.

*Com. Antonio* also attends meetings of the Politburo. He is the former secretary of the Komsomol and now the secretary of the Madrid party committee. But he has not been in Madrid more than two months, as he commanded a column of youths at the front.

The party, of course, has middle cadres, formed during the struggle. Among them are energetic organizers. I must add also the military cadres, which are forming very quickly. But, all the same, the shortcomings of these people are quickly sensed.

The general staff of the Fifth Regiment makes an excellent impression. There is only one foreigner among their number (the political commissar), who is all the same considered Spanish, for he has lived for a long time in Spain. The Fifth Regiment's general staff has an operations department led by comrade workers. The work of the general staff is based on the type of work done by the general staff of a normal army. The officer of each battalion receives a geographical military map of his sector, prepared by the Fifth Regiment. Even the general staff of the War Ministry does not have an operations department and works very primitively.

The Fifth Regiment's general staff carefully trains officers for a month in advance. Lister, the commander of the Fifth Regiment, a bricklayer, is a great comrade, a real military leader. But it is clear that our people still do not have enough knowledge, experience, practice. It is difficult to learn everything in two months, but they have learned a lot. The military comrades also are very overworked. And here, of course, there are few people. We need about ten times as many people.

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## Document 15 *continued*

### 2. *The Military Situation*

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*Prospects.* Our party is working under very difficult circumstances. A great deal of tact and skill is required of it, especially when we need to get something from Largo Caballero. I will present just two facts: on the Tajo front on 17 September, a difficult situation was created. The commanders directly demanded reinforcement, but Madrid could not help them, since at that time they did not have any reserves. Mije went to the War Ministry to speak with Caballero. The conversation took place without witnesses, because Largo is very proud and touchy. Mije brought out the following proposals:

1) Appeal to the people.

2) Quickly set up a military committee that would be under the general leadership of the government and would plan and carry out all the necessary military measures. Each decision of this military committee would be unconditionally put into effect, like a military order.

In the military committee ought to be

Largo Caballero—as chairman

Indalecio Prieto—responsible for national defense and operative units

Antonio Mije—responsible for organizing reserves and military industry

Julio Just—responsible for transport

Chairman of the CNT—responsible for supplies

3) Organize the defense of Madrid.

4) Mobilize the whole rear.

5) Quickly create in the Levant a reserve army, and so on.

Mije advised that Caballero himself, on his own initiative, ought to put these measures into effect and promised that the party would come out with its own proposals only if he, Caballero, wanted that. Mije also introduced several proposals about the air forces (decentralization of the aerodromes and the centralization of the command).

Caballero refused even to consider these questions.

On 20 Sept. we repeated our previous proposals, adding only the suggestion about creating a fortified line halfway between Madrid and the Tajo front and several new proposals on aviation. Mije in particular insisted on the necessity for carrying out a number of measures for anti-air defense. People are running to the front not knowing how to save themselves from enemy fire. We need to teach them to keep their heads and not shoot every tenth person, as is now done. Give people picks and shovels, let them learn to dig trenches. Caballero has spoken: "The Spanish are too proud to dig into the ground." For the construction of a fortified line around Madrid we assigned a French colonel, a military engineer, who was participating in the war and who worked out a suitable draft. We sent two thousand workers to the area. Caballero ought

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## Document 15 *continued*

to have mobilized another twenty thousand construction workers from Madrid, sent excavators, earth-movers, and foremen. In three days we could have dug the main trenches. Largo Caballero promised yet did nothing, and at the moment when work started, he began to dawdle, under the pretext that (he said) there was no money for the earth-movers, there were no transporters for bringing the workers, there was nothing to feed them with, and so on. Greeting the Fifth Regiment and conveying his gratitude for a job well done, he suggested to the command staff that they organize the same kind of military units for all of Spain. With the greatest difficulty we prepared a thousand men in eight days. And Caballero during that time already forgot his request and declared to us that he did not have the money for the upkeep of the new units.

At every step, our party has run into opposition from Caballero. He is completely absorbed in the thought of his political career. It has never occurred to him that if the fascists win, then all his career will turn to dust.

After the defeat at Toledo he changed for the better and began to pay more attention to us.

On the 30th a delegation from the Central Committee, consisting of Díaz, Mije, and both of our ministers, Hernández and Uribe, repeated our proposals to Caballero:

1. The creation of a military committee.
2. An immediate purge of the general staff, which either out of inability or because of the treachery of some elements, was responsible for the lack of success and defeats at the front.
3. The necessity to create an organization that would command operations on the entire central sector. It would be under the chairmanship of Estrada and consist of Asensio, Burillo, Marquesa, Gallo, Lister, García, Mangada, Galán, and many other commanders. This organization ought to answer for military operations on this most important front.

The proposal about the creation of a military committee was rejected by Caballero without any discussion. The second proposal he accepted, agreeing to the introduction of new elements, and even some foreigners, on the general staff.

He also accepted the suggestion about setting up a military operations organization for the central sector but reserved for himself the right to put into it the people that he considered necessary. If only he does not turn the new operations staff into a debate club! That, unfortunately, is the fate of most of our suggestions.

I will conclude: we must carry out as energetically as possible a campaign for realizing the unification of workers and all people.

We must strengthen discipline and bring about unified command—everyone agrees on this.

It is not only Caballero who is dragging out work in the government bureaucracy but also the anarchists throughout the country. This heightens the

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## Document 15 *continued*

sense that their party needs to be more responsible and significantly cuts down on the irresponsible criticism from their side.

I am convinced that we can be victorious. It will seem to many that this is contradicted by everything that I have said here. But we must look at this matter dialectically. Caballero turned his back on us fifteen days ago; now he is listening to us more and more. The anarchists threaten us, but they have introduced not a few suggestions acceptable to us.

My proposals:

1. The government and the Communist party must make clear to the people the purpose of the war, as was done in France during the imperialist war. The Republic of the Popular Front of 16 Feb. is not the same as the Republic of 14 April. Caballero said in the parliament that we must give this republic a social content, that we must create a republic of workers, as is written in the constitution. I think that we ought to emphasize more the social character of the Republic. We are not fighting just to destroy fascism, but also for democratic rights and the vital interests of the masses. We must remember what we already have and what we will lose if the fascists come to power. We must decide the question of land. We must strive so that every peasant receives his own plot of land and the right to farm his parcel forever. The anarchists are, with difficulty, coming around to this point. And all the same we must fight for this.

2. Workers' control exists. We did not create this, but since it exists, we need to legalize it, cutting down on its rights and organizing the protection of foreign enterprises, and so on.

3. We must force the government to put into effect measures for social security (protection for old age, for accidents at work, aid for pregnant women, and so on). Measures like this will bring the people closer to the Republic.

Franco has published his program. We must make our program, the program of the Popular Front, known to all the people. We must give freedom to some Moroccans. Until now we have done nothing in that direction. Caballero refused to discuss this question, pleading that he did not want to spoil relations with the French government. All these measures will make our work easier by causing the enemy's strength to disintegrate. The government must come out with a declaration on the Church—freedom of religion for all. Believers ought to know that we will arrest priests not because they serve God but because they serve fascism—that is, they are shooting at the people and spreading fascist propaganda.

We need to carry out radical changes in the work of the state machinery; the government does not control the bureaucracy, which administers irresponsible committees that [supposedly] carry out the functions of the government. We can find a means for strengthening the state machinery that will not affect the democratic form of a constitutional regime. These committees, committees of the Popular Front, ought to help the civilian governors and local government organs.

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## Document 15 *continued*

The anarchists must be drawn into the state machinery, meet more often with us, together work out proposals, and thus strengthen the differences within their ranks. We need to defeat them not with the threat of being shot, as our comrades do, but through the excellence of our work among the masses.

The anarchists have weapons, and we need to take that into consideration. They showed us this in action, arresting not long ago the political commissar of the Fifth Regiment, who was saved from death only by the arrival of our military unit. They arrested one of the commanders of the Fifth Reg., held him for a half hour to show him all of their pistoleros. To fight with them in the face of fascism—this [would be] the end. This means that we should not stop at conceding something to them, and after victory we will get even with them, all the more so since at that point we will have a strong army.

Regardless of the seriousness and difficulty of the military situation, regardless of the possibility of new partial defeats at the front in the near future, I think that, thanks to the steps we are taking, in three weeks the situation will have changed radically.

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### VLADIMIR GOREV

The military attaché and main GRU agent in Madrid, Vladimir Gorev (code name Sancho), confirmed Marty's opinions about Largo Caballero and gave a professional's view of Spanish military incompetence. In **Document 16**, a report dated 25 September, Gorev commented on the characteristics that least endeared Largo Caballero to the Communists: his attempts to limit Communist influence and his refusal to implement the "proposals" submitted by the party and the Soviet advisers. On the political scene, the GRU agent decried the activities of the anarchists and the "hooligans, criminals, [and] fascists" that had joined up with the CNT after the war began. They used blackmail to force others to follow their policies, and their units fought very badly at the front. Gorev would have liked to take "active measures" against them, a term that could include executions, but the anarchists were simply too strong for that "now." In fact, he noted, the influence of the anarchists in Catalonia was "almost absolute." They could act as they wanted in the province, and it was obvious that the people were also with them. This was an astonishing admission from a senior

Soviet official, because in their public pronouncements and speeches the Comintern and PCE downplayed the role of the anarchists. Gorev's writing, like that of Marty and Ehrenburg, showed that the Soviets were willing to acknowledge privately what everyone else in Spain knew: the Communist party was an insignificant force when compared with the deeply ingrained power and appeal of the anarcho-syndicalists.

The course of the war also provoked nothing but impatient criticism from Gorev. There was no command and control; the staff cadres were pitiful; rations and supplies were not distributed, and there was no sign that the Spaniards were doing anything to improve the situation. Yet Gorev was not completely without hope. He thought that the masses were ready for a broader social revolution and an end to the chaos of multiparty government; the creation, in fact, of a People's Republic. Finally, his constant reiteration of the Republicans' need for military technology (the corresponding Russian word means aircraft, tanks, and heavy artillery) may have helped to convince the Politburo and Stalin to authorize the first shipments of this type of hardware to Spain.

A few weeks later, Gorev analyzed the situation in the Spanish high command and in **Document 17** highlighted the serious problems caused by differing strategic views and personality conflicts. He concluded that the two main actors in the Republican army, General José Asensio (commander of the central front) and Major Manuel Estrada (the chief of staff), who fought with each other continually, were undermining the entire war effort. Gorev's description of Asensio is especially important because this was but the beginning of a full-fledged Communist assault on the general, a firm supporter and protégé of Largo Caballero. By early 1937 Asensio would be the center of a power struggle between the Communists and Largo Caballero, who saw retaining the general as a sign of his continued control over the war. Gorev feared that Asensio could become the next Chiang Kai-shek, but it was his description of the Spaniard's actions as "treason" that would eventually dominate Soviet thinking about Asensio. Meanwhile, Estrada, who would shortly fall under the influence of the Communists, had obviously not done so at this point in the war. Gorev saw him as little better than the other old "leftovers" on the Republican staff. In

the coming months, the Soviets would push the Spanish government to carry out a thorough purge of the officer corps both to ensure that no fascists remained and to assert and maintain their own domination of the war. Another way to do this was by controlling the ideology and political makeup of the army. In his report Gorev referred to the attempts to set up military commissars; in **Document 18**, he reported success after “protracted negotiations and constant pressure.” The new commissars were told about Soviet experiences and given political instruction; their ranks would soon be dominated by the Communists.

Gorev’s next report, **Document 19**, shows just how thoroughly the Soviets had penetrated the new Republican army. Agents of the GRU were everywhere, winning “authority,” helping with pencil and paper to decide operations, writing the instructions for the new political commissars, and even giving orders. The “psalm readers” were aviation experts who worked both with Soviet-provided “psalms” (that is, aircraft) and in the Spanish air forces; the “fishermen” were advisers working in the Republican navy, and the “incense burners” were tank experts. These three branches of the Spanish military would be the most heavily penetrated and controlled by the advisers. This was not enough for Gorev, who made two requests that would further increase the power of the Soviets. First, he asked permission to break off official contact with the Red Army, so that he and a few other men could take over running the war more directly. He also wanted dozens more advisers in place to oversee and instruct the Republicans. His analysis for why these measures were necessary shows that once again his attitude toward the Spanish officers was impatient and condescending: they *needed* the Soviets in order to win. Although his first proposal would (apparently) be rejected, after this report the advisers began to take a more hands-on approach to the war. Soon they would regard issuing commands at the front as a normal extension of their duties, while pilots, tankers, and naval officers from the Soviet Union took active roles in engagements throughout the war zone.



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## Document 16

[Unnamed source (2)]

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25 September 1936

Madrid

N° 6

To the Director<sup>36</sup>

1. In one of your telegrams you pointed out the need to give some perspective on the future situation. For a number of reasons I did not have a sufficient basis for evaluating the political situation. Nevertheless, I can report a few starting points.

The most influential parties that must be reckoned with are the left Socialists (Largo CABALLERO's group); the right Socialists (Indalecio PRIETO's group); the Communists, who are not the "bogeyman" here, but rather the most honest government party; the Republicans—president of the Republic AZAÑA's group—and the anarchists. Up to now I have not understood, and no one can clearly explain to me, why there is no strong peasant party here. It must be kept in mind that the union movement here was strong before the development of the parties, and the unions and their influence on the masses must sometimes be reckoned with more than that of the political parties.

AZAÑA and his group, according to all impressions, do not have great influence on the masses, but they are supported by a fairly wide circle of petty and middle bourgeoisie in the cities and somewhat in the countryside. The significance of this group is that they are supported by a majority of the intelligentsia, that they are more accustomed to government work, and, what is undoubtedly important, that a significant stratum of the officer corps that remained on the side of the government is disposed toward the Republicans.

The right Socialists, headed by PRIETO, control the apparatus of the CC of the Socialist party and several provincial committees. The rights have a majority of the leading positions in the Soc. party. They do not have great influence among the masses, but a majority of the intelligentsia with a Socialist view is on their side. According to a great deal of information, the right Socialists are counting strongly on a majority among the Asturians. PRIETO, himself a northerner, is now occupied more with matters in the north and without him, more than anyone else, almost nothing is done in the north. The leader of the northerners, the Socialist Gonzalez PEÑA, who leads all of the operations there, is apparently PRIETO's man.

The left Socialists headed by Largo CABALLERO hold in their hands the main union organization, the UGT. Through this they consolidated their influence over a rather wide mass of the workers and over a significant mass of the [agricultural] workers and peasants, who also have a union organization.

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## Document 16 *continued*

In the last government L. CABALLERO took an extreme opposition position, and now he himself is in power and it is much more difficult for him because he has not been able to set right most of those things about which he accused the old government. Caballero has considerable influence in the army, among the militia, but he has almost no supporters among the command staff.

The Communists are carrying out the most consistent policy. Helping the government, both the former and the current one, they are attempting to gain the trust of the masses and to broaden their influence. Earlier the Communist party did not have any especially wide range of masses. Now the influence of the Communist party is growing every day. Work is being carried out among both the workers and the peasants. A significant formation of military units is being carried out. Since the units under the influence of the Communists are better organized and fight somewhat better, a certain number of old officers approve of the Communist party's policy on building forces and are demanding that their sectors be given units under Communist influence, and part of the officer corps has joined the Communist party.

The question about the anarchists is special. Their influence in Catalonia is almost absolute. They do what they want there. It is obvious that right now the masses there are also with them. This influence extends to about Valencia. More to the south and in Madrid their influence is weaker. The union organization CNT is in the hands of the anarchists, and a rather large number of good workers have joined up with it, so they are to be reckoned with. One must keep in mind that after the rebellion everyone who wanted to clothed himself in anarchist colors and a lot of hooligans, criminals, [and] fascists joined up with the anarchists.

The government and policy are now in the hands of the left Socialists, who have the principal portfolios. CABALLERO is playing a complicated and dangerous political game. Before entering the government, he held extremist views, insisted on the seizure of power by the workers, on setting up a dictatorship of the proletariat, and so on. Now he is significantly quieter; however, he continues to play on the contradictions. Through all of his policies it's as if he "sics" the Communists on the anarchists, counting on gaining through this. Despite the fact that the Communists are honestly supporting him, he tries in every possible way to avoid strengthening the influence of the Communists, even if this means pandering to the anarchists. Weapons are given to the Communists with great difficulty, proposals by the Communists do not go through, however necessary they may be, and the mistakes of the Communists are overemphasized. The struggle of CABALLERO'S group with the Communist party for influence over the masses is making itself felt everywhere.

PRIETO and his group are biding their time, obviously reckoning on gaining from the struggle between CABALLERO, the Communists, and the anarchists. The more sober policy of the leaders of the right Socialists is far from the demagoguery of CABALLERO and his group, and they are carrying out a

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## Document 16 *continued*

more loyal policy with respect to the Communists, understanding that at the current stage of the revolution the Communists are against all of the extremist tricks of the “leftists.”

The Republicans are keeping to the sidelines, obviously wishing to give the “Marxist” parties the opportunity either to cut their own throats or to win the war with great difficulty so that then they can somehow or other seize power.

The anarchists are carrying out an ever more active policy. Not long ago they came out with a proposal to reorganize the government into a defense council based on the unions. Now they have apparently decided to enter the Barcelona government. Their policy is nothing but the usual anarchist demands. To carry out this policy, they are not squeamish about threatening to recall forces from the front. Their units fight very badly, and those sent to the Madrid front simply opened up the front. In view of the fact that they are extraordinarily strong in Catalonia, we cannot talk about taking active measures against them now.

It is extremely difficult to predict where the revolution will go and through what stages it will pass. It is obvious that the development of the Spanish revolution will be significantly different from the development of the revolution in Russia, for there are many elements here which did not exist there. The broad masses are talking ever more about the fact that it will be impossible to linger at the current stage and that the revolution will inevitably develop into a Socialist revolution. Multiparty leadership is not advantageous, and the masses feel this. Ever more frequently one hears that it is very difficult to get anything done because there are many parties in the leadership and there is a constant struggle for influence, and so on. It seems that formulating the question about the unification of the Socialist and the Communist parties will be correct for the future destiny of Spain (such a unification has already taken place in Catalonia). The organization of power in a People’s Republic, for instance, is entirely probable.

In any case, a struggle against the anarchists is absolutely inevitable after victory over the Whites. This struggle will be very severe, and there will also be huge disagreements with the CABALLERO group, which in case of victory will make a lot of extremist “ultra-left” demands. It is possible to work with the PRIETO group and with the more leftist faction of the Republicans.

I ask that you consider this entire section to be for information only, because there is a lot that is unclear to me in these questions. I am giving this section just to add something to the information that you have.

2. The correlation of the combatants’ military forces is evident from my last reports and from JUAN’s report, which is attached. The government group’s situation is very difficult, since the lack of military hardware and—this I consider fundamental—the lack of command cadres, places the forces in exceptionally difficult circumstances. The principal result of these preconditions is that the Whites have the initiative on almost all fronts, and the young mili-

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## Document 16 *continued*

tia units give in at the first strong blow. The lack of commanders, especially noncoms, and the complete lack of political work and political workers means that no one is able to stop panics and a disorderly flight begins, often even without pressure from the adversary. The leadership of operations is in the hands of completely incompetent people, who do not have any experience and who come up with uninspired plans, which often do not even take the terrain into consideration. Communications are scandalous; in the center they do not know what is being done on the various sectors of the front. The last operation near Talavera can serve as an example of this. When the Whites began to attack without support and approached the Guadarrama River, they decided to use the NAVARRO and URIBARRI groups (columns) to strike the blow from the south through Malpica, at which everyone affirmed that the bridge on the Malpica was in the hands of NAVARRO. The order was issued, there was a lot of conversation about this by telephone, and the next day they explained that the columns had not carried out the attack. Why? It turned out that every bridge was blown up. When anyone speaks to the Spanish about the need for communications, intelligence, and so on, they assert that everything is fine, whereas in reality it is going badly.

There is all kinds of heroism. Side by side with the shameful flight near Talavera, the defense of Irún and the actions of the forces at Guadarrama and Somosierra can be cited as instances of brilliant self-possession and steadiness. All of this bears out the thesis that the morale of the government units is immeasurably higher than that of the White forces. But a lack of technology and leadership can ruin the best units.

Despite the fact that the Whites' command is unified, despite the fact that the White command has excellent units like the Moroccans and the foreign legion, despite the fact that almost all of the officer corps is on the Whites' side, despite the fact that the Whites are now several times stronger in technology—they have not achieved a decisive victory, and even if they do achieve one, it will be only with great difficulty. It is sometimes simply incomprehensible why the Whites do not do elementary necessary things—why they do not gather their air forces for a decisive blow to one sector, why they don't gather a strong enough fist which would destroy the government's forces in detail. One cannot in any way reckon that slow-witted people are leading the Whites. There are enough intelligent generals and sufficient will for victory there. The thing is, obviously, that the whole business is hanging by a thread, as with the government. From some odd bits of information (intelligence here is conducted disgracefully) it is possible to conclude that only the Moroccan units and the legionnaires fight as they ought to. And even these do not show any special enthusiasm. Besides this, the Whites have quite a lot of trouble in the rear. There is also information about the great uprising in Morocco. The government is rather seriously working on this matter and, though we are consciously taking little interest in this problem, we have information about seri-

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## Document 16 *continued*

ous battles there. Disturbances have sporadically sprung up in the Whites' rear—strikes, even uprisings. The activity of the partisans, whom no one from here is leading, also causes some discomfort. The morale of the regular Spanish units is not high. All of this, obviously, ties the hands of the White command and does not allow them to show the necessary activeness.

What are the perspectives? It is, of course, very difficult to answer this question. The main question, on which the outcome of the war will depend, is the correct resolution of the leadership's political problem. As long as the government will not go over to a more planned leadership for operations, does not give up the panicked throwing of disorganized units to reinforce the front, does not formulate the correct question about securing the forces politically, we will progress in fits and starts. The second question is the question about setting up our own cadres. This problem depends completely on the first, for the government is taking an extremely uncertain position on this. For example, until now almost none of the loyal officers have been promoted. Captains and majors are commanding columns consisting of several thousand men. At the same time, the government has not recognized men promoted from the militia, and there are frequent instances when a militia commander with a detachment of a couple of thousand men is subordinated to an officer of the regular army, who either is stupider or has less strength than he does. In this connection the viewpoint dominates that this is not a civil war, in which a new force that has almost nothing in common with the old army is being created for the government's side, but rather that this is the "suppression of an insurrection," in which the army that has stayed with the true government will not, and does not need to, change. For example, there has not even been a decree about the demotion of officers who went over to the side of the Whites.

Training of cadres for the new command staff is held up by the government's narrowly pedantic policies. They do not understand that it is better not to send several hundred men to the front and [instead] to prepare non-coms. Every attempt to set up a school ends unsuccessfully, since everyone immediately leaves for the front.

The problem of equipping the army with technology is a very important problem for predicting the results of the struggle. The war begins to be reminiscent of a war of columns, where aircraft drive away units and the infantry occupies regions almost without resistance. At this point the technological equipping of the government army is so insignificant in comparison with the Whites' army that we expect a catastrophe any day. I have already reported enough to you on this question and will not add anything.

Conclusion—I believe that the government has enough resources to be victorious. The only thing that is needed is more organization and less panic. At all costs, a reserve group of ten thousand soldiers must be set up; even if it is not well equipped with machine guns and artillery, [it must be] trained and go over to a decisive offensive. There are enough aircraft to strike a serious blow

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## Document 16 *continued*

at the Whites on the decisive sector. However, it is plain to you that a bourgeois government cannot show such decisiveness in a struggle and that the war will proceed with continual alarms, defeats, abrupt changes in the situation, and so on. A change in the equipping of the army could play a decisive role.

The loss of Toledo and Madrid would be a catastrophe, but it would still not lead to the defeat of the government. The eastern and southeastern part of the country, not counting Catalonia, would remain in the hands of the government, and resistance could be organized and victory achieved on this foundation. If there is a withdrawal, the principal line from which new forces could be deployed would be Cuenca–Alcázar de San Juan–Ciudad Real–Don Benito. The center would probably move either to Albacete or to Valencia or to Alicante. It is probable that Madrid and Toledo will be held and can be supported for long enough so that they will not be definitively surrendered to the Whites. Some measures have been taken for preparing reserves on this line.

There have been absolutely no proposals made even about broken communications with us, for lines of communication will remain open in any withdrawal.

Naturally, it is impossible to predict how the situation on the fronts will shape up, but it would be incorrect to view it as irreparable. It is very difficult, but this is still not the end—even the contrary. Enthusiasm is so great, the masses are so overwhelmingly on the side of the revolution, that to speak of defeat would be a simple unwillingness to understand the situation. I am speaking about this kind of extreme assumptions because there is a tinge of the inevitability of defeat beginning to creep into some people here, and, according to those communications that I have from France, this point of view is rather strong in government circles there.

Sancho

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## Document 17

[Unnamed source (3)]

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16/10/36

Madrid

N° 26

To the Director

A decree will be published today about reorganizing the military command and about setting up the institution of military commissars. There is much that is doubtful in this decree, but personally I do not believe that it brings anything new to the existing situation.

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## Document 17 *continued*

The real state of affairs is that this decree should have resolved the situation that has arisen between the general staff, with Major ESTRADA as the head of staff, and the head of the central front, General ASENSIO. Lately, an almost impossible situation has been created between these two people. All the plans and instructions of the gen. staff on the central front have miscarried, and the gen. staff does not help the front enough.

General ASENSIO thoroughly influences War Min. CABALLERO and is striving to carry out a whole series of his own measures. He accuses the gen. staff of hampering his work—that they are interfering in his operations, that they do not give him reserves when he needs them, that they do not care about supplying him with weapons, and so on. In some of these accusations he is correct; taking into account that the front is moving up toward Madrid itself and that no one pays attention to the other fronts, everyone—the gen. staff included—is occupied with the center. There was interference, and unnecessary interference, by the gen. staff into his work.

On the other hand, ESTRADA has accused ASENSIO, saying that all of his operations have, in the final analysis, come to nothing but a waste of reserves, an improper use of the forces, and so on.

In practice, these relations have yielded nothing good. The gen. staff gives a directive, ASENSIO goes to the war min. and tries to get it countermanded. ASENSIO demands reserves, shells, weapons, and ESTRADA does not give them—ASENSIO goes to the war min., raises a scandal, and receives everything that he requests.

From my dispatch you can imagine what ASENSIO is like. The same is true for ESTRADA.

For the last six weeks on the central front there has not been one victory, and up to twenty thousand men have been used up in battle. Part of them was scattered, a part then was regathered and scattered again. These twenty or so thousand were given to the front in batches of a hundred to five hundred men. To every objection that they ought not to do this, there is one and the same answer—Without this the front will not hold out. ASENSIO is a general of the general staff, well enough trained to understand that for inadequately trained reserves this kind of meat-grinder leads only to exhaustion and to loss of morale among the forces. However, all his operations begin with a good order being issued; [but] there is no supervision to make certain that the order is carried out; there are no communications or coordination; the forces go forward, run up against the defense or a counterattack, stop, the Whites call in the air forces, the forces are rolled backward, and ASENSIO reports that the front is wide open and if they don't send him two battalions, he will not be responsible for the consequences.

He is well enough trained, has a c[hief] of s[taff] with an advanced French education, ought to understand that commanders of columns do not have sufficient military training. You remember how orders were written during our

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## Document 17 *continued*

civil war. It wasn't orders that were received, but rather instructions, explaining what to do and how to do it. ASENSIO's orders would provoke few objections from a picky professor at the academy, but the force commanders do not know how to carry them out, and the militia are not strong enough to stand up to White aircraft.

All this impels strong doubts about ASENSIO, and moreover some people are frankly talking about his treason. I cannot so categorically assert this, but I do believe that ASENSIO is now more harmful than useful.

The chief of the gen. staff, Major ESTRADA, is a man of limited vision, an instructor of tactics in the military schools. He is comparatively old, a Socialist, a northerner. He is terribly afraid of CABALLERO and is afraid to put forward anything that [Caballero] doesn't want. He understands military questions rather well; he has a clear outlook on the need for trained and equipped reserves. From the viewpoint of military leadership, of course, he cannot be compared to ASENSIO, but with a strong commander, he wouldn't be a bad c[hief] of s[taff].

There are all kinds of old officer leftovers on the gen. staff, and a reorganization of the gen. staff is now taking place. It is not known if ESTRADA himself will remain, but all the department heads are changing, and in three departments (organization, information, and supply) civilians were appointed, and military instructors for them. This reorganization could revitalize the work of the gen. staff and allow it to begin to work on concluding the assembly of a reserve army and on putting together a plan for a general operation.

As I already said above, the decree about unified military command is the method that CABALLERO wishes to employ to lessen the friction between the gen. staff and the central front. Nothing will come of that, since the friction is now focused on the principal question—the use of the reserves—and on that question the situation is the same now as then.

Today the CC of the Communist party [and] the unions (supporters of CABALLERO) ought to have gone to CABALLERO to announce that they do not trust ASENSIO. It is difficult to say how this will turn out, since ASENSIO has CABALLERO hypnotized.

It is difficult to conjecture about how this situation will turn out. In the meantime, I am working primarily with ESTRADA, Juan with ASENSIO. If ASENSIO is able to throw out ESTRADA and take the army into his hands, become chief of the gen. staff, this could turn out very sadly. He is the focus that unites all the hopes of everything old that remains on the side of the Republic, and he could become something like a Spanish Chiang Kai-shek. That is, if he is simply a nonrevolutionary. And if the suspicions are correct that he is working on FRANCO's instructions, then it is clear how all this could turn out.

Sancho



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## Document 18

[Unnamed source (4)]

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16/10/36

Madrid

N° 29

To the Director

As a result of protracted negotiations and constant pressure, Caballero made the decision to set up the institution of military commissars. In many units there are already “political delegates” pulled together on the spur of the moment.

I enclose with this letter a rather badly done translation of the decree.

ALVAREZ DEL VAYO, the minister of foreign affairs, a left Socialist who is devoted to and trusted by CABALLERO, has been appointed “general military commissar.” He has been given four deputies—dep. gen. sec. of the Communist party MIJE, chairman of the syndicalist party PESTAÑA, deputy of the parliament of Republicans BILBAO, and the chairman of the anarchists. In the meantime, it has been proposed that functions will be distributed [thus]—MIJE—Org. Dept., PESTAÑA—Agit.[ation and] Prop.[aganda] Dept., BILBAO—inspector, the anarchist—to coordinate polit. work on the various fronts.

The state of the mil. coms. [military commissars] is taking shape. Tomorrow up to two hundred men will be appointed to political duties, and before they are sent to the units, a meeting will be conducted with them in which they will be told about the experience of our mil. coms., given instructions on how to work, and given political instructions.

If these mil. coms. begin to work as they ought, they will be of great benefit for making the army a cohesive unit.

Sancho

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## Document 19

[Unnamed source (5)]

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16/10/36

Madrid

N° 30

To the Director

1. The advising work is now in the following state.

I am continuing to work with the chief of the gen. staff, I conduct all talks on the question of defense with the rest of the “leaders,” and so on. There is

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## Document 19 *continued*

so little time that it has been a while since I have been to the front. Yesterday could serve as an example of a normal day, where I had to talk on various matters without break from 12 until 3:30 A.M. The talks are not general in nature but are already taking place with paper and pencil. The period of winning authority has turned into a period when it is possible to exploit the results.

The situation of ALCALA [Sveshnikov]<sup>37</sup> and LEPANTO [Kuznetsov] have improved, by comparison with when I wrote to you last time. They can already give orders not as a result of pressure but as a result of capable work.

JUAN [Ratner] is continuing to work a half-day on General ASENSIO's staff; the remaining time he takes my place to deal with various routine matters. He has worked out a plan for the PUR,<sup>38</sup> instructions for the mil. coms., and so on. He works a lot, and well.

FRIDO [Tsiurupa] is in Archena<sup>39</sup> at the school. He has to be there at least another ten days, because the new people are still not acclimatized.

PEDRO [Liubimtsev] is dealing with all the technical work; I have sometimes been surprised by his endurance and capacity for work in this. In the meanwhile, I cannot report anything but excellent testimonials about his work.

As I reported to you by telegram, our work is greatly hampered by the fact that we cannot do a great many necessary things because of our official position. If it might be possible for us to be volunteers rather than being in the situation we now are, things would be much easier and better.

Now, for example, every trip to the front must include a number of precautions. To go to a unit, to view training, to give instructions on the spot, to help, are not permitted, so as not to break the rules. It's dangerous to be with various military men too often, in case people talk about it too much. You have to use so many dodges to receive a dispatch in a timely fashion from the groups that it gets to be annoying.

Barbara treats our work very patiently, but even she reminds us and checks up, just in case we dirty our laundry.

As soon as the groups at the front are organized, the staff, which is now just an embryo, must be developed into an apparatus that is able to direct operations and administer all the groups. Communications must be organized; they will come with dispatches, reports, and so on. All of this fits in so little with our situation now that undoubtedly we will either have to forgo our "purity" completely or have to leave the institution of which my apparatus is a part.

All these considerations compel me to report to you the following possibility: I, ALCALA, and LEPANTO will be officially recalled. If it is necessary, it is even possible to make a trip to France for a day, but it can be done without this. So that this will proceed cleanly, a new man will be appointed for here without aides—with only a man like PEDRO. He will maintain communica-

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## Document 19 *continued*

tions with you and with me. After all the complications have ended, he will conduct official business. In any case, even before this, there were some of my colleagues whom I had not met because I was so busy.<sup>40</sup>

The transition of JUAN and PEDRO to the status of advisers will not cause any special difficulties.

With this kind of situation, I and my people will stand on our own feet, we will be out in the field (in which, in practice, we already are), and the current inconveniences won't constrain us while we are occupied with our job.

It is, of course, possible to set this up differently—to send a group that will take on all of the work and simply to dismiss us. I believe that this will put the new people in the position of having to go through the very same period of winning authority that, to a significant degree, is already behind us.

It seems to me that this operation could pass off without a hitch; in practice, these kinds of things have happened in other countries. Every minute counts now that things are headed toward the preparation of a large operation. We have to go around to the units, teach the forces, prepare the command staff (and now we even have to beware of conducting lessons with the command staff). Now we have to conduct lessons with the commissars there, and right away we are thinking how to do this so that we transfer experience to them and yet don't show ourselves.

When the institution we are part of makes this decision, we will be completely protected from censure and from any dirty work [by the enemy].

I request that this question be decided and that I be informed about your decision as soon as possible.

2. The situation with the forces is such now that things are very difficult without good military leadership. The Spanish are moving toward appointing young commanders, political workers, civilians in the high command posts, but there is nobody to place as military instructors and chiefs of staff. Everyone, from CABALLERO to the commanders of new brigades, is counting on the foreign advisers. It is clear that the arrival of the advisers just before the operations, supposing that they are treated well, will lead to their getting used to [the advisers] during the operations, and they will begin to listen to them as they ought just as the operation is ending. I reported to you about the possibility for allocating the advisers. In practice, the situation has not changed. Now I believe that it is possible and necessary to have advisers: on the general staff—with the ch[ief] of st[aff], with the ch[ief] of the Op[erations] Dept., with the ch[ief] of the Org. Dept. In the Military Ministry—with the ch[ief] of the engineers, with the ch[ief] of the Quartermaster Service. In military industry—one for supplying shells and another for aerial bombs. With the head of the defense of Madrid—one to three engineers. With the chief of the PUR—one to two. With the brigades of the army reserve—one each, six in all. With the schools—infantry, artillery, communications. Furthermore, at the disposal of the senior adviser—two artillerists and a commu-

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## Document 19 *continued*

nication specialist for training the forces. With the Air Force Ministry—two. With the Naval Ministry—one.

On the central front—with the commander of the central front, with five to six brigades, which will be created from units of the front.

On the southern front—three to four men on the different sectors.

On the northern front—a senior man and three to four assistants for the different sectors, an artillerist, and a communications expert.

On the Catalan front—a senior man and three to four assistants for each sector, an artillerist, a communications expert, an aviator, and a tanker.

This is a lot, but I am reporting about the maximum required and possible for allocation. Anything that can be is better than the situation in which we now are, where we have to let a lot slip from under our influence because the day is simply not long enough.

If the question about me, ALCALA, and LEPANTO is decided, then [there should be] correspondingly three fewer people.

It is very desirable that these people know the language. There are fantastic difficulties with translators. Without Spanish there cannot even be any thought about starting the work.

3. The “psalm readers” are now partially here—five men, extremely mobile. They are included in the work and working with the “psalms” that we have. Right here in the Air Force Ministry, one man is settled in the Operations Department.

The rest are getting ready.

According to a communication from ALCALA, there is dissatisfaction in the group with RINALDO [Bergolts], who has not been able to create any comradesly cohesion, holds himself aloof, and so on. There was a case of bad behavior by one “psalm reader,” about which both I and RINALDO have already reported. He drinks, is late from leave, takes the liberty of tactless conduct. Now ALCALA has gone there to supervise the receiving and to investigate this entire matter. If everything is confirmed, I will report and with your permission send [him] back.

4. The group of “fishermen” are in a difficult situation. None of them speak Spanish. FRANÇOIS [Annin] is in the north; he has a translator, and [gathering] from dispatches from him, he is working, teaching people; things are happening. Two others are in Cartagena with LEPANTO, but without any Spanish. I will give him a translator from the first [that arrive].

5. The group of “incense burners” are already all at Archena. GRIGORY came to me. His morale is high. The senior man has still not come to me, but it is obvious that the situation that he is in hasn’t quite sunk in. Yesterday he called on the telephone and tried to “settle some questions” with JUAN. The guy has still not learned what can be discussed over the telephone and what is not permitted.

GRIGORY told me that they have an order to “coordinate everything with

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## Document 19 *continued*

me,” and they told him that I would coordinate with them about every question on their work. This does not completely tally with the instructions that I received when I left that this entire matter would be subordinated to me. I understood that just as with RINALDO, they don’t quite understand about this question. I endeavored to carefully explain this to them. I do not doubt that there will be no misunderstandings of any kind.

...

Sancho

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### VLADIMIR ANTONOV-OVSEENKO

The memoranda of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko provided the Soviet leadership with a somewhat different view of the political situation, while supporting the contention that the Soviets should assume the conduct of the war. A rather tragic figure, Antonov-Ovseenko was a hero of the storming of the tsar’s Winter Palace in 1917, an early member of the Bolshevik faction, and conceivably one of the best candidates to be a Soviet representative working among those imbued with a revolutionary fervor in Spain. Publicly, Antonov-Ovseenko loyally followed Soviet policy. During the ouster of the POUM from the Catalan government, he had threatened that if the Spaniards wished to continue receiving Soviet aid, they would have to act as the Soviets demanded.<sup>41</sup> On other matters, he tried to follow a middle course in Spain. In the following three documents, Antonov-Ovseenko’s attempts to work out a compromise with the CNT, to find some good in Largo Caballero, and to mediate the differences between Catalonia and Madrid are striking.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as Document 23 shows, he too hated the “bad” anarchists and thought that the Spanish were incapable of large-scale military action on their own. In **Document 20**, a memorandum sent to the head of the Soviet army as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Soviet consul described the incompetence of the Spanish government in organizing the defense of their own country. He concluded that it would be impossible for the Spanish to set up large military units without the aid of (Soviet) specialists and instructors. Unlike other observers, however, he did not believe that Largo Caballero deliberately refused to carry out Communist pro-

posals. Instead, it was the Spaniard's misguided attempts to follow a "broad democratic" path that prevented him from carrying out Communist measures. Antonov-Ovseenko also thought that relations with the anarcho-syndicalists (the CNT) were improving, and that the CNT was moving away from its radical anarchist (FAI) core.

His next memorandum, **Document 21**, reported the results of a conversation with an unidentified informant—probably a Communist sympathizer within the ranks of the CNT. In direct contrast to the Soviet consul, "Comrade X." thought that relations between the CNT and the Communists had become more, not less, strained. In some cases there had been armed clashes between the two groups. The CNT also had leaders who were provocateurs, was accepting members without checking their backgrounds, and, most suspiciously of all, had not sent all the weapons that they had seized to the fronts. The killing of scabs by the CNT and the summary execution of priests only added to the violent, and troubling, picture that "X." drew of the anarchists. Antonov-Ovseenko made it clear that he was using "X." to ease relations between the Communists and the CNT, disarm the unreliable elements within the union, and end the worst of the anarchists' "willfulness." His next report, **Document 22**, insisted that the "good" anarchists in the CNT were willing to work with the Communists, even after great provocation by undisciplined PSUC leaders. The mention yet again of Communist attempts to seize all the weapons at the rear (and thus to disarm the anarchists) is another link in the chain of events that would lead to the attempted destruction of the POUM and of anarchist independence in 1937.

In the final report, **Document 23**, Antonov-Ovseenko showed a much tougher side. Buenaventura Durruti was one of the most popular of the anarchist commanders and a good friend of the other famous anarchist activist, Francisco Ascaso (whose brother Domingo Ascaso and cousin Joaquín Ascaso would play active roles during the war). Together they had been involved in numerous violent escapades even before the war, all directed at overthrowing the traditional Spanish order. At the outbreak of the uprising, Durruti had been called upon to lead one of the first anarchist units, more than three thousand men, into battle to de-

fend Catalonia from the Nationalists.<sup>43</sup> For the Communists, Durruti, like other well-known anarchist leaders, presented a special problem. At the beginning of the war, it seemed that he did not intend to yield in the slightest to Soviet pressure on either political or military issues, and yet he enjoyed so much support from the people that it was impossible to confront him directly. Later Durruti would become convinced that unified command was a necessary evil, although, as this document shows, he resisted all attempts to undermine his position on the Saragossa front. The Soviet journalist Koltsov would, in fact, report that Durruti had said, "Take the whole of Spain, but don't touch Saragossa: the Saragossa operation is mine."<sup>44</sup> Faced with this sign of renewed anarchist willfulness, Antonov-Ovseenko was forced to "interfere in a firm way."

The other point of interest in this document is, once again, the extent of Soviet advisers' involvement in planning and carrying out operations. It was the adviser who first conceived of removing Durruti's men from the front; the Soviets who interfered when Durruti would not submit; the Soviets who "frustrated" his plans to arm anarchists with better weapons (on the grounds of the anarchists' military and political unreliability); the Soviets who pressured the Catalans into accepting their proposals on economic policy; and finally, the Soviets who proposed an offensive on the Aragon front. To Antonov-Ovseenko's frustration, the plan finally agreed upon by all parties did not suit his conception of what was possible or likely to succeed. He felt forced to go along with the scheme, however, because of the impossibility of working out a plan with the "worthless" Catalan councillor that he was forced to deal with.

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## Document 20

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, ll. 196–200

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General Consul of the USSR in Barcelona

Copy  
Top Secret

Vkh. N° 5827  
29/10/36

11 October 1936 N° 9/ss

To NKID  
HEADQUARTERS  
Com. Krestinsky

On 8–9 October I was in Madrid (two hours by plane). Spoke with del Vayo, the minister of foreign affairs, Prieto, the minister of the navy and aviation, and with Caballero. I looked over the barracks for the Fifth Regiment and its staff. I conclude from everything that I saw and from conversations:

1. The strategic situation of the Republican forces is not bad. On the Talavera direction, the best of the White units are attacking with up to fifteen thousand men; their communication lines consist of one railroad and one highway. On the Tajo River, behind blown-up bridges, up to three thousand Republican men are holding out on the flank and rear of the enemy. The enemy is not at all using forces from Estremadura. Meanwhile, Deputat Cordón, thanks to good partisan tactics, is holding down a force of three thousand Whites in the Hinojosa del Duque region with a unit of only four hundred men. With just a few weapons and elementary organization they ought easily to be able to create a serious threat in the Whites' rear in Talavera and thus hamper the Whites' offensive on Madrid.<sup>45</sup> Add action to the southeast of Madrid and also with the Asturians on León, and they might create an encirclement of Gen. Franco's forces, which are trying to surround Madrid. It all depends on arms and organization.

2. The Madrid government and general staff have shown a startling incapacity for the elementary organization of defense. So far they have not achieved agreement between the parties. So far they have not created an appropriate relationship for the government and War Ministry to take control. Caballero, having arrived at the need to establish the institution of political commissars, so far has not been able to realize this, because of the extraordinary bureaucratic sluggishness of the syndicalists, whom he greatly criticizes and [yet] without whom he considers it impossible to undertake anything. The general staff is steeped in the traditions of the old army and does not believe in the possibility of building an army without experienced, barracks-trained old cadres. Meanwhile, the capable military leaders who have been fighting at the front for two months in various detachments, and who might have been the basis for the development of significant military units, have



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## Document 20 *continued*

been detailed all over the place. Up to four thousand officers, three-fourths of the current corps, are retained in Madrid and are completely idle. In Madrid up to ten thousand officers are in prison under the supervision of several thousand armed men. In Madrid no serious purge of suspect elements is in evidence. No political work and no preparation of the population for the difficulty of a possible siege or assault is noticeable. There are no fewer than fifty thousand armed men in Madrid, but they are not trained, and there are no measures being taken to disarm unreliable units. There are no staffs for fortified areas. They have put together a good plan for the defense of Madrid, but almost nothing has been done to put this plan into practice. Several days ago they began fortification work around the city. Up to fifteen thousand men are now occupied with that, mostly members of unions. There has been no mobilization of the population for that work. Even the basics are extraordinarily poorly taken care of, so the airport near the city is almost without any protection. Intelligence is completely unorganized. There is no communication with the population behind the enemy's rear lines. Meanwhile, White spies in the city are extraordinarily strong. Not long ago, a small shell factory was blown up by the Whites; an aerodrome with nine planes was destroyed because the aerodrome was lit up the entire night; a train carrying 350 motorcycles was destroyed by enemy bombs.

Caballero attentively listens to our advice, after a while agrees to all our suggestions, but when putting them into action meets an exceptional amount of difficulty. I think that the main difficulty is Caballero's basic demand, now in place, to carry out all measures on a broad democratic basis through syndicalist organizations. Sufficient weapons, in particular machine guns, are now flowing to the city to raise the morale of the populace somewhat. Masses of peasants and workers are thronging to the city—volunteers. They end up for the most part in the Fifth Regiment, where they go through a very short training course, as they receive their weapons only about two days before going to the front.

It is obvious that without very serious support from specialists and instructors they will not succeed in setting up large military units for the various branches under current conditions.

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6. A number of facts, which I communicated by telegram, are evidence for the stabilization of the government and for the serious attempts by Catalonia to regularize the administration [of the country]. At the same time, relations between the anarcho-syndicalists and the FAI, which depend on the lumpen proletariat, are becoming strained. Relations between the anarcho-syndicalists and the Soviet Union are changing in a fundamental way, one sign of which is an article, "Spain and Russia," in the leading organ of the anarcho-syndicalists, set forth for me in a special telegram. Our speech in London had a special significance.

7. Companys acknowledges that relations between Madrid and Catalonia

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## Document 20 *continued*

have improved, “but this is a song from necessity.” Not long ago, the Whites in Seville ironically praised Caballero, saying that, because of the discord with Barcelona, he had not evacuated the shell factory to there. In Madrid I was told that Barcelona had held up fifty trucks destined for Madrid. Companys informed me, however, that in the last few days they had sent Madrid three hundred trucks. We need to be careful in assigning blame to either side. There is a great deal of well-founded distrust on both sides and direct lies to us. We need to check up carefully [on matters].

All of this convinces me once again [of the need] to send me the necessary workers quickly, and among their number must absolutely be a worker on foreign trade and a specialist on mobilizing industry.

General Consul of the USSR in Barcelona

/Antonov-Ovseenko/

Correct: [illegible]

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## Document 21

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, ll. 201–206

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General Consul of the USSR in Barcelona

14 October 1936

N° 10/s

Copy

Top Secret

To Headquarters

NKID—Com. Krestinsky

On 12 October Com. X. and I saw each other. He impressed me as a well-informed and precise man.

1. In his words, the relationship between our people [the Communists] and the anarcho-syndicalists is becoming ever more strained. Every day, delegates and individual comrades appear before the CC of the Unified Socialist Party with statements about the excesses of the anarchists. In places it has come to armed clashes. Not long ago in a settlement of Huesca near Barbastro twenty-five members of the UGT were killed by the anarchists in a surprise attack provoked by unknown reasons. In Molins de Rei, workers in a textile factory stopped work, protesting against arbitrary dismissals. Their delegation to Barcelona was driven out of the train, but all the same fifty workers forced their way to Barcelona with complaints for the central government, but now they are afraid to return, anticipating the anarchists' revenge.

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## Document 21 *continued*

In Pueblo Nuevo near Barcelona, the anarchists have placed an armed man at the doors of each of the food stores, and if you do not have a food coupon from the CNT, then you cannot buy anything. The entire population of this small town is highly excited. They are shooting up to fifty people a day in Barcelona. (Miravittles told me that they were not shooting more than four a day).

Relations with the Union of Transport Workers are strained. At the beginning of 1934 there was a protracted strike by the transport workers. The government and the “Esquerra” smashed the strike. In July of this year, on the pretext of revenge against the scabs, the CNT killed more than eighty men, UGT members, but not one Communist among them. They killed not only actual scabs but also honest revolutionaries. At the head of the union is Comvin, who has been to the USSR, but on his return he came out against us. Both he and, especially, the other leader of the union—Cargo—appear to be provocateurs. The CNT, because of competition with the hugely growing UGT, are recruiting members without any verification. They have taken especially many lumpen from the port area of Barrio Chino.

X. agreed with me that these excesses, coming from below, were meeting ever greater opposition from CNT leaders and that it was completely possible to agree on joint struggle against such occurrences.

2. They have offered our people two posts in the new government—Council of Labor and the Council of Municipal Work—but it is impossible for the Council of Labor to institute control over the factories and mills without clashing sharply with the CNT, and as for municipal services, one must clash with the Union of Transport Workers, which is in the hands of the CNT. Fábregas, the councillor for the economy, is a “highly doubtful sort.” Before he joined the Esquerra, he was in the Acción Popular; he left the Esquerra for the CNT and now is playing an obviously provocative role, attempting to “deepen the revolution” by any means. The metallurgical syndicate just began to put forward the slogan “family wages.” The first “producer in the family” received 100 percent wages, for example seventy pesetas a week, the second member of the family 50 percent, the third 25 percent, the fourth, and so on, up to 10 percent. Children less than sixteen years old only 10 percent each. This system of wages is even worse than egalitarianism.<sup>46</sup> It kills both production and the family.

X. told about the oddly forceful impression that this scheme is making among the workers. He himself observed at a place where Barcelona workers take walks—la Rambla—how thousands of workers listened to a speech over the loudspeaker by a representative of the syndicate about the introduction of this system.

Three days ago, the government seriously clashed with the anarchists: the CNT seized a priest (from a Marian order). They agreed to release the priest to France, but for a ransom. The priest pointed out another 101 members of his order who had hidden themselves in different places. They agreed to free all

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## Document 21 *continued*

102 men for three hundred thousand francs. All 102 appeared, but when the money had been handed over, the anarchists shot forty of them. Against the protests of the councillor of internal affairs, President Companys delayed shooting the remaining sixty-two. He stated that he would resign if they continued summary shootings. The sixty-two priests have been entrusted to [the care of] a judge.

Arguments in the government about municipal decrees continued for four days. Companys proposed organizing municipal authorities on the model of the central government—that is, on the basis of government by all the parties. Our people sharply objected, since they have undoubted majorities in almost all the cities and large settlements and since Companys's proposal would give the POUM party (Trotskyists) representation in the municipalities completely without grounds, but X. recognizes the need to settle problems about the government of the cities, and our people, although they voted against the government's decrees, decided to remain in the government, publishing a special statement.

Com. Calvet—an adviser on agriculture; he is also the secretary of agricultural workers' syndicate—is preparing a decree on forbidding the liquidation of small-peasant property.

4. Our people are also preparing a decree about putting the housing question in order. Houses in Madrid that are without owners are handed over to the ministry of industry and commerce, and in Barcelona this business has not been put in order at all.

Our people are taking every step to ease relations with the syndicalists. The permanent commission, with three members each from the CNT, the FAI, the UGT, and the PSUC, has resumed working on preparing questions for the government and on settling various conflicts.

Approved in principle: a unified UGT-CNT division with fifteen thousand men, in which there ought to be, according to García Oliver, "iron discipline." The question about the command of this division and about the selection of its people has still not been decided.

X. agreed that the people ought to be checked out through the Combined Commission. They should be members of an organization and have guarantees from two members who belonged to the organization before the 17 July.

The CNT also agreed in principle to a proposal by our people about disarming unreliable elements in the rear: a combined commission will be set up that will hold meetings everywhere, explaining the need to hand over weapons for the front. After the meetings—searches. Putting this into effect has been postponed for now.

X. agrees with me that with this campaign it is necessary to stir up a lot of agitation about the danger of the situation at the front, which is emanating from the slogans of the anarcho-syndicalists themselves, most of all from Duruti (however, some partisan pride is shown by X. on this question).

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## Document 21 *continued*

5. X. sharply criticized Caballero's conduct. In Madrid there are up to fifty thousand construction workers. Caballero refused to mobilize all of them for building fortifications around Madrid ("and what will they eat") and gave a total of a thousand men for building the fortifications. In Extremadura our Comrade Deputy Cerdón is fighting heroically. He could arm five thousand peasants but he has a detachment of only four thousand men total. Caballero under great pressure agreed to give Cerdón two hundred rifles, as well. Meanwhile, from Extremadura, Franco could easily advance into the rear, toward Madrid. Caballero implemented an absolutely absurd compensation for the militia—ten pesetas a day, besides food and housing. Farm laborers in Spain earn a total of two pesetas a day and, feeling very good about the militia salary in the rear, do not want to go to the front. With that, egalitarianism was introduced. Only officer specialists receive a higher salary. A proposal made to Caballero to pay soldiers at the rear five pesetas and only soldiers at the front ten pesetas was turned down. Caballero is now disposed to put into effect the institution of political commissars, but in actual fact it is not being done. In fact, the political commissars introduced into the Fifth Regiment have been turned into commanders, for there are none of the latter. Caballero also supports the departure of the government from Madrid. After the capture of Toledo, this question was almost decided, but the anarchists were categorically against it, and our people proposed that the question be withdrawn as inopportune. Caballero stood up for the removal of the government to Cartagena. They proposed sounding out the possibility of basing the government in Barcelona. Two ministers—Prieto and Jiménez de Asúa—left for talks with the Barcelona government. The Barcelona government agreed to give refuge to the central government. Caballero is sincere but is a prisoner to syndicalist habits and takes the statutes of the trade unions too literally.

The UGT is now the strongest organization in Catalonia: it has no fewer than half the metallurgical workers and almost all the textile workers, municipal workers, service employees, bank employees. There are abundant links to the peasantry. But the CNT has much better cadres and has many weapons, which were seized in the first days (the anarchists sent to the front fewer than 60 percent of the thirty thousand rifles and three hundred machine guns that they seized).

In Sabadell (the largest textile center) the union, which is still autonomous, voted not long ago to join either the CNT or the UGT. Eight hundred men voted for joining the CNT, and eleven thousand voted to join the UGT.

The central organ of the party in Catalonia (*Treball* in Catalan) has a circulation of twenty-seven thousand. *Mundo Obrero*—seventy-five thousand. In Catalonia another four of our daily papers come out with small circulations. A daily paper in Spanish has been gotten under way.

We agreed with X. that:

1. We will jointly strengthen, using all measures, the permanent conciliation commission with the anarcho-syndicalists.

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## Document 21 *continued*

2. We will support the authority of the present government of Compañys-Tarradellas, gradually, systematically carrying out a number of measures to liquidate the anarchists' willfulness.<sup>47</sup>

3. Until measures are undertaken to disarm unreliable elements, we will develop a large political campaign on the dangers from Franco threatening the revolution, and so on.

4. To carry out as urgently as possible the organization of a unified division, carefully selecting the command staff for it and getting uniform arms for it. Weapons coming from outside will go to this division first.

5. To insist that the government create in the rear no fewer than two fortified defensive lines.

6. To struggle against the obviously provocative rumors about an impending landing by enemy troops on the Catalan coast.

7. To take every measure in our power to deploy C. Cordón's detachment as quickly as possible.

8. Not to allow the government to abandon Madrid, at the very least half of its members ought to remain in Madrid until the end.

Information from other sources: 1) relations between the UGT and the CNT are getting better, 2) the UGT and CNT Liaison Commission worked badly because of the "intransigence" of Comorera (Gen. Sec., PSUC), recently resumed work (one meeting); a proposal submitted by our people on 10 Oct. about transforming this commission into an "action commission" was received evasively and then was published in the c.[entral] o.[rgan] *Treball*.

General Consul of the USSR in Barcelona  
/V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko/  
8 copies/mm

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## Document 22

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, ll. 222–224

vkh. N° 5842 from 29/20/36  
General Consulate of the USSR  
in Barcelona  
18 October 1936  
N° 13/ss

Copy

*Top Secret*

To Headquarters  
NKID—Com. Krestinsky

1. My conversations with García Oliver and with several other CNT members, and their latest speeches, attest to the fact that the leaders of the CNT have an honest and serious wish to concentrate all forces in a strengthened

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## Document 22 *continued*

united front and on the development of military action against the fascists. I must note that the PSUC is not free from certain instances that hamper the “consolidation of a united front”: in particular, although the Liaison Commission has just been set up, the party organ *Treball* suddenly published an invitation to the CNT and the FAI that, since the experience with the Liaison Commission had gone so well, the UGT and the PSUC had suggested that the CNT and the FAI create even more unity in the form of an action commission. This kind of suggestion was taken by leaders of the FAI as simply a tactical maneuver. Com. Valdés and Com. Sesé did not hide from me that the just-mentioned suggestion was meant to “talk to the masses of the CNT over the heads of their leaders.” The same sort of note was sounded at the appearance of Com. Comorera at the PSUC and UGT demonstration on 18 October—on the one hand, a call for protecting and developing the united front and, on the other, boasting about the UGT’s having a majority among the working class in Catalonia, accusing the CNT and the FAI of carrying out a forced collectivization of the peasants, of hiding weapons, and even of murdering “our comrades.”

The PSUC leaders-designate agreed with me that such tactics were completely wrong and expressed their intention to change them. I propose that we get together in the near future with a limited number of representatives of the CNT and the FAI to work out a concrete program for our next action. According to a communication from Comorera, the Liaison Commission has indeed revived with changes in its membership: from the PSUC—Garcí Amatei, from the UGT—Sesé and Vidiella, from the FAI—Escorsa, from the CNT—Eroles and Herrera.

2. The Council of the Catalan government works regularly on putting the rear in good order. After a decree on municipalities, a draft decree on collectivization, put together by Fábregas, came before the council. It was returned to the Council on Economy as ordinary material, since the principle of collectivization was too widely extended. The PSUC repeatedly proposed to the government that weapons at the rear be seized and put at the disposal of the government. Not long ago, military councillor Sandino came out with this proposal and was supported by the PSUC, but the CNT induced [them] to postpone the question.

In the near future, the PSUC intends to bring forward the question on reorganizing the management of military industry. At this point the Committee on Military Industry works under the chairmanship of Tarradellas, but the main role in the committee is played by Vallejos (from the FAI). The PSUC proposes to put together leadership from representatives from all of the organizations, to group the factories by specialty, and to place at the head of each group a commissar, who would answer to the government.

3. The evaluation by García Oliver and other CNT members of the Madrid government seems well founded to me. Caballero’s attitude toward the question of attracting the CNT into that or any other form of government betrays

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## Document 22 *continued*

his obstinate incomprehension of that question's importance. Without the participation of the CNT, it will not, of course, be possible to create the appropriate enthusiasm and discipline in the people's militia/Republican militia.

The information concerning the intentions of the Madrid government for a timely evacuation from Madrid was confirmed. This widely disseminated information undermines confidence in the central government to an extraordinary degree and paralyzes the defense of Madrid.

4. The arrival of the *Zyrianin* called forth such enthusiasm and such hopes from the Catalans, accompanied by such demonstrations, that it has created a situation of extraordinary responsibility, demanding from us further measures for the support of Catalonia. The development of operations for bartering will be one of these measures; but this is absolutely not enough. Again I will mention to you the necessity to organize all-around assistance to make Catalonia stronger. Catalonia is Spain's healthiest region, with strong industry and undamaged "morale"—from here we can, and must, urgently organize the rescue of Madrid.

General Consul of the USSR in Barcelona V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko

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## Document 23

[Unnamed source (8)]

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Consulate of the USSR in Barcelona  
[illegible] November 1936  
N° 26

*Top Secret*

### *On Military Questions.*

1. The dispatch of aid to Madrid is proceeding with difficulty. The question about it was put before the military adviser on 5 November. The adviser thought it possible to remove the entire Durruti detachment from the front. This unit, along with the Karl Marx Division, is considered to have the greatest fighting value. To put Durruti out of action, a statement [was issued] by the commander of the Karl Marx Division, inspired by us, about sending this division to Madrid (it was difficult to take the division out of battle, and, besides, the PSUC did not want to remove it from the Catalan front for political reasons). However, Durruti refused point-blank to carry out the order for the entire detachment, or part of it, to set out for Madrid. Immediately, it was agreed with President Companys and the military adviser to secure the dispatch of the mixed Catalan column (from detachments of various parties). A



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## Document 23 *continued*

meeting of the commanders with the detachments on the Aragon front was called for 6 November, with our participation. After a short report about the situation near Madrid, the commander of the K. Marx Division declared that his division was ready to be sent to Madrid. Durruti was up in arms against sending reinforcements to Madrid, sharply attacked the Madrid government, “which was preparing for defeat,” called Madrid’s situation hopeless, and concluded that Madrid had a purely political significance—and not a strategic one. This kind of attitude on the part of Durruti, who enjoys exceptional influence over all of anarcho-syndicalist Catalonia that is at the front, must be smashed at all costs. It was necessary to interfere in a firm way. And Durruti gave in, declaring that he could give Madrid a thousand select fighters. After a passionate speech by the anarchist Santillán, he agreed to give two thousand and immediately issued an order that his neighbor on the front Ortiz give another two thousand, Ascaso another thousand, and the K. Marx division a thousand. Durruti was silent about the Left Republicans, although the chief of their detachment declared that he could give a battalion. In all, sixty-eight hundred bayonets are shaping up for dispatch no later than 8 November. Durruti then and there put his deputy at the head of the mixed detachment (Durruti agreed to form it as a “Catalan division”). He declared that he would personally be with the detachment until the appointment [of the new head]. But Durruti unexpectedly pulled a stunt, holding up the dispatch. Learning about the “discovery” of a kind of supplementary weapon (Winchester), instead of sending the units from the front on a direct route to Madrid, he sent these units unarmed into Barcelona, leaving their weapons (Mauser system) at their own place [on the front] and instead calling up reserves (without weapons) from Barcelona. His anarch. neighbors did the same thing. Thus Durruti got his own way—the Aragon front was not weakened. About five thousand disarmed frontline soldiers were gathered in Barcelona, and Durruti raised the question about immediately arming them at the expense of the units of the B.[arcelona] gendarmerie and police (Garde d’Assaut [*sic*] where the Socialists predominate and Garde Nationale where the Republicans are in charge). Through this, Durruti would achieve a continual striving by the CNT and the FAI to undermine the armed support of the present government in Barcelona. Since the weapons seized from the Garde d’Assaut and Garde Nationale (about twenty-five hundred rifles) were still not enough, it was proposed to get them from the “rear soldiers,” and instead of weapons of a different sort, the Garde d’Assaut and Garde Nationale would also, according to Durruti, receive Winchesters in place of Mausers. Here the government’s decree on the handing over of weapons by the soldiers at the rear has already been frustrated.

With a great deal of effort we frustrated this plan, which, in the best case, would impede the dispatch [of the troops] to Madrid for several days (the Winchesters were still en route). Another motive for our repudiation of the

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## Document 23 *continued*

former plan was the military unreliability of the anarchists and the political unreliability of the projected staff leadership. We insisted on the dispatch from the front of the Stalin Regiment, the select thousand from Durruti, and from Barcelona the Libertad detachment, which fought well at the approaches to Madrid and was being re-formed. These units came forward between 8 and 9 November. In addition, a thousand fighters were sent to Durruti and a battalion of Left Republicans were dispatched. In sum, about sixty-five hundred bayonets, twenty-five machine guns, fifty light machine guns, twelve pieces of ordnance.

This entire incident proclaimed not only the huge resentments toward Madrid and distrust of our intentions, but also the extreme clumsiness and ossification of the old Spanish military commanders, and also the organizational confusion (all of the parties are in command, bypassing the staffs, with their "own" detachments). One also senses the possibility of treason (by the staff of the Huesca sector commander, Colonel Villalba, if not by Villalba himself).

2. Characteristic difficulties in connection with the use of our specialists dealing with cartridge matters. Industry here is under the leadership of councillor Fábregas, nominated by the anarcho-synd. CNT. The metal industry is under the worker Vallejo (who is under the influence of the FAI). They treat our specialists with suspicion—we have secret schemes, hostile to the CNT-FAI. I have already told how it was necessary to quash these doubts, which even García Oliver has. But even after talks with the latter, sensible proposals by our specialists were curbed.

In the presence of Companys, I agreed with the first councillor, Tarradellas, that he should summon at his own place a special meeting with our specialists and leaders of military industry. Tarradellas put off this meeting in an extreme way, leaving for Paris. It was necessary to hold it without him at Santillán's. The explanations were rather sharply worded, but a large part of the proposals were approved (Santillán was fully canvassed beforehand).

This pressure of ours also served Tarradellas, on his return to France, as grounds for an attack on me personally, as (he said) "giving orders even to individual factories" (Tarradellas later admitted that he was incorrectly informed).

Thanks to our specialists, production of cartridges (mainly out of old empties) has already been raised fivefold, to two hundred thousand. Further increases have been hindered by the poor quality of the tools, because of a lack of tool steel. Soon a lack of various [other] metals will also begin to be experienced (about which I will communicate separately).

3. The weakening of the opposing forces on the Aragon front which was revealed (the recall, in any case, of the Moroccans and several units of the "Spanish falange" and a unit of aircraft) and also the consideration of assistance for Madrid—prompted us to raise the question about an offensive on the Aragon front. This also coincided with the intentions of the staff. At a meeting held on 10 November at the headquarters, a decision was approved

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## Document 23 *continued*

by all of the column chiefs, except for Villalba. The plan for the offensive was accepted for 14 November. I consider this plan to be a bad one.

...

But there should be no reconsideration of this plan, nor should it be worked out in agreement with the councillor that you know well (he is utterly worthless and stubborn besides), in order not to ruin even this kind of decision.

Of course, the timing was bad. Because of this, the offensive should be postponed. A second reason for postponing it is the need to amass cartridges, and so on. A third is the organizational friction (mainly from Villalba, whose suspicious manner hampers the regrouping of units).

There are no tanks on this front, and there is not even one modern airplane. Units have sat in damp trenches for more than two months. To stir and captivate them will be possible only through some potent means of inspiration. Best of all would be to support their attack with modern aircraft.

In the present circumstances, success is extremely doubtful.

General Counsel of the SSSR in Barcelona  
(Antonov-Ovseenko)

### *6 Copies*

- 1—Higher headquarters
- 2—Headquarters
- 3—The Boss<sup>48</sup>
- 4—The Director
- 5—Dep. Director
- 6—Archive

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### IOSIF RATNER

Antonov-Ovseenko's views of the anarchists and of Catalonia were given further confirmation by Iosif Ratner, the assistant military attaché. As he noted in the first paragraph of **Document 24**, the opinions he would express were his own and not agreed to by "Sancho" (Gorev). In his reading of events, the anarchist leaders had become much more reasonable and willing to work with the Communists. Only the anarchist "masses" still showed the old desire to shoot anyone who questioned their right to complete freedom from rules and discipline. He also thought that Catalan claims of unfair treatment by Madrid had some basis and believed that the Soviets could find some way to work with Catalonia. Nevertheless, neither of these

two men's opinions changed Soviet views of, and policies toward, the anarchists and Catalonia. Both the Catalans and the anarchists were seen as anti-Communist and untrustworthy; little better than the fascists from whom the Soviets had supposedly come to save Spain. This attitude toward the two groups would come together in May 1937, when the Communists decided to rid Catalonia of all the anarchists, "Trotskyists," and "fascists" that stood in their way.

## Document 24

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 852, ll. 324–333

NKO SSSR  
Worker-Peasant Red Army  
Department 1  
12–14 October 1936  
N° 10698

To the People's Commissar of Defense  
Marshal of the Soviet Union  
*Com. Voroshilov*

I submit a dispatch received by us from Com. Ratner *on the situation in Catalonia*.

The facts brought forth in this dispatch characterize the comparatively great stability of the Catalan army units.

Enclosure: Dispatch of 9 pages.

Chief of the Intelligence Directorate of the RKKA  
Corps Com.[mander] S. Uritsky

*Top Secret*

Copy N°

### *On the Situation in Catalonia* *A Dispatch*

I am writing from Barcelona. I am taking advantage of the fact that the mail leaves from here and am writing to you directly. Consider everything that I set forth in this letter my own personal opinion, not agreed to by Sancho. Tomorrow I am leaving for Madrid, and I will report to Sancho everything that I write in this letter.

I was in Barcelona three days. I met with the war minister Sandino. I had a protracted conversation with Guarner, the chief of the general staff. I had a protracted conversation with Durruti, the people's hero of Catalonia, leader of the anarchists, commander of the nine-thousand-man anarchist column at Saragossa. I visited with Miravittles, the state commissar of propaganda. I was

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## Document 24 *continued*

at the front near Huesca, where I rode around to all the units stationed there. I was in the only aerodrome in Catalonia, at Sariñana, where all the airplanes are concentrated. I visited barracks situated in Catalonia.

This gave me enough material on which to base the following general conclusions.

Catalonia, and Barcelona in particular, have a more normal and peaceful existence than Madrid. "Anarchist" Barcelona lives the almost normal life of a European capital—a huge contrast with the anarchy that reigns in Madrid. And this was not only in Barcelona, but in all Catalonia. Catalonia gained several victories on the Aragon front immediately after the rebellion began and pushed the enemy back from the borders of Catalonia and continues even now to enjoy partial success. This influences the cheerful, confident, and peaceful mood.

*On the anarchists.* The anarchists came to power, and they hold three ministerial posts, command large army units, and hold a number of prominent government posts. Having become part of the government, the leaders of the anarchists have gradually changed their tactics. The anarchist press, more than anyone else, began to agitate for unified command and for iron discipline. The well-known anarchist Durruti tried for half an hour to convince me that without unified command and without obedience there would be no victory. To the front near Huesca came the beloved idol of the anarchists, Oliver García [*sic*]. He assembled the anarchist column and began to persuade them that they ought to obey orders and be disciplined. That provoked a general indignation. Threats directed at him began to be heard. He hurriedly left there. On that same day the anarchists shot three commanders in their column suspected of sympathizing with Oliver's ideas. The anarchist masses are still as before, but the bosses have already turned toward a more sober and realistic government policy. On social questions there has also been a great change: at the large factories the anarchists themselves are being compelled to reject egalitarianism<sup>49</sup> in wages. The Left Republicans—influential themselves in the government party—are coming out everywhere for organization, discipline, and order and are forcing the anarchists to come to their senses on these questions.

Between Catalonia and Madrid there is a highly charged relationship. Catalans accuse Madrid of not helping them with anything: during the whole war Madrid has given them only 1,200,000 cartridges and no money; they asked for several dozen tons of powder, as they could put together the bullets and cases themselves, and Madrid did not give that, either. They did however give Madrid in these difficult circumstances twelve thousand men and continue even now to send men and even weapons, in which Catalonia is even more lacking than Madrid. Everything that I enumerate here is complaints aimed by Catalan government officials at Madrid. Apparently, some of this is not devoid of substance. Catalans advanced the following proposition: let Madrid give them two million cartridges, and they would take Saragossa and from there

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## Document 24 *continued*

strike at Sigüenza—that would be the best aid for Madrid. Madrid will not go for that, demanding that they send reinforcements directly to the Madrid front. Personally, I think that the Catalans are absolutely right on this question. At Saragossa Durruti had thirty cartridges per rifle left. There's about the same kind of picture at Huesca. If they would arm them more, they could take Huesca without difficulty, in one day, because Huesca is completely surrounded and has four and a half thousand Whites, not unwavering troops, against twelve thousand Blues. After the capture of Huesca, they could send ten thousand for an attack on Saragossa from the north. Durruti assures [me] that he would take Saragossa by himself, without the help of other units, if only they gave him cartridges. The capture of Saragossa would have great political, moral, and strategic significance. In addition, the Catalan units sent to the Madrid front are fighting very badly there. They fight much better at home in Catalonia.

As in all Spain, in Catalonia everyone, even the anarchists, has placed hope in us. They are profoundly certain that we will not desert them. This hope gives them confidence and good spirits. I think that, with the Catalan leadership, as with the anarchist leaders, we may come to agreement on many questions. We can influence them strongly. This is possible because the old politicians are in Madrid, while the majority here are young, very candid, ardent, and less experienced in political machinations.

### *Situation on the fronts*

...

The Catalan military organization is stronger than that of Madrid. The forces are in general more battle-ready. In the Catalan units, discipline will quickly be strengthened. There is already talk of a re-forming of all the party columns and of transformation into a normal military organization. This, of course, they will not achieve quickly, primarily because the anarchists have still not come to that, but order and organization will undoubtedly be strengthened.

In case of an attack on Madrid, Catalonia can undoubtedly play a huge role as a base for offensive action on Madrid from the north. The largest factories and enterprises are in Catalonia, including Hispano-Suiza. There are large cadres of qualified workers, technicians, and engineers with various specializations. With some help from outside, Catalonia can very quickly get the necessary military industry going. In Catalonia the masses as a whole are of a more revolutionary temper and are more intransigent toward fascism than in other regions of Spain (with the exception, perhaps, of the north).

All these circumstances, undoubtedly, dictate the necessity for closer connections with Catalonia.

We absolutely must have a permanent military worker in Barcelona. There is a lot of work here, and there are a lot of opportunities.

CORRECT: Chief of the I Department of the RU RKKA  
Corps Commissar                      Shteinbriuk

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ARTUR STASHEVSKY

The final report from the advisers, **Document 25**, shows the stance the Soviets took toward the Spanish economy. Broué and Témime believe that Artur Stashevsky, the author of this report, was nothing more than the economic attaché who arranged arms shipments to Spain.<sup>50</sup> This document suggests that the more sinister reading of Krivitsky—that Stashevsky was sent to manipulate the Spanish economy—may be closer to the truth.<sup>51</sup> Stashevsky was appalled by the “wild, unplanned work” that reigned in Catalonia (the main industrial center in Spain). The Spaniards in his report are incapable of dealing with their own economy or the saboteurs that were attempting to destroy industry at every turn. In addition to arranging the deliveries of weapons from the Soviet Union, then, Stashevsky set about organizing the Spanish economy for war through “skillful maneuvering and persistence.” He tried to make sure that Socialists were in charge of the economic bureaucracy and recommended Stalinist-style planning and the centralization of military industry. This latter effort is significant because, according to Stalin’s theories, a centrally planned *military* industry was the basis for a socialist economy. If the Soviets were indeed hoping to create a people’s democratic republic in Spain, a transformation of the economy in this way was essential.

The other point that is clear from this report is that the Soviets had no intention of *giving* the Spanish anything. Whatever weapons or other supplies they wanted had to be paid for in hard cash. Not long after the war began, the Madrid government sent more than two-thirds of the Spanish gold reserve, much of it in rare coins, to Moscow for safekeeping. As the war progressed, the Spanish would gradually spend the gold, paying the Soviets for the weapons necessary to prosecute the war. Recent scholarship has shown that the Soviets overcharged the Republican government for these arms, inventing prices to coincide with the amount of Spanish gold in their hands.<sup>52</sup> The government in Catalonia, meanwhile, had no hard currency reserves. This explains Stashevsky’s attitude when confronted by the English demand that the Soviets act as guarantors for Catalan coal shipments: the mere suggestion that the USSR would give the Catalans coal to fight their war provoked nothing but outrage.

Stashevsky also followed Stalin’s views on sabotage and “wreck-

ing.” Accusations of sabotage were at the core of the terror sweeping across Stalinist Russia. In 1928, Stalin had begun an ambitious effort to industrialize his backward country in only four years. The result had been, not unnaturally, many setbacks and failures to fulfill plans, along with a few spectacular successes. According to Stalin’s paranoid vision of the world, every failure in industry was the result of a deliberate attempt by Trotsky himself to undermine the achievements of the new Soviet Union. The term used to describe this sabotage was “wrecking,” and its use in this document, and others, had very specific political connotations, linking the “sabotage” in Spain with the worldwide conspiracy of “Trotskyists” and “fascists” bent on destroying the Soviet Union and any powers allied with it. Stashevsky thus did not believe that just individual fascist sympathizers were at work destroying the Spanish war effort, but rather an entire “fascist organization among the higher command.”

It is also significant that, once again, a Soviet adviser singled out General José Asensio as “a highly suspect man.” Like other advisers, Stashevsky, too, warned about the anarchists’ secret caches of weaponry, while believing that there were opportunities to work with the CNT. The “better part of the anarchists” were beginning to agree ideologically with the Communists, and he praised a talk given by the minister of industry, Juan Peiró (a CNT leader), as “almost the speech of a Communist.”

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## Document 25

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 853, ll. 313, 319–323

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Copy No. 5  
NKVT N° 771 31/12/36

SECRET

To Com. Stalin  
Com. Molotov  
Com. Kaganovich  
Com. Voroshilov  
Com. Ordzhonikidze  
Com. Andreev

I am sending a copy of two letters from Com. Stashevsky mainly on the question of the situation with military industry in Spain and on the relations among the various parties.



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## Document 25 *continued*

These letters were written before the meeting between the ministers Prieto and Negrín and the representatives of the Catalan anarchists, which took place the other day on the initiative of Com. Stashevsky, and at which some understanding on economic questions was reached.

L. Rozengolts

AP/8e

31/12/36

[ll. 319–323]

COPY

Valencia, 14 December 1936

Dear Arkady Pavlovich,

On the question of relations with Catalonia—I am putting everything into this avenue, because in every area—financial, hard currency, either military industry or economic—the problem of relations is becoming very critical and, without the participation of Catalonia, almost impossible.

1. The other day Com. Malkov had a talk with Fábregas, who is not unknown. The latter related the following: in Barcelona there are coal reserves for industry until 1 January. They recently sent a commission to England with the object of obtaining coal from there. The commission returned with nothing and declared that [England] would sell coal to them if there are guarantees from our side that we would pay for the coal. It is unclear to me how it came about that this kind of conversation was carried on. Obviously, the Catalans are trying to speculate on their friendship with the USSR. However that may be, they still have no coal. Fábregas proposed that in exchange for 150,000 tons of coal, which Catalonia could need for the next six months, they would manufacture twenty locomotives and diesel engines, and so on.

I called Com. Malkov's attention to the harm in carrying out this kind of conversations. I believe that the only way out (since the Catalans do not have any hard currency) is for them to apply to the Min.[istry] of Fin.[ance] with the object of obtaining the latter's consent for payment in hard currency. Every import to Catalonia can be carried out only with the authorization of the Min. of Fin., which in the end can pay us hard currency for the delivery.

Do not connect the questions of export and import; take each problem separately. If we find interesting goods for export from Catalonia, calculate in turn for them in hard currency as well. Make an agreement with the Min. of Fin. on the Catalans' affairs, regarding the means for paying for their import orders.

I think that this is the only correct way to strengthen a unified hard currency policy and from the standpoint of normal hard currency relations. I ask for your directives on this question.

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## Document 25 *continued*

2. Questions about mil.[itary] ind.[ustry]. Coms. Gaines, Grishin,<sup>53</sup> and I conversed for a long time with the leaders of the anarchists—García Oliver, minister of justice; Vázquez, general secretary of the CNT and minister of health.

Besides various [other] questions, I raised the question of how they pictured the future development of mil. ind. Could the wild, unplanned work in Catalonia continue in the future, haggling for every chassis (by the way, three hundred Ford chassis from Barcelona have still not been handed over), lack of a unified plan for the supply and distribution of food? They declared to us that they were for a unified supply plan, but they insist that a certain percentage of the military material produced ought to remain in Barcelona. I pointed out that perhaps the one unified center for distribution was the War Ministry, which concentrates matériel according to the degree of importance of the fronts, and that they ought to obtain some influence over distribution in the War Ministry. By the way, Largo Caballero for some time asked the anarchists to send people to the staffs, to the War Ministry, but so far the anarchists have not sent any people.

They decided that in a few days Prieto, I, and García Oliver will fly to Barcelona, where we will find out all of the raw material needs, and from that we will try and put together a plan.

The anarchists asked that I come alone, without Prieto; they cannot stand Prieto.

The other day I was with Prieto. He, for his part, cannot talk calmly about the anarchists. But he promised me that he will conduct himself very fairly.

I am not expecting anything much from this meeting, but I hope that we will secure some elementary normal relations between the central government and the Catalans on military industry.

Without this, it is out of the question to think seriously about military industry here, as the entire principal industry is concentrated in Catalonia.

3. General impressions from this conversation—the anarchists are gradually abandoning their positions, they will look for rapprochement through a possible merging of the CNT and the UGT, and they do not want to lose face politically.

Today I was at a meeting organized by the friends of the Soviet Union, in honor of a Spanish delegation that was arriving from the Union. Among others, the minister of industry spoke (an anarchist). He came down rather hard on the control committees in the factories, and demanded discipline, without any reserve. Almost the speech of a Communist. The better part of the anarchists are in the process of this kind of ideological movement toward us. But the process is very painful.

It seems to me that we must help to accelerate this process through *practical* work.

4. Side by side with this are subversive instances of anarchists' hiding weapons. It is known that even in Madrid fairly large quantities of weapons have been secreted away.

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## Document 25 *continued*

The other day, one of the engineers (a Spaniard from Mil. Ind.) reported to me that there are four caches of mortars hidden away in one place here in Valencia. I received a letter from the minister and today a commander of an International Battalion ought to have seized this ordnance with its shells.

Abnormality, disorganization, carelessness, and laxity are everywhere.

I am convinced that provocation is all around and everywhere; that there is a fascist organization among the higher command, which carries out sabotage and, of course, espionage.

Unfortunately, Gen. Asensino [*sic*] is a highly suspect man; a former military attaché for ten to twelve years, now vice-minister for Caballero, enjoying his exceptional trust.

While working on the military industry, I have met with such a large number of seditious instances of subtle wrecking that it is impossible to ascribe this to the casual wrecking of individual people; an organization is at work.

Now the organization of the leadership of military industry is under Prieto, who has had this laid on him. The influence of the most harmful elements has been temporarily checked. On the whole, the bureaucracy is selected by Prieto from among Socialist specialists, engineers, technicians, and there are some results after two weeks of work, or, more truthfully, huge opportunities for production have been brought to light. If there are raw materials and some machine tools, then in a month cartridges, explosives, armored trains, and possibly even tanks should make their appearance. However, Caballero already has said (under the influence of a report by Asensio) that it is absolutely imperative to use generals (the very same ones that I suspect of wrecking) for the leadership of mil. ind.

That is the situation in which the work on military industry is taking place—this is at the moment when the front is groaning because of a lack of cartridges, when a number of reserve brigades that have already formed up are sitting around without rifles.

The situation, as you can see, is not easy. And all the same, I shall not lose hope that through skillful maneuvering and persistence, we shall succeed in introducing planned development into this work, even if elementary in nature.

I shake your hand firmly.

A. Stashevsky

Valencia

14/12/36

CORRECT: [illegible]

AP/8e

31/12/36

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## THE ADVISERS AND THE PURGES

Almost all the principal advisers sent to Spain at the beginning of the war were dead by the time the conflict ended in March 1939. None of them fell in combat, however; they were victims of the political intrigues so characteristic of Stalin's Soviet Union. When the war broke out, the greatest of the political show trials was just beginning. After the marginalization of Bukharin, Stalin was ready to clean out the last institution to remain untouched by his purges—the army. In May 1937 Mikhail Tukhachevsky, along with seven other high-ranking officers, was arrested and summarily executed. That event began a purge in which 90 percent of the Soviet high command and perhaps as much as 70 percent of the officer corps as a whole eventually died.<sup>54</sup> In the midst of this “whirlwind,” Gorev, Berzin, Antonov-Ovseenko, and Stashevsky were all recalled to Moscow, imprisoned, and shot. The motivation for their arrests and executions is far from clear, although there has been a great deal of speculation on this point.

Although the new evidence offers no definitive answers, **Document 26** hints at why one of the victims incurred the displeasure of Moscow. In early 1937 Marcel Rosenberg, the Soviet ambassador to Spain, was ordered to return to the Soviet Union, where he disappeared. Many historians have described a public scene outside Largo Caballero's office in which the ambassador was accused by the Spanish leader of trying to impose his will on the Republican government.<sup>55</sup> Since Rosenberg was recalled shortly thereafter, it seemed reasonable to conclude that the dispute precipitated his fall from grace. There were just two problems with this assumption. First, as the documents in this section show, all the Soviet advisers were busily attempting to take over the Spanish war effort, the economy, the PCE, and, eventually, the Spanish government itself. Rosenberg's efforts to do the same could hardly have provoked Stalin to kill him. Second, Rosenberg was already out of favor by December 1936. That month Stalin sent a personal note to Largo Caballero in which, among other things, he asked whether the Republican government was happy with the Soviet ambassador.<sup>56</sup> The following document sheds some light on why Stalin felt impelled to ask this question. Here Gorev hints at a telegram from

Voroshilov on “all kinds of dirty matters” in which Rosenberg was involved. Rosenberg’s response was that he would not change but would act as he saw fit. Gorev also comments on the ambassador’s “unhealthy [sense of] self-esteem,” his interference in everyone’s affairs, and his petty surveillance. It was probably allegations of this sort that brought Rosenberg to Stalin’s attention and provoked the mention of him in the December letter.

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## Document 26

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, l. 239

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16/10/36

Madrid

Copy

Top Secret

To the Director [Voroshilov]:

I showed your telegram about negotiations on all kinds of dirty matters to Rosenberg. The result was about what I expected. He took it as a personal insult limiting his authority and is writing a letter which says that all the same, he is doing that and does not think it necessary or possible to stop. For the present he decided to continue his former policy for leading the negotiations.

You must keep in mind Rosenberg’s unhealthy [sense of] self-esteem. He is terribly afraid for his authority; he is afraid lest someone should do something greater than what he does. The result is that he fritters away his energy. He does the same thing with my business and with my opinions and your directives. And as far as the work with Vintser, that’s even worse. There he does not allow him to do anything without checking up on him. All his telegrams go through his inspection, and whatever he [Vintser] wants, he [Rosenberg] simply will not allow him to do.

He is incredibly nervous whenever one of us goes into a situation on his own to handle something. There was one incident when Kuznetsov sat with Prieto with Rosenberg’s authority, holding preliminary talks about what their conversation would be, and just then, in the very middle of the talks, he could not hold himself back and burst in. Of course, for us that is [not] of no importance and is not good for affairs here. Too much petty surveillance means that he is missing the forest for the trees.

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## Document 26 *continued*

It would not be a bad thing if you could write him a letter with some good comradely advice on this problem. But please do it carefully so that he will not know that I had any part in it.

Sancho

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### The Soviets Urge the Catalans to Stay the Course

In addition to seeking to control the conduct of the war, the Soviets also had to stiffen the resolve of their Spanish friends for the fight against “fascism.” **Document 27**, a letter by Antonov-Ovseenko on the situation in Catalonia, was written when the war seemed hopeless to the Spanish. By early October, Franco’s troops had taken several major cities in the south and north of Spain and were beginning to converge on Madrid. It was obvious that the Nationalists were winning because of the aircraft, tanks, and other weapons that they had received from the Germans and Italians, while the Republicans seemed to have no supporters abroad. Faced with this desperate situation, the Catalan government began to lose confidence in its ability to win the war. In this letter Antonov-Ovseenko tried to provide the Catalans with hope; the letter also offers the student of the Civil War a number of surprises. The first revelation is the doubts Jaume Miravittles (an Esquerra in the Catalan government) and Companys expressed about the nature of the uprising. Some historians have assumed that the Spanish shared the Communist belief that the Civil War was a part of the overall struggle with fascism. Miravittles and Companys, like many recent scholars, instead saw it as a war against “militarism and clericalism”—that is, the old army and the Church, rather than as a battle against some worldwide fascist conspiracy. The second revelation is that the Catalans seriously considered making a separate peace with the Italians. None of the sources available to us heretofore has hinted that the Catalan leaders thought it might be possible to come to an understanding with the Italians.<sup>57</sup> On both these points, Antonov-Ovseenko used his considerable talents of persuasion, with the weight of the Soviet government behind

him, to convince the Catalans that they were wrong. The war was against fascism; the Catalans could not break the united antifascist front; and Miravittles had misread the intentions of the Italians. After this conversation with the Soviet consul, the Catalans dropped both ideas and became more committed to the struggle with “fascist elements” in Spain.<sup>58</sup>

The other revelation in this document has to do with the nature of the killings that took place behind the front lines in Republican Spain. The controversy over this point is of long standing. On the one side are scholars such as Gabriel Jackson, Paul Preston, and Antony Beevor, who emphasize the disorganized and spontaneous nature of the terror in the Republican zone as compared with the more institutionalized executions carried out by Franco and his men. Jackson also gives a figure of about twenty thousand total killed by the Republicans—approximately six thousand in Madrid and six thousand in Barcelona and Valencia together.<sup>59</sup> On the other side are men like Hugh Thomas and Stanley Payne who blame both sides impartially for the killings. Payne specifically argues that the old distinction between terrors (one spontaneous and popular, the other organized and institutional) is invalid. The “Red Terror” was also carried out by officially sanctioned groups.<sup>60</sup> In his conversation with Antonov-Ovseenko, Miravittles supports the latter view of the terror. Not only are Jackson’s figures far too low—the Catalans had after all killed eight thousand in Barcelona only nine weeks into the war—but the executions were obviously viewed as part of the war effort and supported by the government of Catalonia. Other documents reprinted in this chapter allude to many instances of unplanned and undesirable executions within the Republican zone. As in Nationalist Spain, however, under the Republican government tens of thousands of civilians were killed as part of the official war on fascism.

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## Document 27

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, ll. 53–55

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Copy  
Top Secret

Letter No 2/s  
Vkh. No 5465 from 11/10/36, 6 October 1936  
Headquarters  
NKID—To Com. Krestinsky

At the very same meeting on 4 October,<sup>61</sup> Miravittles, specifying that he wanted to ask a “very delicate question,” relayed the following: personally he had suggested and suggests that “in Catalonia there is no fascism,” that “here the war is with Spanish militarists and clericalism” (“it was enough to shoot five hundred, and they had shot eight thousand in Barcelona alone”). Thus, as general secretary of the Committee of Antifascist Militia, the Italian general consul had presented himself to him with a protest at the murder of several Italian nationals. Saying that the murdered Italians were active enemies of the Spanish Republic, M. expressed the opinion cited above, adding that Italian fascism is “characteristic of youth and national consciousness.” The Italian consul reproached M. with the fact that he was not expressing a similar notion publicly and suggested that he come with him to the consulate for a more detailed conversation. M. declined, citing his official position and his isolation on that question in the Committee of Antifascist Militia. Yesterday Companys expressed to him the exact same opinion about the lack of fascist elements in the Franco uprising, adding that they might try to agree with Italy on a cessation of assistance for Gen. Franco. M., according to him, answered that this undertaking was extremely crucial and that he would seek advice from me.

I explained to M. that first, his appreciation of Franco’s movement was wrong politically, that second, an attempt at such an agreement with Mussolini was patently doomed to fail. Moreover, this attempt, exposing the weakness of the Republican Front in Spain, would only strengthen the activity of Italian fascism, most of all on the Balearic Islands, and, finally, this kind of escapade would destroy the united antifascist front. To counter this, I suggested a plan to M. for a large campaign around that last subject. England and France were vitally interested in not allowing Italy to seize Majorca, and so on, for this would extraordinarily strengthen the Italian position in the Mediterranean, by placing France’s communications with Africa under Italian control, and so on. He had to whip up rumors of an agreement between Gen. Franco and Italy on a concession of Majorca to Italy for its support of the fascist rebellion in Spain. He had to raise a similar campaign in the world press, in parliamentary circles of France and Italy, and so on, obtain a landing



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## Document 27 *continued*

of French and English journalists on Majorca with intensified observation of them by the French and English navies, and so on. In this way he might, at least, make it difficult for Franco to use the Balearic Islands, with Italian assistance, as a base (for carriers and submarines) against Barcelona. M. seized on my suggestion and promised to send me all the materials the next day.

The evening of 4 October, Companys set forth the same kind of thought to me on the nature of the “general’s rebellion” in Spain and on the possibility of pulling Italy away from Germany, but he offered the proviso that he thought it was now impossible, too late. He also talked about his fierce struggle with fascist elements in Spain, and so on. But he did not express any particular enthusiasm about my projected campaign on the Balearic Islands.

...

Along with this, M. and C.’s scheme shows the great confusion of the ruling petit-bourgeois Catalan democrats in the face of a situation that is ever more threatening. It may be that here, and without blackmail directed at us, you can quickly and concretely help, or else we will have to come to an agreement with Italy. At the same time, as Ehrenburg commented, dreams [such as] putting themselves under the protectorate of France are prevalent in Barcelona; now, because of Blum’s administration, this opinion has disappeared, but are not the pronouncements of M. and C. signs of a rising tide of pro-Italian opinion, in connection with m.b. and with the great activity of Italo-fascists in Barcelona? I have given myself the task of urgently clarifying that question.

Irrespective of the possibility of blackmail, this is another serious motive for beginning all kinds of work in Catalonia.

Antonov-Ovseenko

P.S. I just found out that Companys has seized on my plan and has already taken steps to send French and English journalists (at Catalan expense) to Majorca and also to Lisbon and Gibraltar (I pointed out the need for a campaign of journalists and . . . these people.

A. Ov.

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## The Spanish Civil War and Espionage

In seeking to control the Spanish revolution and to use the Civil War for their own ends, the Soviets brought to bear their greatest resources: diplomatic, military, economic, and, of course, intelligence. The Soviets were not alone in using this last institution—the

Germans, Italians, British, and French also exploited covert assets to obtain information about their opponents' intentions and actions in the war. The Soviets did, however, seem to have better agents, who supplied the most highly classified documents to their Communist controllers. **Document 28** offers one example of the quality of the material to which the Soviets had access. It also presents a small glimpse into the murky world of espionage that underlay so much of the action in the Spanish Civil War. When the Western Department of SIS generated this document, all of the interested parties were trying to prove, while seeking to shield their own violations, that their opponents were breaking the noninterference agreement. The British used information from reports like this to confront the Soviets about violating the treaty, while the fact that the Soviets had a copy of it allowed them to prepare for public accusations at the nonintervention committee in London. The source who supplied this document is unknown but must have been highly placed either in SIS or in Vansittart's office—a reminder that Soviet intelligence had deeply penetrated the British government during the 1930s.

The SIS report is also important for showing us how the Spanish government managed to obtain arms from abroad. Although by mid-October the Republicans were beginning to receive the first military hardware from the Soviets, the channels through which it came were often tortuous. Tanks and used matériel arrived directly from Soviet ports, but there were other, more complicated routes for smaller weaponry and aircraft. One of these involved using some of the gold sent to Moscow to open a bank account at the Chase American bank in Paris. The Soviets then bought weapons, supposedly destined for an unnamed Latin American country, that ended up in Spain. The Spanish were not entirely dependent on the Soviets, however. As the report shows, they had their own buyers, who used the same American bank to purchase war matériel that was then shipped to the Republic. Czechoslovakia was the other important route for weapons destined for the Civil War. It is notable that while the Czechs were willing to permit the shipment of aircraft and other hardware through their country, they drew the line at allowing the Soviets to test-fly the airplanes in Czech air space, a reminder of a similar stance taken by neighboring coun-

tries during the Munich crisis. Finally, the attitude of the Spanish leaders when trying to set up these arrangements is telling. Faced with the need to take an action that could lead to international complications, they were all paralyzed by nervousness. Only Buenaventura Durruti, the well-known anarchist commander, was able to act decisively to obtain the weapons that were vital to prosecuting the war.

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## Document 28

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 870, ll. 35–42

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*Top Secret*

[Marginalia:] To Voroshilov from Yezhov, 2/11/36

INO GUGB NKVD [the Foreign Department of the NKVD] has received from London the following document from the English Secret Intelligence Service, addressed to Vansittart's secretary—Cordón.

*Translated from English.*

*Secret*

Report No. 23 from 19 October 1936  
*Western Department*

*Weapons for the Madrid Government*

Below we will relate evidence, received from three completely independent sources, concerning the supplying of the Madrid government with weapons from other countries. Judging from this evidence, we can conclude that agents of the USSR took a very active role both in Paris and in Prague.

a) Moscow credit in Paris

A highly reliable source, closely concerned with the transactions for supplying weapons, reported the following in the course of the first half of October:

1) In the Paris "Chase Bank" credit was opened for Moscow not long ago in the sum of a hundred million gold French francs. On the weapons market buyers appeared who tried to buy large consignments of weapons and ammunition, supposedly destined for a republic in South America. These consignments included a hundred thousand Mauser rifles with a thousand clips for

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## Document 28 *continued*

each, fifty million cartridges, four thousand light 7.92-caliber machine guns, a thousand heavy 7.92-caliber machine guns and twenty million cartridges for these, twenty anti-aircraft guns with thirty-five thousand bullets. These consignments of weapons were to be paid for out of the above-mentioned credit. It is very unlikely that they succeeded in purchasing such a huge consignment of weapons, for it is well known that almost all the spare weapons in Europe are more or less taken up by orders placed not long ago by both of the warring parties in Spain.

2) In confirmation of this intelligence, information was received supporting the circumstance that the steamship *Sishviya*, which sailed from Danzig 3 October, supposedly bound for Vera Cruz, in fact went apparently to Alicante. The weapons carried by the ship were examined beforehand by Col. Levèque who, according to rumors, works for the French government. The cargo was paid for out of the above-mentioned Soviet credit.

### b) *Further activity in Paris*

Below, evidence will be given that was received at the beginning of October from a completely independent Parisian source, who maintains close contact with individuals who deal in weapons.

1) A certain Mr. Fournier and his co-worker Mr. Chenette have demonstrated a great deal of energy in locating weapon supplies. The first has plenary powers from the Spanish ambassador in Paris and has a deposit at the Chase Bank (at rue Cambon 41 in Paris) for five million francs (which may be increased to forty million). The question of the deposit was verified by Mr. Geide (4 rue Francoeur, town of Davalier), and it was determined that this report is in fact true. Mr. Geide tried to conclude a bargain with the Spanish government through Mr. Fournier. The latter, apparently, was especially warmly recommended to the Spanish by the French government, and the Spanish government now looks on him as a "trusted person."

2) As a result of the activity of Mr. Fournier, part of the equipment was bought for the Spanish government at the same time as the other orders were receiving a negative answer. [ . . . ]

3) Another agent of the Spanish government is Mr. Druilgue, who is staying at 4 bis rue Gustave Zédé in Paris. This Mr. Druilgue is a personal friend of Señor Largo Caballero. Since correspondence with Madrid was difficult, Mr. Druilgue, who had a Spanish airplane in his possession, flew to Madrid himself, from which he returned only a few days ago. He determined that Sr. Caballero was very agitated and did not have the time (or even the desire) to occupy himself with these questions. At the same time, since Mr. Druilgue insisted that the question of buying the weapons, the payment, and so on, be on solid ground, Sr. Caballero sent for Messrs. Pietro and Condis; at the same time, these three were so nervous that they did not succeed in achieving any results.

4) After this Druilgue got in touch with a certain "Durruti" from Barcelona,

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## Document 28 *continued*

who, apparently, is a very influential anarchist leader. After the arrival of "Durruti" everything changed completely. When Druilgue set off, together with "Durruti," to see Caballero, they asked them to wait. "Durruti" however declared, "tell Mr. President that I must be received within three minutes, and if not I will raise a scandal such as has never before been seen here." After that he was received immediately, and "Durruti" came down on Caballero, accusing him of not carrying out his duty and of becoming nothing but an unnecessary hindrance. "Durruti" succeeded in firing up the others present, and it was decided to spend another billion francs on buying military matériel.

...

### V) *Information from Prague*

The following information was received from a very reliable source, completely independent from all others described above (this source maintains close contact with the secretariat of the president of Czechoslovakia).

1) A certain individual, calling himself Mr. Paul, came not long ago to Prague from Madrid. He had a Swiss passport, but he is known to be an agent of the Soviet government. He stayed on Lotsova St. in a room used by the Soviet embassy when they wish to maintain secrecy. He was received by Mr. Krofta, to whom he reported that he had been sent by the Soviet ambassador in Spain to ensure the supply of weapons for the Madrid government. This plan has the approval of the Soviet government, which, according to "Paul," has completely resolved to render assistance to Madrid. He explained to Mr. Krofta that they expected help from Czechoslovakia, and that it would not risk anything, even if it became known, since formally they were selling weapons to Russia.

2) Mr. Krofta answered that the Czech government had in principle nothing against this plan, but that he still had no reply to the further proposal put by Mr. Paul that Soviet pilots, when sending airplanes to Spain, test them out in Czechoslovakia.

3) On 9 October a specialist from Moscow arrived in Prague and, on the following day, after discussion with Paul and a Spanish syndicalist named García, left for Spain.

This García undoubtedly was in Moscow and received complete authority to act as representative for the Spanish government in the matter of buying military matériel. Mr. Paul was to stay in Prague until the reception of further instructions from Moscow. It is possible that they will attempt to send airplanes by air directly to Spain from Czechoslovakia.

CORRECT

Chief INO GUGB NKVD SSSR

COMMISSAR OF STATE SECURITY

2nd RANK

Slutsky

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## The International Brigades

While the Soviets tightened their grip on the conduct of the war, international volunteers were streaming into Spain for the fight against the Nationalists. Many of the volunteers saw the war in Spain as their chance to take on fascism directly—to achieve in Spain what they were unable to do in Germany or Italy. The movement was at first largely a spontaneous response to the war in Spain and the dire straits that the Republic faced. It was, however, soon taken over by Comintern officials, in communication with Moscow, who organized the men into International Brigades, trained them, and would eventually lead the brigades into battle. **Document 29** provides a glimpse into the early organization of the brigades and the answers to several historiographical questions about the units. Here we see that the lowest estimates for the numbers of men available for the defense of Madrid were correct. By early November, Franco's troops were so close to the city that the Spanish government decided to move the capital to Valencia. The transfer was opposed by both the Communists and the anarchists, who argued that the city could and should be held.<sup>62</sup> To bolster the defense of Madrid, André Marty, placed in charge of the international volunteers by the Comintern, formed up battalions and immediately sent the men off to battle as the 11th Brigade. Although two thousand soldiers could not make a difference in the actual fighting strength of the defenders, the effect on Spanish morale was immediate and overwhelming. The presence of the Russians, as they were called, stiffened the resolve of the Madrileños and made it possible to hold the capital.

Marty's request for commanders, and the emphasis on the party affiliations of the brigade members, are also significant. From the very beginning, the Comintern and Moscow wanted these units under their control and saw to it that a majority of the troops, if not all of them, were members of the Communist party. The percentage given here by Marty is comparable to numbers cited in later documents in this volume and with the claims of Communists during the war.<sup>63</sup> Control over the command staff was seen as particularly important. Moscow had already sent a few regular Red Army officers to lead the international volunteers and would now

send more in answer to Marty's appeal. So that there could be no charges of Soviet *Russian* participation in the actual fighting, these were always men who had been born outside of the current borders of the Soviet Union. Thus Emilio Kléber, the head of the 11th Brigade, was actually Moshe (Manfred) Zalmanovich Stern, a native of Bukovina who had fought for the Reds in the Russian civil war and then become a staff officer in the Soviet army. General Walter, who would eventually lead the 35th Brigade, was Korol Karlovich Sverchevsky, born in Poland, and a participant in the October Revolution and the Russian civil war. He was, moreover, a regular staff officer in the Red Army and a deputy chief of a GRU sector. General Lukács, whose actual name was Mate Zalka, led the 12th Brigade, though his real employment was as an officer in the Soviet army. Finally, the 15th Brigade, which included the American Lincoln Battalion, was commanded by General Gall (Janos Galicz), another regular officer in the Red Army.<sup>64</sup> Through these men, and other "advisers" sent by the Comintern (among them Luigi Longo and Palmiro Togliatti), the International Brigades became, in effect, a Soviet army within Spain.

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## Document 29

RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, d. 832, l. 309

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*Top Secret*

To Comrades Stalin

Molotov  
Voroshilov  
Kaganovich

We received a telegram from Com. Marty from Madrid, through Paris, with the following contents:

"Despite the material difficulties, we have three thousand men for an International Brigade at Albacete; of them two thousand men are already formed into four battalions. By nationality they are Italians, Germans, French, Balkan nationals, and Poles; by party, they are 80 percent Communist and Socialist. The morale of the brigades is strong. Lacking are automatic weapons and ar-

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Document 29 *continued*

tillery; one-third have insufficient military training. The command staff is extremely small and insufficiently qualified.

“We request twenty commanders, from battalion to company commanders, including also four for the artillery, all French-speaking.”

The further reinforcement of the brigades will proceed to increase, with the calculation of reaching five thousand men by 15 November. I request your directives.

4/11/36

D. Manuilsky