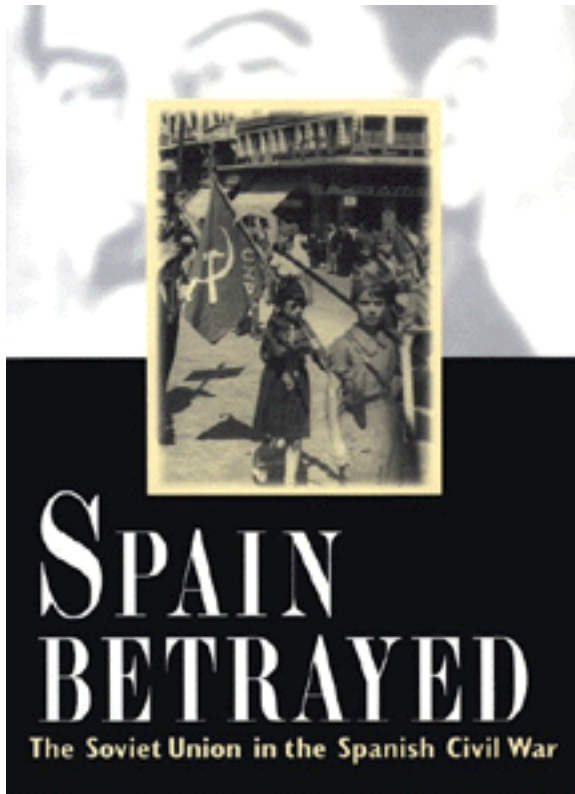


## Review

Grover Furr

*Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* by Ronald Radosh (Editor), Mary Radosh Habeck (Editor), Grigory Sevostianov (Editor). Annals of Communism series. Yale University Press, June 2001.

### Anatomy of a Fraudulent Scholarly Work: Ronald Radosh's *Spain Betrayed*



Long awaited and published to rave reviews -- albeit predictably by Cold War conservatives (Arnold Beichman) and anti-communist liberals (Christopher Hitchens) -- Radosh's commentary on the 81 documents from the Comintern archives in Moscow concerning its involvement in the Spanish Civil War turns out to be notable for quite another reason: it is an utterly fraudulent work.[1](#)

In the course of this review-essay I'll present a lot of evidence to substantiate this serious charge. I'll also discuss, though briefly, the major positive reviews of the book. They are full of the same stuff. In several instances, an innocent reader might think that the reviewers had not actually *read* the documents themselves, but only Radosh's commentary. For how could anyone

compare what the Comintern documents state with what Radosh says about them, without noticing the enormous discrepancies between the two?

I won't say much in this report about the documents themselves. Many of them are fascinating and valuable, though Radosh, in his zeal to arraign the communists, basically neglects them.

But one conclusion is so striking that it cannot be left unstated. Far from showing Soviet "betrayal," these 81 documents make the Comintern, the International Brigades, and the massive Soviet aid to Spain appear in an extremely positive light. Reading the documents alone, and ignoring Radosh's "commentary," any objective person will come away with tremendous respect for the communist effort in the Spanish Civil War, not only by the Comintern and the justly famed International Brigades, but of the Soviet Union -- or, as Radosh says it, in his crude demonizing synecdoche, of "Moscow" and "Stalin."

Despite itself, Radosh's book represents something valuable: an object lesson in the rhetorical strategies of anti-communism. Perhaps the biggest question of all -- "Why lie, if the truth is on your side?" -- will require a few remarks about the uses of anti-Stalinism in foreclosing any objective understanding of the successes and failures of the communist movement.

Radosh's book contains so many errors and distortions that even a much longer review could not discuss them all. Therefore, I examine the documents in which the major "revelations" are supposedly to be found. To identify those, I've used (a) the four-page publicity handout from Yale University Press that accompanies the book, and (b) a number of the major reviews favorable to this volume, from leading publications (all are listed at the end). A few other documents were chosen because they seem to me particularly interesting. This close examination constitutes the bulk of the review.

I'll also point out some examples of simple editorial incompetence. Radosh could have provided useful summaries of long and significant documents, or helpful and specific references to other scholarly work -- surely the duty of a competent commentator -- but scarcely ever does.

At the end of the review I've included some remarks of a more general nature about the issues raised both by these documents themselves and by Radosh's commentary. There's a good deal that can be said by Marxists in criticism of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern during the Stalin period -- or of any political group, communist or not, at any period -- and in conclusion I'll allude to one or two things with special reference to Spain. But any and all criticism should be based on what actually happened as that can be deduced from the best evidence available, rather than on fabrications or demonization, as with Radosh and many other Cold-War writers, either from the Right or, not infrequently, the so-called Left.

What follows is a short outline of the main ideological frameworks for interpreting the Spanish Civil War. Some knowledge of them is essential to an appreciation of Radosh's interpretation, the documents themselves, and the present review. Considerations of space preclude any more detailed discussion of the foundational texts of these frameworks. (I am planning a critique of Orwell's influential book at a future time.)

The Spanish Civil War has always posed a special problem for the kind of anti-communist who is determined to argue that the leadership of the international Communist

movement never acted out of any idealistic motives. Such people are convinced -- at any rate, they are determined to convince others -- that *all* communist struggles, no matter how noble in appearance, were in reality aimed at manipulative, cynical, authoritarian goals, ultimately far worse than those of the capitalist exploiters they professed to oppose. Khrushchev's portrayal of a malevolent, virtually demonic Stalin after 1956, while it differed little from Trotsky's, was far more influential, and except in China and Albania quickly became widely accepted within the Communist movement itself. It was essential in smoothing the path for Trotskyist and, in terms of Spain, Anarchist narratives, hitherto current only among tiny, marginalized groups.

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is basically such an account, though Orwell's superior literary ability, British patriotism during World War II, and subsequent endorsement of mainstream Cold War ideology, gave his work the status of a somewhat independent authority. Orwell's book remains the main representative of these anti-communist paradigms, the only book about the Spanish Civil War that most people ever encounter.

According to this interpretation, further popularized in British director Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995), Trotskyists and, especially, Anarchists are the true revolutionaries, collectivizing the land, ceding control of factories to the workers, and promoting egalitarian relations generally. The Communists are portrayed as counter-revolutionaries, whose rank-and-file think they are fighting to defeat the fascists in order that, in the victorious bourgeois-democratic Spanish Republic, they can then initiate a struggle for working-class revolution, but whose leadership -- Stalin -- aims in reality at a bleak authoritarian dictatorship of the kind Trotskyists, Anarchists, conventional capitalist anti-communists and even fascists, claimed was the state of affairs in the USSR itself. This creates a certain tension within the otherwise "united front" of anti-communist versions of the Spanish Civil War, since capitalist anti-communism is normally aimed at the radical, not the putatively conservative, nature of the communist movement.

The Communist version, on the other hand -- the version by far the best supported by the evidence -- is that the "United Front Against Fascism" and for a liberal, bourgeois-democratic (and therefore capitalist) society was the *only* way to unite as many social forces as possible, including nationalists, urban capitalists, and wealthier peasants, to defeat the fascists. According to this view, upon victory a Spanish Republic would have a strong, organized working class which would continue the fight for progressive social reforms and, ultimately, socialist revolution. The Communists held that to begin a revolutionary struggle in the midst of the war against the fascist armies would guarantee the defeat of the Republic -- a defeat which, in fact, happened.

A critique of the Communist view from the Left is certainly warranted -- indeed, essential. But what passes for a "left" critique, the Anarchist-Trotskyist version outlined above, accepts the basic premises of the reactionary Cold War critique, to the point that it can be cited in service to the latter, as Radosh does here. To clear the ground for a real Left critique, it is first necessary to recover the historical truth of what did, in fact, happen, both in the Spanish Civil War and in the Soviet Union itself. A real Left critique

of the Comintern's politics which both fully and correctly appreciates its successes and goes beyond it to identify the main roots of its failures, is yet to be made, despite a few promising starts which have long been available, albeit little known (see below, and note 6).

Radosh's own view, as represented in his commentary in *Spain Betrayed*, is contradictory. In places Radosh argues, according to the fashion of conservative capitalist anti-communists, that the Comintern was hiding its truly revolutionary intentions. In other passages, however, he endorses the Orwell-Trotskyist-Anarchist view that the Communists were a conservative force that "betrayed" the revolutionary potential in Spain. Radosh seems untroubled by, indeed unaware of, this basic contradiction, as in the case of the many passages in which he -- in the most generous description of his practice -- makes flagrant and egregious errors in reading the very texts upon which he is "commenting."

### Document 5

Document 5, a report by Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Comintern, to the Secretariat of the ECCI (Executive Committee, Communist International) of July 23, 1936, contains the following lines:

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.

Radosh claims that this statement (a statement repeated in the press release)

. . . supports the contention of some scholars that the Communists purposely disguised their true objective, social revolution. (5-6)

But it does not. It clearly states that there are "stages," the present one being the stage of "maintaining unity with the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants and the radical intelligentsia . . ." (11). Radosh's claim could only be true if he gave evidence that the Communists were *denying* what everyone would have expected of them -- to wish to move to another "stage," once the fascists were defeated. Radosh gives no evidence that the Communists were making any such claims to have abandoned the ultimate goal of a Soviet-style revolution in Spain. So there can be no question of "disguising their true objective."

It ought also to be noted that Radosh also wants it "both ways." Sometimes he criticizes the Communists for *opposing* social revolution, which the Anarchists supposedly stood for. This is Ken Loach's main contention in *Land and Freedom*. But other times, as here, Radosh criticizes the Communists for wanting social revolution but supposedly "disguising" their intentions.

Document 5 also offers an obvious mistranslation from the Russian. Immediately after the lines quoted above, Radosh et al. allege that Dimitrov wrote the following:

Therefore we must say: act *in the guise of* defending the Republic. . . .  
(p.11; emphasis added)

In his commentary Radosh states:

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 revolution. (pp. 5-6; emphasis added)

Evidently Radosh is referring to a different translation of the document than that which finally ended up in the volume, although arguably "in the guise of" and "under the semblance of" convey much the same thing: duplicity, dishonesty. However, there is an interesting footnote in the text of Document 5 attached to the phrase "in the guise." That note, number 11 on page 515, reads thus: "Literally, 'under the banner.'" In other words, what Dimitrov actually said is this:

Therefore we must say: act *under the banner of* defense of the Republic. . . .

The question is: What does "under the banner" -- in Russian, "*pod znamenem*" -- mean in Russian? The answer is: it means the opposite of what Radosh says it means. Rather than "under the semblance" or "in the guise," it means "in service to" or "in defense of." At exactly this time, one of the foremost Soviet philosophical journals was titled "*Pod Znamenem Marksizma*": literally, "Under the Banner of Marxism," often translated as "In Defense of Marxism." No one would even think of translating that title as "In the Guise of," or "Under the Semblance of," Marxism! "Under the banner of" is a military metaphor, meaning "In the ranks of."

In other words, what Dimitrov actually said was:

. . . act in defense of the Republic. . . .

There must be an interesting story behind that footnote. Whoever translated Document 5 -- Radosh tells us (p. xxxi) that there were two translators for the Russian documents -- that person evidently *knew* that "in the guise" was *not* the correct translation, and wanted to tell the world, even if by a footnote, that he or she was not responsible for this particular mistranslation.

This is the only mistranslation from the Russian *that can be discerned* in this collection, because Radosh et al. don't give us the documents in the original languages (mostly Russian, but a few in Spanish, German and French). This would have been easy

to do -- on a book-related web page, for example. But the way this mistranslation is treated makes one wonder whether there may be more.

## Document 42

Radosh spends a lot of words on Documents 42 through 44 because one of the central points of his book is that in these documents, especially Document 42, is to be found the proof that the Communists instigated the Barcelona uprising of May, 1937 as a pretext for violently suppressing their Anarchist opposition.

Briefly, the context for Radosh's comments is as follows, in the words of Helen Graham, who has written authoritatively and most recently on this event (Graham 1999, p. 485):

On the afternoon of Monday 3 May 1937 a detachment of police attempted to seize control of Barcelona's central telephone exchange (Telefónica) in order to remove the anarchist militia forces present therein. . . . Those days of social protest and rebellion have been represented in many accounts, of which the single best known is still George Orwell's contemporary diary account, *Homage to Catalonia*, recently given cinematic form in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*. It is paradoxical, then, that the May events remain among the least understood in the history of the civil war.

Radosh takes Document 42 to be directly related to this event:

. . . we have the proof that the view held by the Communists' opponents was essentially correct. The Spanish Communist Party, with the support and knowledge of the Comintern and Moscow, had decided to provoke a clash, in the full understanding that the outcome would give them precisely the opportunity they had long been seeking. (174)

Radosh does not bother to tell us what would have been wrong with the communists' seizing the telephone exchange from the anarchists. After all, the government, not one of the various parties, should have been in control of the exchange. And the assault was led by the Police Chief of Barcelona who, though a communist, was also a government official.

The anarchists had clearly been prepared for such an attack for a long time -- after all, they had a machine-gun nest in the first floor which prevented the police from seizing the building at once. What justification did the anarchists -- not the government, but one of the political parties in Barcelona -- have controlling the telephone exchange in the first place?

The words that Radosh takes as "proof" that "the view held by the Communists' opponents was *essentially* correct" -- I emphasize "essentially" because even Radosh

feels he has to qualify this statement, evidently realizing he is on weak grounds here -- are as follows:

. . . the author of the report noted that the Communists had decided not to wait for a crisis, but to "*hasten it and, if necessary, to provoke it*" (emphasis added).

But Document 42 says *nothing whatsoever* about the attack on the telephone exchange, or about any plan for confrontation with the anarchists. The sentence quoted in part by Radosh in his commentary reads this way in full:

In a word, to go decisively and consciously to battle against Caballero and his entire circle, consisting of some leaders of the UGT. This means not to wait passively for a "natural" unleashing of the hidden government crisis, but to hasten it and, if necessary, provoke it, in order to obtain a solution for these problems. . . . The leadership of the party is more and more coming to the conviction that with Caballero and his circle the Republic will be defeated, despite all the conditions guaranteeing victory. (194)

These lines do not refer at all to the attempt by the Communist Chief of Police to take possession for the Republican government of the telephone exchange that had been unlawfully seized and held by the anarchists, the event that precipitated the "May Days" in Barcelona and to which Radosh tries to tie this statement, or to any plan to incite any actions against the anarchists. Instead, the paragraph quoted just above refers to the previous points 8 through 14 of Document 42, in which the unnamed communist author says that the PCE has decided to take action *against the Caballero government*. There is nothing whatsoever in this document that connects it with the attempt to retake the telephone exchange.

Radosh's allegation -- one of the "bombshell" findings Radosh claims to have found -- is a lie. This whole "discovery" is a complete swindle on the unsuspecting reader. I stress this point because Radosh's supposed "discovery" here has been so widely touted as one of the major "revelations" of these Soviet documents. For example, the Press Release from Yale University Press that accompanied the books publication lists seven documents and summarizes what Radosh says they contain. The blurb on Document 42 reads:

**Barcelona -- the civil war within the Civil War.** The five-day street battle in Barcelona was portrayed by Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* and by Ken Loach in the film *Land and Freedom*. The historical dispute has always been: Was *the anarchist reaction* deliberately provoked? Document 42 shows that the view held by the Communists' opponents was essentially correct. The Spanish Communist Party, with the support and knowledge of the Comintern, decided to provoke *the* clash. (emphasis added)

We should also note, in passing, the esteem in which Loach and Orwell are held by establishment anti-Communist ideologues like Radosh, and the way in which the echo-chamber of the "big lie" functions in the blurb above by pairing these supposed "authorities" with the specious "facts" that Radosh is creating here.

Richard Bernstein, whose very positive review of Radosh's book appeared in the *New York Times*, tacitly recognizes that Document 42 did not prove what Radosh says it proves:

Two weeks later, the Communists, *in the view of this book's editors*, did provoke the desired crisis, unleashing the Barcelona street battles that essentially eliminated the anarchist leadership and led to the replacement of Largo Caballero by a more malleable premier. [emphasis added]

(Bernstein makes it sound like Caballero was the leader of the anarchists; in fact, he was head of the government and a Socialist.)

In the interest of good sense, I would like to make a few additional remarks at this point.

1. The assumption, in Radosh's Commentary and in other anti-communist accounts Radosh quotes, is that, by taking the Telephone exchange away from the anarchists and returning it to government control, the Communists were "provoking" the anarchists.
2. The anarchists had no business whatsoever holding the telephone exchange. The Police Chief, besides being a communist, was also a government officer. If removing an armed group of occupiers who have taken control of the telephone exchange is not a legitimate matter for the police, what is?
3. Imagine if the Communists had occupied the telephone exchange, fortified it with a machine-gun nest, interrupted government phone calls whenever they wanted to, and then a non-Communist police chief had tried to oust them? Would Radosh not take that as evidence that the Communists wanted to take over?

### **Document 43**

One of Radosh's statements about Document 43 has been cited in several favorable reviews of his book:

As the Comintern document cited earlier revealed, Stalin had in mind a Spanish version of the Moscow purge trials most likely to be held in Barcelona. (209)[2](#)

The document in question, No. 43, is a report from an anonymous source, presumably to the Comintern. In it the informant states:



The immediate political consequences of the putsch [the anarchist attempt to seize power -- this is the way this writer interprets the "May Days" in Barcelona] are very great. Above all, the following one: the Trotskyist-POUMists revealed themselves to the nation as people who belong totally to Franco's fifth column. The people are nourishing unbelievable animosity toward the Trotskyists. The masses are demanding energetic and merciless repression. This is what is demanded by the masses of people of all of Spain, Catalonia, and Barcelona. They demand complete disarmament, arrest of the leaders, *the creation of a special military tribunal for the Trotskyists!* This is what the masses demand. (196-197)

In his discussion of this document on p. 176, Radosh wrote:

In other words, the call was out for the creation in Spain of the equivalent of the Moscow purge trials. . . .

"In other words" (why not use the same words?) "the call was out for" can only mean one thing: Radosh assumes that our unnamed informant, writing *to* the Comintern in Moscow, is speaking for someone other than himself. But this assumption is invalid. This document does not mean that any "call is out." So far as we know, it's the opinion of the writer alone. After all, he's reporting to the Comintern. If the PCE, or Soviet advisers, had "put out the call" for a Moscow-style purge trial, he would have said so, for why hide it to the Comintern? And if *Stalin* had expressed interest in a Spanish "purge trial," surely this writer would have said so as well.

#### **Document 44**

Document 44 is a report to the Comintern sent to Marshal Voroshilov, Commissar (Minister) of Defense of the USSR and the man whose office oversaw military equipment and material aid for the Spanish Republic, by a certain "Goratsy," whom Radosh, in another failure of his editorial responsibility, does not further identify. Radosh accuses the Comintern of *lying to itself*, in that it states the communist belief

that the "uprising" carried out by "the extremist wing [of the anarchists] in the block with the POUM" was prepared in advance over a "long period of time." (177) [This refers to the "May Days" in Barcelona -- GF].

A few considerations are in order:

1. How does Radosh *know* that this is false? He has not proven it.
2. Furthermore, Radosh has already claimed that, in Document 42, he has evidence that *the Comintern itself* planned the Barcelona uprising, whereas here the Comintern reporter blames the uprising on the Anarchists. Why would the Comintern lie to itself? If the Comintern had successfully provoked this confrontation, as Radosh claims, why wouldn't

they be gloating over their success? Instead, they blame it on the anarchists, *even in private communications within the Comintern.* (206)

3. The document itself claims that the uprising was *unexpected* by the Communists. Once again: if it had been not only expected, but in fact "provoked," as Radosh would have it, why would this not be noted, with pride, as a successful operation?

### Document 1

Here a Spanish Communist in Moscow is writing to the Communist Party in Spain.

Radosh: ". . . 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 . . . (1-2).

Doc. 1: "After considering the alarming situation in connection with the Fascist conspiracy in SPAIN, we *advise* you: -- . . . Please *let us know your opinions on our proposals.*" (7, 9; emphasis added)

Conclusion: This document is not "imperative" in tone. Radosh is simply trying to make "Moscow" appear dictatorial and high-handed. The text will not support that interpretation, so he simply puts it into his commentary.

I put "Moscow" in quotation marks because this message, while certainly sent from the city of Moscow, was *sent by a Spanish Communist*, "Dios Major," who signed the document. Why doesn't Radosh mention this, saying only that "Moscow" sent it? Perhaps because to say that one Spanish Communist is "advising" other Spanish Communists does not support the impression -- which Radosh evidently wants to give -- that the Bolsheviks, Stalin, the Politburo, or whatever "Moscow" usually conveys, was trying to say anything to anybody. It appears that through metonymy, a linguistic trope in which "Moscow" represents any Communist leader, anywhere, allows Radosh to reduce all Communist leaders to "Moscow," and "Moscow" to "Stalin." Demonize Stalin, then, and all Communist leadership is automatically demonized as well.

Radosh gives other invidious readings of Document 1, but is rather vague about it. I'll mention only one more example.

Document 1 reads, in part:

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.

The worst one could say about this piece of analysis -- given, we recall, by one Spanish Communist to others, all of whom had extensive experience with the Spanish anarchists and hated them just as the anarchists, in turn, hated the communists -- is that it was

rhetorical over-statement to say that "the hand of the Fascists is hidden behind" the anarchists' attempts at seizing power.

But here is what Radosh himself says about the anarchists:

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.* (3, emphasis added)

Radosh admits that the anarchists took this attitude towards the army. Yet how could the Fascists -- who certainly had "a regular, disciplined army" -- ever be defeated unless the Republic had one too? Guerrilla warfare -- what Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap later refined into the doctrine of "People's War" -- is very important. But no theoretician of guerrilla or people's war ever suggested that a war could be won without "a regular, disciplined army."

In refusing to form such an army the anarchists played directly into the hands of the Fascists. Yet even while admitting this, Radosh attacks the Communists for stating the obvious: that this played into the Fascists' hands. Elsewhere, in passages Radosh does not comment on, the Communists expressed the view that Fascist agents chose to infiltrate the Anarchists precisely for this reason.

Radosh's Commentary continues:

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.

Radosh gives no evidence to support this statement at all. He certainly can't cite Document 1, the document he is supposedly elucidating, because in it Dios Mayor proposes that

the C.G.T. (U.) [the Communist-led union movement] ought to propose to C.N.T. [the Socialist-led union movement] the immediately construction in the center and locally of joint committees to fight against the Fascist insurgents and to prepare the unification of the syndicates.

. . . At the same time you must establish broad social legislation, with extensive rights reserved in the unified C.G.T. . . .

Dios Mayor is proposing that the Communists call for unified action and a unified trade union organization. Radosh suggests that there is something underhanded about calling for unification: the Communists want to "absorb independent unions into a single entity controlled by the Communists." But there is no suggestion of this in the document

itself. I would note also Radosh's concept of "absorption" here is standard anticommunist rhetoric. Other parties might "win a political struggle" for leadership of an organization, but communists only "control" -- never "lead" -- and "absorb," with connotations of "suffocation," "snuffing out independence."<sup>3</sup>

One might say, "Well, Radosh hates Communism, so for Radosh the communists can never do anything right." But it's more than that. For Radosh, if a non-communist makes a good proposal -- say, trade union unity -- that is good; whereas when Communists do the same thing, it's bad. That's because, for Radosh, communists never do anything honestly; their "dishonesty" is a *given*.

The interesting thing is that Radosh, using the documents his collaborators have selected, cannot demonstrate "dishonesty" on the part of the communists. An honest researcher would consider the possibility that, if the evidence at hand did not suggest the communists were "dishonest," it just may possibly be because the communists *were not* dishonest.

### Document 79

Radosh confesses that the previous document, no. 78, "suggests that he [Negrín] enjoyed a degree of autonomy from Communist control" (497). Radosh further acknowledges that even some anti-communist scholars of the SCW believe Negrín was "a more independent figure." Radosh stresses that Document 79, a report by Marchenko, a Soviet and a Comintern representative, to Litvinov (Soviet Foreign Minister) and Voroshilov,

. . . makes it clear that the Spaniard's views of politics closely coincided with the Soviets', while the similarities between his vision for postwar Spain and that of the Soviet Union are striking This document suggests that if the Republicans had won the Civil War, Spain would have been very different from the nation that existed before 18 July 1936 and very close to the post-World War II "people's democracies" of Europe.

This is false. Document 79 itself reveals that Marchenko was not supportive at all of Negrín's outline of what a post-war Spanish Republic might look like:

I reacted in a very reserved way to Negrín's idea and drew his attention to the difficulties and complications that the organization of a new party would cause. . . . If there are military successes, he can begin the formation of "his" united-Spanish political party, *with the participation of the Communists if they will allow it, and without the Communists (and that means against them) if they refuse.* (499; emphasis added).

The post-WWII "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe were (a) propped up by the presence of the Red Army; (b) directly on the borders of the USSR; and (c) governed by Communist Parties (or communist-socialist united parties) run frankly by pro-Soviet

communists. Negrín's conception of a post-war Spanish Republic is very different from the post-war pro-Soviet regimes of Eastern Europe, sharing no essential similarity with them at all. Yet the allegation that a post-war Republic would have been forced into the mould of the post-WWII Eastern European regimes is, supposedly, one of the major "discoveries" of this collection of documents. This document alone shows that this claim of Radosh's is without foundation.

## Document 62

This is an important report by Palmiro Togliatti, head Comintern representative in Spain, to Dimitrov in Moscow. It is of great interest, and Radosh can find nothing to say about it that is at all negative. He makes false statements about its contents, however.

For example, Radosh writes:

Togliatti's reports are of special importance. It is clear that, *unlike other apparatchiks*, Togliatti was extremely candid and forthright in his observations. (370, emphasis added)

But Radosh gives not a single example of these "other apparatchiks," supposedly not-candid and not-forthright. Since Togliatti was later the head of the Italian Communist Party and a major leader of the Comintern, it does not seem to have hurt his reputation to have been "extremely candid and forthright."

Note, too, Radosh's use of a Russian term for an official of the *Italian Communist Party*. Radosh would never refer to an official of the Spanish Socialist party as an "apparatchik." The point here is to give the impression, by whatever means possible, that "Moscow" controls everything.

Radosh's discussion of this report contains several outright lies, including one that is very blatant -- always provided that one actually reads the document itself. Radosh states:

At the same time, in Catalonia, Togliatti called for a policy of reinforcing the moderation of the Popular Front, rather than demagogic appeals to a revolution-minded populace. *If the anarchists tried to move toward open revolt and stage a coup, he advised one solution only: "We will finally do away with them."* (emphasis added)

Here is the passage (390):

As for the anarchists, on this question, in my opinion, we have not merely hesitated, but made absolutely real mistakes in our tactics [Togliatti is referring to methods of political struggle -- GF.] On the role from Barcelona to Valencia, I posed the question to the comrades accompanying me. *Their opinion* was very simple: the anarchists have lost all influence, in Barcelona (!) there is not even one anarchist worker, we

are waiting until they organize a second putsch, and we will finally do away with them [emphasis added].

So this attitude is not that of Togliatti, but of some "comrades." Here is what Togliatti wrote about this attitude; this passage begins immediately after that above:

This opinion is very widespread in the party, in particular in Catalonia, and *when we stick to such an idea, it is impossible to carry out a policy of rapprochement with the anarchist masses and differentiation of their leaders.* (390; emphasis added)

Radosh attributed to Togliatti *the very views that Togliatti cites in order to strongly oppose them!*

Again, Radosh writes:

While publicly advocating attempts at cooperation with opposition anarchists, Togliatti noted that their leaders were "scum, closely tied to Caballero," and had to be fought via "large-scale action from below." (371)

It is clear from the context of p. 390 -- see the emphasis in the quotation above -- that the "large-scale action from below" that Togliatti hoped for was action by the "anarchist masses," as he stated in the passage quoted above, which alone can lead to "differentiation of their leaders." In other words, Togliatti proposed relying on a *democratic* plan -- *winning over* the anarchist masses to replace or repudiate their own leadership. Communist authors show appreciation for the political instincts of the anarchist rank-and-file many times in these documents; it is the anarchist *leadership* they see as the stumbling blocks to effective unity against Franco.

In addition to Togliatti, another Soviet adviser, Antonov-Ovseenko comes across very well in these documents. Radosh seriously distorts Document 22. Antonov-Ovseenko wrote:

The PSUC repeatedly proposed to the government that weapons at the rear [i.e. in areas not involved in battle] be seized and put at the disposal of the government. (p. 80)

Radosh calls this "Communist attempts to seize all the weapons at the rear (and thus to disarm the anarchists)" (p. 71). In reality, the PSUC (the Unified Socialist Party) -- *not* just the communists, who were only a part of the PSUC -- was proposing that *armed men should be at the front* fighting the war, and that arms were needed at the front, not in the rear. Orwell himself complains time and again about the obsolete, broken, and useless arms available to his own unit at the front, and that even these arms were in short supply. If, as Radosh suggests here, the armed anarchists were all in the rear, what were they

doing there? If armed *communists* had been "all in the rear," would Radosh not think this sinister?

In Document 21 Antonov-Ovseenko quotes an informant, "X," who told him that the anarchists were carrying out mass executions in Catalonia and that they had executed 40 priests.

told me . . . [t]hree days ago, the government seriously clashed with the anarchists: the CNT seized a priest. . . . The priest pointed out another 101 members of his order who had hidden themselves in different places. They [the anarchists] agreed to free all 102 men for three hundred thousand francs. *All 102 appeared, but when the money had been handed over, the anarchists shot forty of them.* (76-7; emphasis added).

Radosh does not condemn the anarchists at this point for shooting the priests. Nor does he suggest that this charge against the anarchists is false (p. 71). Imagine if the communists had been executing up to 50 people a day, as "X" told Antonov-Ovseenko -- would Radosh have let this pass without criticism? Rather, such a document would have been featured as a major find, one of the most important documents in the book. Yet when anarchists are alleged to be committing mass murder, and Communists are opposed to it, Radosh scarcely mentions the matter, and certainly does not praise the Communists for stopping such massacres. This illustrates one of the central weaknesses in Radosh's commentary: he is, in fact, not much interested in these documents except insofar as they can be used to show the communists as "bad."

A strongly positive review of the Radosh book in *First Things* states baldly: "Although leftist atrocities against the Church, including the execution of thousands of nuns and priests, were widespread, they are nowhere mentioned in these documents." In his rush to provide Radosh with another positive review, this anonymous reviewer in a right-wing, "pro-religion" journal clearly never read even Radosh's own commentary, much less the documents themselves.

## Document 46

This is a report by Dimitrov, head of the Comintern, to Marshal Voroshilov. Radosh makes many false statements about the contents of this 14-page report. For example, Radosh states that "the writer [of the report] came to the stunning conclusion that the war and revolution "cannot end successfully if the Communist party does not take power into its own hands." (212). In fact, Dimitrov *explicitly refuses to endorse* the idea that the only way to victory is if the Communist party takes power.

The influence of the party is growing more and more among the masses, and chiefly among the soldiers; the conviction is growing among them that the war and the popular revolution cannot end successfully if the Communist party does not take power into its own hands. *Who knows, that idea may indeed be correct.* (232; emphasis added)

Arnold Beichman's review makes the same inaccurate statement: "It is sad to read these Soviet archives and read the words of a Soviet agent to the Comintern's Georgi Dimitrov: 'The war cannot end successfully if the Communist Party does not take power in its own hands.'"

In fact, this is a very interesting statement, especially coming from Dimitrov, famous since the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 for championing the concept of the Communist International's abandoning its independent advocacy of socialist revolution in order to make possible "united fronts" with all anti-fascist parties, as in Spain. The Spanish Communists, with the support of the Comintern, were struggling hard to make the United Front in Spain work. Here Dimitrov shows that he himself has doubts about it. The documents published in this volume could indeed provide much evidence for an argument that it was precisely the insistence on a United Front with the Spanish socialists and Anarchists that doomed the Republic. A competent commentary should have discussed this issue.

### **Document 70**

This long report by General Walter (a Polish communist general whose real name was Karol Svershevsky) is of special interest since it includes the longest discussion of the International Brigades among the documents in this volume. These pages give Radosh a chance to slander not only the Soviets, but the members of the International Brigades as well, and he tries his best to do so by ignoring positive statements made about the Brigadistas in the documents at hand, while emphasizing the criticisms made about some of them.

Radosh begins with the following statement:

By early 1938, the international units were important to the Soviets and the Comintern only as a means of scoring points in the propaganda war and as bargaining chips in negotiations with the other great powers. (431)

Radosh continues immediately with the words, "Nowhere is this more clearly shown than in the series of documents that follow." However, nowhere in these documents is the statement above documented in the least.

Walter shows admirable frankness in discussing both strengths and weaknesses within the Brigades. Radosh ignores the strengths and distorts Walter's words about the weaknesses.

For example, Radosh generalizes Walter's criticism of *some* Brigadistas, that they thought themselves superior to the Spanish, and implies Walter said it was true of *all* Brigadistas. (431)

In Sverchevsky's words, they [the international soldiers] believed they had come to Spain to save it from the fascists. This viewpoint had led directly



to their superior attitude toward the Spanish, whom they treated like second-class citizens. (431)

In reality, Walter's remark is a general one, critical of an ideological attitude to be found in the Brigades (438). The words "second-class citizens" are never used. Rather, Walter's incisive political criticism is directed towards a shallow understanding of internationalism among many Brigadistas, as illustrated in the following passage:

It seems to me that the fundamental reason for, and primary source of, our troubles lies, first and foremost, in a deeply rooted conviction which stubbornly refuses to die that we, the internationalists, are only "helping," that we "save" and "are saving" Spain, which, they say, without us would not have escaped the fate of Abyssinia. This harmful theory prevents the German and Italian comrades from seeing the silhouettes of "Junkers" and "Fiats" in the fascist air force; they forget that here, on Spanish soil, they are fighting with arms in hand, that is, in the most effective and revolutionary way, first and foremost against their own enemy, which has already oppressed their own countries and peoples for many years. French "volunteers" do not always notice the direct connection between Franco, De la Roque, and Doriot; they forget . . . that their vital interests lie in preventing a fascist sentinel from looming on the last border, the Pyrenees. The Poles do not completely comprehend that every one of their victories here is a direct blow against the Pilsudski gang, which has turned their country into a prison for the people. . . . (438)

Walter is unsparingly frank in his criticisms of the shortcomings of the Brigades. His analysis appears to be a model of honest criticism, including much criticism of the performance of communists. But Walter's report also contains the highest praise for the Brigades (for example, see the first three paragraphs, p. 436). Typically, Radosh's commentary is utterly one-sided; he mentions many of Walter's critical comments, but *not a single one* of the positive ones.

In his extremely positive review, Schwartz is more shameless yet in quoting some of Walter's frank criticisms of the political problems in the Brigades as though they were characteristic. Radosh and Schwartz are of the same kidney; see Radosh's praise of Schwartz on p. xxv.

Schwartz: "Anti-Semitism was a serious problem among these "progressive" fighters."

Document 70: "It is true that even then there were more than enough petty squabbling and strong antagonisms in the international units. The francophobia was most transparently obvious . . . anti-Semitism flourished (and indeed it still has not been completely extinguished). . . . (448)

Schwartz: "Above all, the International Brigades possessed transport, food, and other supplies far in excess of their Spanish counterparts, with whom they resolutely refused to 'share their wealth.'"

Document 70: "The English and American soldiers not long ago were smoking 'Lucky Strikes,' not paying attention to the Spanish fighters next to them, who had spent days looking for a few shreds of tobacco. The internationalists receive frequent packages from home but are very rarely willing to share them with their Spanish comrades." (453)

Schwartz: "International Brigade *officers* accounted exactly for the numbers of foreigners killed and wounded in battle, but 'never knew of the casualties of the Spanish personnel.'" [emphasis added]

Document 70: "Richard, the commander of the 11th Brigade, reporting on the casualties suffered by the brigade at Brunete and Saragossa, always gave the exact number of dead and wounded and frequently even the names of the internationalists. But he never knew the casualties of the Spanish personnel." (454)

In this case, Schwartz transformed the behavior of *one* commander, in *one* battle -- behavior that the Communist general Walter was holding up for criticism -- as typical of "International Brigade officers" generally. (Schwartz gives no page numbers, so verifying his dishonest quotations is a tedious job.)

Neither Radosh nor Schwartz put Walter's criticisms of the Brigades into context. But Walter does. In addition to high praise for the International Brigades' heroism and importance in the war (see pp. 436 and 459) Walter explains the difficult problems of overcoming national chauvinism, racism and distrust among nationalities:

The International Brigades and units were created literally within the course of one or two days from those volunteers who were on hand at the time . . . there were subunits that contains dozens of nationalities all of these were people who were absolutely unacquainted, not accustomed to one another, and right off found themselves in a battle. If you add to this the extremely acute shortage of political workers, the lack of qualified military cadres, and a whole number of other needs, then the weaknesses and the solution to this problem (adequate at that time) are not surprising. (448)

Schwartz: "According to Walter, the International Brigades, inspired by slogans of worldwide unity against Fascism, were plagued by a 'petty, disgusting, foul squabble about the superiority of one nationality over another. . . . Everyone was superior to the French, but even they were superior to the Spanish, who were receiving our aid and allowing us to fight against our own national and class enemies on their soil.'"

*Immediately preceding the passage quoted by Schwartz (449) occurs the following passage (Document 70):*

The great, very exalted, and revolutionary objective, armed struggle with fascism, united everyone, and for its sake Germans, Italians, Poles, Jews, and representatives of the world's numerous nationalities, including blacks, Japanese, and Chinese, had to agree among themselves, found a common language, suffered the same adversities, sacrificed their lives, died heroes, and were filled with the very same hatred for the common enemy.

But at the very same time as the volunteers were unifying, this petty, disgusting, foul squabble about the superiority of one nationality over another was going on. . . ." (448-9)

At a time when every army in the world *except* communist-led armies were organized along *officially* racist lines (and some, like the Israeli army, are officially racist even today), this struggle for internationalism inspired millions around the world. Yet the venomous Schwartz sees the racist attitudes among Brigadistas as "the most shocking element of the picture, *especially for those who for sixty years have witnessed the Lincoln veterans preening themselves for their antifascist virtue*" (emphasis added). The International Brigades set a standard for anti-racism and internationalism that has never been equaled before or since. Schwartz's insult is simply a measure of his contempt for such values.

### **Conclusion: Why Lie If You Have the Truth On Your Side?**

The flagrant inadequacy of Radosh's discussion of these very important and fascinating documents itself would fatally mar any work with scholarly pretensions. But there is a deeper problem with Radosh's work. It is not merely that Radosh fails to comment accurately on the documents he publishes (Habeck did most of the translations; Sevostianov did the archival work in Moscow). More than that: Radosh actually lies, time and again, about the contents of documents which readers can study themselves a few pages after his commentary.

Radosh is one of a small number of former Communist Party members who, once they realized that the Soviet-led world Communist movement no longer championed an egalitarian, non-exploitative world and was not the answer to human liberation, simply decided that the other side must, therefore, have been right all along and became uncritical supporters of American capitalism and imperialism. Anyone familiar with Radosh's history -- any reader of his autobiography, *Commies* and the many reviews of it -- might expect to find a lot of anti-communist prejudice -- for example, giving a document the most anti-communist possible interpretation whenever there was any ambiguity.

But even a wary reader would also expect at least a couple of real "revelations" of communist deviousness, dishonesty, double-dealing, some kind of "betrayal" -- *something* that would at least partially substantiate the claims of Radosh, and of those who reviewed his book positively. Even the wary reader would be unprepared for the extent of Radosh's dishonesty. Not a single of Radosh's allegations of Comintern or Soviet treachery is born out by the documents he himself publishes and comments on.

Is Radosh deliberately lying about the documents on which he's commenting? Is he hoping that his only readers will be like-mindedly anti-communist drones that will simply take his word at face value? Or that those who notice his mendacity will be ignored or marginalized? Some of the distortions in the commentary are so blatant that one cannot account for them in any other way.

Yet I think that dishonesty and incompetence cannot provide the whole answer. On a deeper level, Radosh's anti-communism, and specifically his allegiance to the demonization of Stalin, seems to produce a kind of tunnel vision that imposes a systematic distortion on everything he sees or reads.

Radosh mentions the name of Stalin dozens of times, although none of his documents were written by Stalin or are under his name, and only a few were sent to him. For Radosh, the word "Stalin" no longer denotes an individual, but is a synecdochal signifier for -- depending on the circumstance -- the Comintern, the Soviet political leadership, or even any Communist, anywhere. Like a kind of mirror-image of the "cult of personality" that existed from about 1930 until Stalin's death in 1953, Radosh too attributes all the initiative and agency of all communists to Stalin alone. A more radical reductionism can scarcely be imagined, and is all the more noteworthy since Radosh seems entirely oblivious to his own practice here. It never occurs to him to justify it theoretically, historically, or in any way at all.

This ideological distortion is more serious because more pervasive. Many who think of themselves as "liberal" or even "left" share with Radosh a kind of reflexive assumption that, whenever "Stalin" -- read, the Comintern -- *seems* to have been acting according to its professed motives of supporting the exploited and oppressed around the world, it must really have been acting out of selfish motives which, if not obvious, are simply cleverly disguised.<sup>4</sup>

I hope that readers of this review will be inspired to read Radosh's book and see for themselves. In view, however, of the inaccurate and misleading nature of Radosh's commentary there is only one way to read this book:

- First, ignore Radosh's commentary entirely. Read the documents themselves, and only them, very carefully.
- Only after doing that should you read Radosh's commentary. But every time Radosh makes any kind of assertion about any document, go to that document, find the relevant passage, and note what the document really says.

Often this is not easy to do. Radosh does not include page numbers to the passages of the documents when he gives his comments or summaries. Often he will write things like "As we have seen . . ." ( p. 502); "Nowhere is this more clearly shown than in the series of documents that follow . . ." (p. 431); "The documentary evidence, as we have shown . . ." (p. 372). Here the job of finding the passage in question can take quite a long time. It's always worth taking the time, though, because what one usually discovers is that that NO previous document has shown anything of the kind.

Radosh reminds us that one of the main stumbling blocks for Marxists is the figure of Stalin. Stalin has been demonized -- by Trotsky and those who have relied on Trotsky; by some Soviet émigrés, also imitators of Trotsky, in the main; and by Khrushchev and those who have been accustomed to believe that Khrushchev's so-called "revelations" about Stalin were true. As Robert Thurston has written, the demonized "Stalin" is "a powerful cultural construct in scholarship, film, popular works, etc. The difficulty is to try to get past that construction as best we can." (Thurston, 2000). Radosh has not even tried.

As Roger Pethybridge, a well-known British Sovietologist, commented long ago:

If one considers all the well-known biographies of Stalin, a common feature emerges: the volumes are a quite accurate reflection of biographical method current at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, when historical biographies dwelt on so-called "good" and "bad" kings. The personality who reigned appeared to dominate not only the political but the social and economic life of his kingdom, so that by a sneeze or a yawn he could magically change the whole socioeconomic pattern of his reign. This method of historical biography has long been discounted in the treatment of authoritarian rule in earlier history. It has also been discarded with regard to the study of Nazi Germany. Unfortunately, it still remains as a specter from the past in the study of Soviet personalities in high politics. (Pethybridge, 1976).

Since the end of the Soviet Union, many formerly secret Comintern and Bolshevik documents have been published, with more coming out all the time. Like the Comintern documents in Radosh's book, most of them contradict the widely-propagated, and widely-believed, horror stories about the history of the Communist movement during the Stalin years.<sup>5</sup>

It's up to us all of us who recognize the desperate need for a truly classless, egalitarian society to learn from the successes and failures of our predecessors, including, especially, the Bolsheviks during the time of Stalin's leadership. But in order to do this, we must first convince ourselves that we do not already know these things.

For example, many of the Comintern documents in this collection support the suggestion made by some on the Left that the United Front Against Fascism was doomed from the outset, even as a tactic in fighting fascism.<sup>6</sup> For no matter how devotedly the

communists supported only bourgeois democratic goals, many capitalist forces refused to co-operate with them, in effect preferring to risk a fascist victory rather than take their chances in a liberal capitalist state with a strongly organized working class and peasantry under communist leadership. The subsequent fate of the communist parties of Western Europe and the USA after World War II, who were viciously attacked by the capitalists despite their adherence to a reform-oriented, non-revolutionary program, further suggests that the united front strategy was wishful thinking.

That is, we have to be ready and willing to question the Cold-War, Trotskyist, and Khrushchevite versions of this history, and "do it all again," so we can actually begin to understand what really happened.<sup>7</sup>

If that's what we're about -- and I think we should be -- then Radosh's book can help us, by reminding us not to be like him.

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### Notes

1 There is absolutely no question that Radosh is lying in some places -- e.g., in Document 62 where, as I discuss in the text, he attributes to Togliatti the views that, in the document itself, which any reader can study a few pages later, Togliatti explicitly criticizes. Radosh does this kind of thing many times.

The book is also an example of incompetence. Radosh simply does a poor job at what a commentator should do: summarizing the documents, isolating the most important aspects of them, putting them into an overall historical context, and so on.

These kinds of faults should have been red flags to any editor. But there is a long history of anti-communist works getting published even though filled with errors that would doom any other kind of research.

The uncritical praise of so many reviewers suggests that one purpose of Radosh's book is to influence those who will not read it carefully. Perhaps someone made the estimation that few people will read such a book anyway, and most of those who do will probably rely on the commentary, rather than study the documents themselves. Again, this is no excuse for the kind of mendacity displayed in *Spain Betrayed*, but rather a grasping after some kind of explanation for so poor a work.

Finally, the book is a failure. Radosh had boasted for years -- in some ways, since the '80s, when he began publishing stuff about the Spanish Civil War, but explicitly since he began working on this book -- that it would "prove" the USSR ("Stalin") betrayed Spain. In the event it not only fails to "prove" any betrayal; it fails to come up with a single example of anything devious, dishonest, anything at all to make the communist side or the USSR specifically look bad.

2 Radosh betrays his ignorance of Soviet history. "Purge trials" is a term no longer used even by anti-communist Sovietologists. The *chistki*, or "purges," were expulsion of Communist Party members for many reasons, most commonly drunkenness, neglect of duty, etc., though sometimes for political deviations. They were completely separate from

the three famous Moscow Trials of 1936-8, of persons who confessed to plotting to overthrow the Soviet government. The best, and classic discussion of this is J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the great purges: the Soviet Communist Party reconsidered, 1933-1938*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

3 See the excellent typology of anti-communist rhetoric in James R. Prickett, "Anti-Communism and Labor History," *Industrial Relations* 13 (October, 1974), 219-227."

4 For example, Stalin stated that "The cause of Spain is the cause of all humanity." The USSR sent huge amounts of aid, in materiel and men, to the Republic both itself and through the Comintern, much of which was not, in fact, repaid. Yet Cary Nelson, a staunch supporter of the American veterans of the Spanish Civil War and a prominent left-liberal, still feels compelled to explain Soviet aid in this way: "Stalin's motivations, no doubt, were pragmatic. He probably hoped, for example, to use an alliance to help the Spanish Republic as a way of building a general antifascist alliance with the Western democracies." ("The Spanish Civil War: An Overview," accessed at <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/scw/overview.htm> on 20 February 2003). "Pragmatic" in this context explains nothing; the Soviets knew very well that the antifascist alliance they aimed at was *jeopardized* by their aid to the Republic, but did it anyway. For Nelson, the International Brigade volunteers can, and did, have idealistic motives, but Stalin cannot, even though the whole effort could hardly have taken place without his strong support at every step.

5 For example, the interrogations and confessions by such major figures as NKVD chief Genrikh Yagoda and Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky have been published, making it clear that the accusations leveled against them by the Soviet government in the late '30s were substantially accurate. There is also some additional evidence of Leon Trotsky's contacts with oppositionists in the USSR who were plotting the overthrow of the government, as well as the first evidence of Trotsky's contact with the Japanese fascist government, both central claims of the Communist movement in the '30s but both strongly denied by Trotsky's followers.

6 See, for example, "Lessons of People's War in Spain 1936-1939," *Progressive Labor*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Oct.-Nov. 1974), 106-116, cited at [http://www.plp.org/pl\\_magazine/pws.html](http://www.plp.org/pl_magazine/pws.html) (February 22, 2003). For more on a left critique of the consequences of the Popular Front strategy upon the world communist movement, see "Road to Revolution III: The Continuing Struggle Against Revisionism" (1970), at [http://www.plp.org/pl\\_magazine/r3.html#RTFToC5](http://www.plp.org/pl_magazine/r3.html#RTFToC5).

7 J. Arch Getty, the dean of the younger generations of American historians of the USSR, is quoted by the prominent (and very anti-communist) Russian historian Yuri Zhukov as having said Soviet history is poisoned by Cold War "propaganda," and has to be done all over again. See Aleksandr Sabov, "*Zhupel Stalina*" ("Stalin's Boogeyman"), *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Nov. 5, 2001.