

### **SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY**

On June 8 Santiago Carrillo created a major crisis in the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) by resigning as general secretary of the party, a post he had held for nearly 20 years. The subsequent withdrawal of his resignation has not ended the crisis within the Communist Party, which has merely been postponed until after the forthcoming general election. What follows is a description of the events leading up to and during the crisis of early June.

In May the PCE suffered very poor results in regional elections in Andalusia despite a

high turnout, although the Left as a whole, including the Socialist Party, achieved an overall majority. The Communist vote was cut to 8%, almost half the figure for previous general and municipal elections, in an area where Communist support was considered to be extremely solid and durable.

This setback followed a series of crises which had afflicted the party since its 10th Congress in July 1981. The Congress had led to the breaking away of a section of the party in the Basque region to form a new party with the Basque nationalist Ezkadiko Eskerra (the breakaway section consisted of 'renovators', a term used to describe party activists who believe that internal party democracy should be reformed in accordance with their idea of Eurocommunism). Other problems followed the Congress: the breakaway of Catalan 'pro-Soviet' militants to form a new party; the expulsion of a number of Central Committee members and leading Madrid local councillors, all of them 'renovators'; and the expulsion of a number of leading party members in various provinces. The Andalusian electoral setback revealed that the crisis in the party which these events reflected had not ended.

In an atmosphere of growing criticism, a meeting of the party's Central Committee was called for June 8 to assess the election results. Carrillo, however, intervened by calling an Executive Committee meeting for the previous day which was to last until the Thursday, thereby postponing the Central Committee meeting until June 11.

In the course of the Executive Committee meeting Carrillo presented an analysis of the Andalusian result which failed to satisfy a number of committee members. Marcelino Camacho, general secretary of the Workers Commissions (the largest of the two main trade union confederations), proposed that Carrillo should stand down from the post of general secretary and become President of the party, and that Dolores Ibarruri (La Pasionaria) should become Honorary President. And he proposed Nicolas Sartorius, then one of the party's two vice-secretaries, as general secretary. Sartorius rejected the proposal, but insisted that Carrillo's analysis of the election results, which concentrated exclusively on external political factors, should lay far greater emphasis on the negative impact of the internal character of the PCE which, he argued, did not conform to the image of a Eurocommunist party.

In the face of these criticisms, Carrillo presented his resignation, affirming his intention of abandoning the leadership of the party. Sartorius and Camacho also presented their resignations from the posts they occupied on the Executive Committee.

Camacho had for some time expressed his intention of resigning from the Executive, in order to devote all his time to the Workers Commissions and to reinforce its independence from the Communist Party. Sartorius' resignation was clearly related to the fact that his position of proposing greater internal democracy in the party, and his attempts to bring back those who had been expelled or had left the party during the crisis of the previous year, was in a minority among the leadership.

The Executive Committee, however, refused to accept any of the resignations, referring the whole question to the Central Committee which commenced its meeting on Friday June 11.

After one day's session in which both Sartorius and Camacho maintained their criticism of the leadership and the internal functioning of the party, Camacho continued to request Carrillo's resignation, and Carrillo himself repeated his intention of resigning, saying he would impose his own conditions before he would reconsider.

In an atmosphere of great tension the Central Committee was suspended in the evening to allow a meeting of the Executive which neither Carrillo, Camacho nor Sartorius attended. The Executive produced a resolution reflecting Carrillo's conditions for withdrawing his resignation for debate by the Central Committee the following day which proposed:

\* Both Carrillo and Sartorius should withdraw their resignations.

\* A reaffirmation of the policies agreed by the 10th Congress (rejection of factions in the party, backing for a Eurocommunist strategy, and for a policy of democratic collaboration as opposed to political bipolarisation).

\* Open door to all those who had left the party.

\* The convening of a party conference on trade union work and other policies.

In the course of the Central Committee debate which followed, a majority of delegates supported Carrillo, although it was also considered that Sartorius should remain as vice-secretary. Sartorius and Camacho came under severe attack, Carrillo himself accusing them of trying to assume the leadership of discontented groups within the party. Sartorius responded by claiming that his resignation arose from his disagreement with the methods of work and daily practice of the general secretary and his present team. He would continue to defend his ideas and positions but could not remain in the leadership of the party, he said.

After 34 hours of discussion, a new proposal was finally adopted in the small hours

of Saturday by 64 votes to 4, with 12 abstentions. The resolution contained the proposals originally made by the Executive Committee, including a request to Carrillo and Sartorius to withdraw their resignations. It also proposed the calling of a further meeting of the Central Committee, at which suggestions for the reinforcing of the leadership should be considered, and discussion and preparation for an imminent general election campaign. And it contained a proposal to set up a commission composed of members of the PCE and of the party in Andalusia in order to analyse in greater depth the Andalusian election results. Camacho's resignation was accepted in order to allow him, as was his own expressed desire, to devote all his time to union work.

Carrillo, after the result, explained his decision to withdraw his resignation as an effort to end the crisis in the party which, he maintained, he had no right to reopen in such a delicate political moment, practically on the brink of general elections. However, he also expressed certain dismay at the 'votes of quality' who had abstained, obviously referring to Sartorius and Camacho. He also stated that he was moved to this decision by the firm intention expressed by the Executive Committee to present their resignation *en bloc*, if he persisted in presenting his.

The Executive Committee resolution passed obviously has not satisfied Camacho and other members of the Workers Commissions (the rest of the abstainers) nor did it please Sartorius, who did not receive the support he might have expected from, for example, members of the Catalan leadership who share his views on the party, but who are indebted to Carrillo's aid in restoring them to the leadership of the Communist Party in Catalonia, from which they had been removed by the pro-soviet section of the party.

The whole crisis has received great attention in the Spanish press, radio and television, and has produced many statements from former members of the party of all tendencies expressing disappointment at the outcome. The 'renovators' regard the policy of 'open doors' as false and hypocritical, claiming that the party under present conditions will continue to lose votes in the coming general elections as well as members.

It is generally accepted that the crisis has not been closed, but rather postponed until after the coming elections.

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## ERRATUM

Simon Barrow's name was inadvertently omitted from 'Arms Trade' in the Focus section of last month's *Marxism Today*.