

SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY

The formation in January of a new Spanish 'Communist Party' followed closely on the heels of a deeply-divided Congress of the long-established Communist Party of Spain (PCE) held last December. The PCE Congress had been preceded by sharp internal struggles which both contributed to and were exacerbated by heavy losses in membership and severe electoral setbacks.

In considering the problems of Spanish communists it is well to remember that Franco held power longer than Hitler and Mussolini put together. He was never 'defeated' — he died in his bed only about eight years ago; and reaction is still strong in Spain. When the PCE emerged into legality — after nearly 40 years underground — its record in the struggle against fascism ensured it a considerable following. Membership soared (to over 200,000 at one point) and numbers of Communists were elected to Parliament and to local assemblies.

Why has membership since dropped to less than 90,000 and why did the Party suffer such serious setbacks in the elections of October 1982? The political report to Congress from the retiring general secretary, Gerardo Iglesias, suggested a number of reasons, two of which seem particularly important. Iglesias argued that the Party had been too much involved in working inside the 'institutions' (eg, parliamentary manoeuvring, presumably) at the expense of mass work and the development of mass struggle. This had led to a growing separation of the Party from the masses, as well as to a rift between the Party leadership and the activists.

The other major reason advanced for the setbacks was the conflict between the Party's broad, 'open' political line (Carillo, the previous general secretary, had developed 'Eurocommunist' ideas to an extent that earned him sharp criticism from Soviet communists) and its organisation, structure and style of work, which still showed characteristics carried over from the period of illegality. (During Carillo's period as general secretary many members who had argued for a democratic 'renovation' of the Party's organisation and style of work had either been expelled or had resigned). The report argued that the main weakness had been the 'demobilisation' of the Party's

activists as a result of administrative methods of leadership replacing mass work. The Party had 'consumed itself by the administrative treatment of differences.

Following the election defeats of October 1982, Carillo resigned as general secretary and, with his support, Iglesias — 34 years old, an ex-miner from Asturias — was elected to the position. Yet shortly after, Carillo emerged as a bitter critic of the leadership, and made himself a spokesman at Congress for the 'opposition'. In his speech to Congress he claimed to still hold to the political positions he had advocated in the past; but, comparing those positions with the views he expressed at Congress, one could not help feeling that he had made, if not a U-turn, at least an S-bend!

Debate at Congress ranged over a wide field but there appeared to be three key issues.

First there was controversy — as in so many Communist Parties — over the Party's internationalist stance. Not only the speeches at Congress, but also the warm reception given to foreign fraternal delegates, showed how deeply delegates were concerned to maintain their links with the world communist movement. Whether or not those links were compatible with the rather independent and critical position the PCE has taken at times was a matter of controversy.

Secondly, there were sharp differences over the attitude to be taken to the Socialist government. Both leadership and 'opposition' agreed that the Government was pursuing right-wing policies. Carillo and other critics of the leadership argued for a sharp line of making the PCE a 'radical opposition' to the Government. The leadership argued that this would isolate the Party from masses of workers and from a growing 'left' movement within the Socialist Party itself. The Party's role should be to present positive alternatives to government policies and seek to build broad alliances in struggle for those policies. The extreme Right was still the principal enemy.

Finally, there was intense controversy over the Party itself — over what sort of Party it should aim to be. The leadership argued for a very 'broad' approach that could win back to the Party thousands who had left it, and make new recruits, on no other terms than acceptance of the decisions of Congress. Critics argued that what was proposed meant a move away from a proletarian party based on Marxism-Leninism. Particularly controversy was aroused by Iglesias' argument that, in the conditions of Spain, a mass

party must be a 'lay' party, not a 'doctrinal' party — 'neither faith nor atheism are a motive for militancy'; the Party, and Marxism, could only be enriched by the admission of a wide range of cultural attitudes and traditions.

In the event the leadership won the vote — but only just. A wide-ranging political report had to be voted for or against on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis with no amendment possible (an arrangement which seems bound to maximise opposition). It was carried by 386 votes to 376 against, with 25 abstentions. The leadership did rather better on some subsequent votes on particular issues of policy, and the central Committee election gave Iglesias and the retiring leadership a clear majority of 2 or 3 to 1 over Carillo and other critics.

Deep as were the divisions at Congress, what was also clear was the genuine emotional feeling of the great majority of delegates for party unity. How many of them — and how many of the members they represented — would join the new party it is impossible to say. Some — Carillo, for example — have been so much associated with 'Eurocommunism' that it is difficult to conceive of them joining, or being accepted into, a new party with a very different sense of political direction. I think, too, that the position of Dolores Ibarruri ('La Pasionaria') may be of some influence. Now well into her 80s, she sat on the platform throughout Congress and was greeted with unmistakable warmth, love and respect by the whole Congress. More than any other personality, she symbolises the continuity of the Party from its historic struggles of the 30s through to the present day. On all major issues she voted with Iglesias and the leadership majority; and following the Central Committee election she was unanimously elected party president (Iglesias was re-elected general secretary but not unanimously).

According to press reports, a delegation from the Soviet Communist Party was present at the foundation meeting in January of the new party, which has, it seems, declared war on 'Eurocommunism' in the name of 'Marxism-Leninism'. A delegation from the CPSU had also been present at the PCE Congress in December; it was very warmly received and, in common with the many other foreign delegations, a message of greetings was published in *Mundo Obrero*. One can understand why the PCE leadership should feel that CPSU representation at the foundation meeting of a rival body was hardly a fraternal act!

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