

Ronald Radosh Sevostianov, Mary R. Habeck, eds. Grigory. *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001. xxx + 537 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-08981-3.



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Published on H-Diplo (March, 2002)

Soviet Intervention in the Spanish Civil War:
Review Article

[The Spanish language uses diacritical marks. US-ASCII will not display them. Some words, therefore, are written incompletely in this review]

This collection is actually two books wrapped in a single cover: a book of Soviet documents presumably chosen in Moscow by Grigory Sevostianov and mostly translated by Mary Habeck. Then the Soviet intervention in Spain is narrated and interpreted by the well-known American historian Ronald Radosh. *Spain Betrayed* is a recent addition to the continuing Yale series, "Annals of Communism," edited with the cooperation of Russian scholars in Moscow. Professional historians concentrating on documents should consider postponing their reading of the lengthy (about 110 pages) introductory sections of *Spain Betrayed* until after they have read the eighty-one important Soviet documents in chronological order.

Soviet Minister of Defense Klement Voroshilov, in Moscow, handled many of the incoming military messages from Spain, as more than a third of

the eighty-one published documents were addressed to him. Stalin was sent at least ten. Stalin, the real head of the Soviet Union, made one direct order to the Spanish government, on the conservative side. After the bombing of the pocket battleship *Deutschland* on 29 May 1937 (which enraged Hitler), Stalin said that the Spanish Republican air force should not bomb German or Italian vessels. (Doc 55.)

From reading Radosh's inadequate table of contents, it is not easy to discover casually a coherent picture of what the Soviets knew and were saying during the civil war. Archival information tends to get buried in the footnotes and essays scattered throughout the book, and there is no bibliography.

Examining the notes, one can list about sixty books and articles, written mostly by Americans and British. A notable exception is the Spanish edition of the memoirs of Francisco Largo Caballero, Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic September 1936 to May 1937. "Abbreviations and Acronyms" lists perhaps three-quarters of the

terms that an archivist would have included for the benefit of professional historians.

Another problem with the editing and for the editors is that foreign Communists in Spain used many pseudonyms. Most of these are helpfully translated into real names in the index and in the lengthy editorial essays. As it stands now, the reader is forced to consult the documents, five major essays, the index and footnotes in zig-zag fashion over the course of about 400 pages of documents. The reader can get confused, for example, about "Berzin." He is identified on p. 22 as leader of the Soviet military advisers in Spain, and former head in Moscow of the GRU, Soviet Military Intelligence. He was also known as "Grishin" and "Donizetti" and "Old Man." His real name, Peteris, is not listed in the index. The editors could have provided a clear list of pseudonyms. Anybody not already familiar with names from the Spanish Civil War could give up in frustration. In short, to say that this book is "a hard read" would be to understate the problem.

This documentary collection had a number of distinguished Soviet experts on its editorial board, including eighteen Americans and twelve Russians, but apparently lacked somebody like George Kent with experience editing the better-organized State Department, Foreign Office, and Nazi Foreign Ministry documents. Those document volumes dealing with the Spanish Civil War, already published in the 1950s and 1970s, allow the research historian to discover facts from the 1936-1939 archives in chronological order, because clear tables of documents are included.

Radosh's index is fairly good, but with more work a better product would have been produced. Some names are not as well indexed as others. For example, the citations to GRU chief in Moscow Uritsky are incomplete. Several Anglo-Americans are ignored. Document 76 by Sverchevsky ("Gen. Walter") mentions Abraham Lincoln Brigade member Robert Merriman, claiming he was captured at Batea (p. 484), but Merriman is not in-

dexed. Neither is English Communist party leader Harry Pollitt or Captain Watkins, on the same page.

Historians interested in the Spanish Civil War have seven questions about the role of the Spanish Communist Party and the Soviet officials in Spain:

(1) The growth of the membership of the Spanish Party at the expense of liberals, anarchists and socialists from July 1936 to sometime in mid 1938; (2) The division among the Spanish Socialists; (3) Whether the Spanish Republic ever became a satellite; (4) Why the Republic lost, (5) yet lasted as long as it did; (6) What the Spanish Communists thought about "revolution," as compared to socialist, anarchist, and Trotskyist conceptions of "revolution"; (7) What destroyed, as the war ground on, the morale of the Spanish left.

Soviet agents in Spain in the Comintern, the GRU, and Foreign Ministry wrote some long dispatches. Frightened of a purge, they put in a line to satisfy every tendency. After all the twists and turns, the line that best describes Soviet policy is the slogan, "Win the war, and this means the revolution too" as quoted by the Spanish Communist, Pedro Checa (Doc 63, p.403.). There is ample room for others to mine the eighty-one documents for facts and to interpret them differently from Checa or from Radosh.

One point clarified is the importance of the International Brigades (IB) in upholding a military balance of power. The Soviet documents back up the generally well-known story that Brigade members saved Madrid in November 1936, and played a big role at Guadalajara (March 1937). But previous historians have exaggerated the power of the Brigades and their continued presence as a potential "pretorian guard" on into 1938. "Gen. Walter" in Doc. 70 shows that by 14 January 1938, the Spanish Popular Army had 200 Spanish brigades compared to five International Brigades.

The fighting effectiveness and number of the foreign volunteers on the side of the Republic de-

clined by 1938. The Comintern had recruited 31,369 foreigners for the International Brigades as of 30 April 1938 (Doc. 73). This key document shows 18,714 had moved through the IB base at Albacete by April 1937, and thereafter lists recruits and replacements on a monthly basis. The total figure 31,000 was used when withdrawal of the remaining 10,000 Brigade members (5,000 at the front) was discussed in Moscow in September 1938 (Doc. 74.) The IB had 15,992 troops available on 31 March 1938 (Doc.73). The 31,400 compares with about 16,500-18,000 Germans.[2] The Legion Condor stationed about 4,500-5,000 at the fronts at any one time. Mussolini dispatched about 74,300 men in Spain from August 1936 to the end of the war, with 48,000 in the "Volunteer Corps" (CTV) as of March 1937.[3] About 6,000 Brigaders died (Doc.75) compared to 4,000 Italians, and 320 Germans. Man for man the German military was the most efficient foreign unit in Spain, and the Brigade members shed the most blood.

The longest (seventy-three printed pages) and most colorful document in this collection is Doc. 60. "General Emilio Kleber," real name Manfred Stern, was a Soviet Commissar sent by the Moscow Politburo. By timely action, the internationals he commanded helped save Madrid from Franco in November 1936, after Spanish Government leaders had left the capital. Kleber's report is dated 14 December 1937, which was probably when he began composing it, after his recall from Spain. However, it apparently included diary material written at Spanish fronts. Internal evidence in the document on p. 363 indicates he may still have been writing after March 1938, because he mentions the *Anschluss* and the Sudetenland problem. He was in Spain by 15 September 1936, present at the fall of Toledo and a field commander for parts of a critical year.[4]

In November 1936, Kleber was in liaison between the Spanish Minister of Defense in Valencia and the French Communist Andre Marty, who was in charge of recruiting and arming the Inter-

national Brigades in Albacete. Kleber essentially saved Madrid in November 1936, with the Spanish Communist 5th Regiment and the International Brigades. After that he fell into constant quarreling with Marty. Kleber says relations with the official Madrid Junta of Defense commander Gen. Jose Miaja were good until mid-1937.

Kleber demolishes the myth of a monolithic Stalinist, totalitarian unity. Stalin had aspirations to totalitarianism, but was nowhere near achieving it until 1939. The Spanish Socialist Minister of Navy and Air Force Indalecio Prieto (Doc.45) expresses the typical democratic attitude toward Communists, "For the Communist is not a human being—he's a party; he's a line." He is a person, "with the unseen committee behind his back." Kleber, in contrast, got on well with some Spanish Communists but not others. He got on better with Poles and Yugoslavs than with French. He even sometimes parried suggestions to go to this or that town or front line on suggestions made by his presumed Soviet superiors in the Military Attache's office. After his recall to Moscow in December 1937, Kleber (Stern) disappeared, shot in the 1938 purge. Others purged by Stalin included Ambassador Rosenberg, Consul Antonov-Ovseenko, General "Berzin," and Military Attache Gorev. On the other hand, Palmiro Togliatti ("Alfredo," "Ercoli", Docs. 51,62) survived to head the post World War II Communist Party of Italy. Tito of Yugoslavia, who also aided the Communist cause in the civil war, is not identified.

Very few of the eighty-one documents mention General Francisco Franco or other Nationalists. But they underline Franco's importance by discussing both the Communist and general Republican problems in establishing a chain of command from the beginning in July 1936. Few in the Nationalist Army or among Franco's Italian or German military advisors questioned the Generalissimo's final decisions. In contrast, some Communist commissars and military officers quarreled with each other and the Spaniards practical-

ly every day on a battalion and company level, as the documents attest.

Who was primarily in charge in the Republican government? The Spanish Fifth Regiment in Madrid? The general staff in Valencia? The Prime Minister of the Spanish cabinet? Various Spanish leaders in Barcelona? The union militias of the Socialist UGT, the anarchist CNT, the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party, Marty in Albacete with the International Brigades, or the Soviet Military Attache? What authority did Comintern and military men, sent by Moscow, have over the Spanish operation? Those questions were never decided from July 1936 to March 1939. What happened is that too much time was wasted stabbing others in the back, missing orders, stealing equipment, placing battalions in reserve, not understanding the basic languages of the operations (Spanish, French, Russian) and committing a dozen other errors. The Spanish parties and Soviet agents also spent too much time spying on one another. Incompetence was confused with subversion by spies, provocateurs, wreckers, and saboteurs.

Looking at the five documents signed by Marty (Appendix 2) as a whole, it emerges that this French Communist and Comintern agent could be considered the *de facto* ambassador of Stalin to the Spanish Republic. His knowledge of the Spanish personalities inside the cabinet, inside the CNT and UGT unions and Spanish Socialist Party, the Fifth Regiment and the PCE was outstanding. To see him as only the first commander of the IB base at Albacete would downplay his importance, for he reported in person to the Communist International.

Did the Republicans eventually lose through incompetence, or sabotage, or the ideological fixations of half dozen tendencies? Who in the CNT or the UGT or the Republican Left were secret party communists or Trotskyists? Did it make any difference by 1939? It is well known that the Socialist Party was badly divided in July 1936 between the

revolutionary faction and the reformist faction. What the Soviet documents show is that the Socialist problem was only the tip of an iceberg.

Anglo-American historians occasionally have suggested that Juan Negrin, Prime Minister of Republican Spain from May 1937 to March 1939, was either a puppet of Moscow or a secret Soviet agent. One tidbit of information from "Kleber" (Doc. 60) about Negrin, which partly explains his puzzle, is that the Socialist doctor from the Canary Islands had a Russian wife (p.326). The Soviet documents indicate that he was trapped by his situation. Surrender to Franco meant execution. Fleeing to France meant cowardice and charges of fascist sympathies. Staying in office offered an ever-diminishing chance that the Republic and his own life could be spared by a twist of international diplomacy. Doc. 45, written by a Soviet GRU agent[5] best describes Negrin's problem. He tried to be a smooth vacillating healer in a split cabinet. He tried to negotiate between the anti-communist Largo's UGT, the CNT unions and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Yet the PCE through its ties to Moscow eventually assumed the power of rationing military supplies bought and paid for in advance by the Spanish since September 1936.[6] Negrin also was quite sensitive to French politics and wanted the Soviets to go slow in pressuring the French Popular Front to the left, for fear of forcing the Radical Socialists to move to the right (Doc.79). The USSR was fighting for the Popular Front, so worked to keep Socialists, both Largo and later Negrin, in office as long as possible.

A Communist coup would have meant open repudiation of the democratic Republic, and probably an early recognition of Franco in Washington, London and Paris and an early end of the Spanish War. When the war was over, Negrin fled to France and later Britain, not the USSR.

The major enemy of the Communists within the Popular Front coalition, both Spanish and foreign, was General Jose Asensio. After the fall of

Malaga in February 1937 the Soviets were convinced he was a secret agent of Franco sabotaging the Popular Front (Docs. 39, 60).

The Soviet Military Attache was suspicious of him as early as 16 October 1936 (Doc. 17). Louis Fischer, American journalist and Popular Front sympathizer who helped at the International Brigades base at Albacete in the fall of 1936, agreed with the Soviets that Asensio's loyalty was in question (Doc. 30). The Soviets could not openly expose Asensio, because Premier Largo Caballero leaned on him for military advice. Largo needed Asensio to protect him from the PCE.

As a 67-year-old union boss, Largo thought he was for revolution in July 1936. He had no military experience, but by observing the battles and the shifting political pressures within the parties, unions and militias by 1937, he came to the conclusion that if the Popular Front won the war, he would be dumped as leader of the UGT union. So he stepped down in May 1937 as Premier, after considerable pressure from the Republican military units, in order to protect his position as leader of the UGT union. (Docs 30, 31, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42, 46). Voroshilov noted about 15 April 1937 that Largo "does not want defeat, but he is afraid of victory," because it would strengthen the communists (p. 192).

It is well-known that Stalin's paranoia led to a curtailing of the influence of the party with Trotskyist tendencies, the POUM, in May 1937. Soviet Ambassador Marcel Rosenberg on 30 September 1936 charged the POUM as "provocateurs" (Doc. 13). It is noteworthy that as early as 22 July 1936, the Comintern Agent Codovilla (Argentinean, p. 4) reported together with Jose Diaz, who headed the Spanish Communist Party (Doc. 2).

The title *Spain Betrayed* creates many ambiguities. It is vital to identify and date the charges. The complex reality was that many were betraying many others. Franco betrayed the constitution and the liberal government in July 1936. Communists betrayed Prime Minister Largo Caballero in

1937, socialist Prieto betrayed the anarchists, the CNT union anarchists betrayed the political FAI, Spanish Communists betrayed Comintern officials and vice versa, French comrades betrayed German comrades in the International Brigades, etc. What this generation needs to know is, what were the Soviets trying to do in Spain? *Spain Betrayed* sheds real new light, but not enough, on this question.

NOTES

[1]. For a few later documents, see Robert H. Whealey, "Economic Influence of the Great Powers in the Spanish Civil War: From the Popular Front to the Second World War," *The International History Review*, Vol. 6 (May 1983), 229-254. It cites fragmentary archives of CAMPSA-Gentibus, a supply company that facilitated the Soviet arms shipments to the Republic, in particular pp. 241-45, nn. 58, 65, 73, 77, 78. There are several letter boxes captured in Barcelona by the Nationalists, which are strong from the 1938-39 period. I wish Radosh had discovered more about Federico (Friedrich) Luchinger, in charge of CAMPSA-Gentibus.

[2]. Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), pp. 205-06, n. 56.

[3]. John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 417-18, annexes.

[4]. Kleber's report discusses Col. Segismundo Casado's role in summer 1937 (pp.339-41). Then somewhat obscure, Casado later became well known in March 1939 for surrendering Madrid. This may be a clue that somebody in Moscow modified Kleber's document in 1939 or later. Or else Soviet intelligence was more efficient than we have assumed, because as of 1937 Kleber already had an unfriendly eye on Casado.

[5]. "Cid," an unidentified GRU agent who wrote Docs. 41 & 45 and also "Mayor Dios," Docs. 1-4, CI (Annex II) need further research.

[6]. Radosh obscures the fact that as of September-October 1936, the Spanish Government bought Soviet weapons, with cash. He should have added to the notes and non-existent "bibliography" two works by Angel Vinas Martin, *El oro espanol en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudio Fiscales Ministerio de Hacienda, 1977) and *El oro de moscu* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1979). The first uses the archives of the Bank of Spain and the second cites the papers of Marcelino Pascua, the Republican Ambassador in Switzerland who handled relations with the Soviet banks. Instead Radosh, p. xvii, cites Gerald Howson's *Arms for Spain* (London: Albemarle, 1998), to the effect that the Soviets deliberately swindled the Republicans and made money by using an artificial exchange rate. However, the Germans and Italians set similar inflated rates for aid to Franco, who long after the end of the civil war was repaying post-Mussolini Italy.

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Citation: Robert Whealey. Review of Sevostianov, Ronald Radosh; Habeck, Mary R.; Grigory, eds. *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. March, 2002.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6082>



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