COLLECTIVIZATION IN SPAIN

In a previous issue* we have endeavored to refute one of the main fallacies that conceal from the international working class the present-day stage of that new phase of the Spanish revolution which was inaugurated by the events of July 19, 1936. In spite of the rapidly increasing amount of literature on Spain today there is not available up to now any full report of what from our point of view we would consider the real contents of the present struggles in revolutionary Spain. Of course, one would not expect such information on the really interesting facts from those progressively-minded people who even today go on to interpret the intensified class struggles, wars, and civil wars of contemporary history as so many expressions of an ideological struggle between a fascist and a democratic "principle". Yet the actual content, and especially the spiritual element of the struggle is not revealed any better by those apparently objective and realistic historians who dismiss the political and juridical side of the present developments in Spain (not to speak of the less conspicuous conflicts between the various groups of the bourgeois historians) than it is by the theoreticians of the present-day political developments in this country. As against both the "idealistic" and the "realistic" superficiality of the bourgeois historians, the proletarian reader is able to see a new type of state for the new, free type of communal production attempted here for the first time on a larger scale. The study of this movement, its conceptions and methods, the Catalan failures, and the consequent recognition of its strength and weakness is therefore of lasting importance to that class conscious reader who seeks to interpret the development of the international proletariat to whom the book is expressly addressed and to whom it gives a careful account of this effort at self-emancipation begun by the Spanish working class. Moreover, this careful account of the methods and results of the struggle, which has been industrially and politically the most advanced province of Spain, authorized by the leading labor organizations of Catalonia (the syndicalist C. N. T. and the anarchist F. A. I.), is of general theoretical importance as a historical source book of the first rank. The editors endeavored to let the "Spanish revolutionists speak for themselves." Besides a number of short sketches necessary to complete the story of the events presented by them contains original documents, decrees of expropriation, reports of the syndicates (unions), resolutions, statements, press interviews, and accounts on the various industries and localities by the functionaries of the revolutionary movement or from the lips of the workers. There were no lengthy investigations on "the problems" or "the limits of collectivizations," no arbitrarily selected body of learned experts, lacking all real authority such as the notorious "Permanent Special Commission" of the French February revolution of 1848, or its faithful copy, the German "Socialization Commission" of 1918-19. The syndicalist and anarchist labor movement of Spain, well prepared for this task by many years of incessant discussion carried into the remotest corners of the country, were better informed and possessed a much more realistic conception of the necessary steps to achieve their economic aims than had been shown in similar situations, by the so-called "Marxist" labor movement in other parts of Europe. It is true that in this first heroic moment to a certain extent, neglected the political and juridical safeguarding of the new economic and social conditions it had achieved. Even this initial mistake, which could be only partially remedied later, was difficult to avoid under the con-
tions. Except for the “Committees of Anti-Fascist Militias” formed by representatives of the libertarian labor movement themselves there was at that early time neither an executive authority nor a parliament.* Nor were there any large capitalist-proprietors or representatives of the rebelling generals. Both groups fled as soon as the Franco rebellion in Barcelona fell, leaving behind them what had anticipated that possibility and, like Juan March and Francois Cambo, had shrewdly abandoned the country they consecrated to civil war. The offensive against capital inaugurated by the Catalan workers immediately after the heroic suppression of the Franco revolt resembled a war against an invisible enemy. The directors of the great railroads, of the urban transportation companies, and of the harbor of Barcelona, the owners of the textile factories in Tarrasa and Sabadell had disappeared and it was expressly declared during the militarization of the street car system of Barcelona the workers found in the administration buildings of the big monopolistic concerns a lonely, trembling creature whose life and liberty they could spare by a magnanimous impulse.

Thus the Catalan proletariat established itself at will in the capital and public offices that had been deserted by their erstwhile masters. The collectivized enterprises after seizure by the workers operated in simple fashion as “the stock companies of capitalist economy.” The general meetings of the workers proceeded to elect councils in which all activities of the plants are represented—production, administration, technical service, etc. Permanence connected with the rest of the time has been maintained by the representatives of the trade union central bodies, who also participated in the sessions of the councils.

The business management itself was left to a director selected by the workers of each shop, in the more important enterprises subject to the consent of the general council of the respective industry; there is no reason why he should not be the former owner, manager or director, of the socialized enterprise. However, this external similarity by no means signifies that collectivization did not essentially change the system of production of the industrial and commercial enterprises.

It merely demonstrates the relative ease with which under equally fortunate circumstances one had offered themselves here—deep and far reaching changes in production management and wage payment can be accomplished without great formal and organizational transformations. Once the resistance of the former economic and political rulers was completely eliminated for a time, the armed workers could proceed directly from their military task to the positive one of continuing and transforming production for which they had prepared themselves in what had seemed to many observers to be boundless and “utopian” dreams in the preceding period. Even for that most intricate problem of socialism, the collectivization of agriculture, these workers had prepared a completely realistic program unmarred by haste, exaggeration or psychological blunders.

The resolution on the collectivization of the land which had been adopted by the C. N. T. in Madrid in June, 1931, which since, through all the vicissitudes of an advancing and retreating revolutionary movement has been spread and carefully explained throughout the land by anarchist and syndicalist propagandists, gave new practical guidance for action in July and August, 1936 to the agricultural laborers and small tenant farmers who left on the left of them task unharpered by any external authority or tutelage. The concrete forms in which this task was solved by the producers themselves is illustrated by a resolution of the full meeting of the Catalan agricultural workers and by the regulations and organization plans subsequently adopted by various districts and communes in the years 1936-37.

Only the main points of the detailed and exact manner of presenting the collectivization in the most important single industries—transportation, steel, food, textiles, etc.—are taken up in the second part of this book can be discussed here. These chapters show not only the new social organization of the industries, but mark distinctly the beginnings of the great successes resulting from the economic and social initiative of the libertarian labor movement for the workers themselves and even more so in maintaining and expanding production. We read of the abolition of inhuman working conditions, of wage increases and reduction in hours, of various new forms of equalizing wages between various types of workers, skilled and unskilled, male and female, adults and juveniles, of “salaires unique” and “salaires familial.” We see how the question of transforming and improving production in every industry assumes increasing importance from week to week. We read of entirely new industries, small and large, that were called into being by the revolution itself. We hear of the process by which some branches of industries lacking unobtainable foreign raw materials, or not necessary for the immediate needs of the population were now quickly adapted to procuring the most of these negative virtues of sacrifice and self denial under which the great achievements of the revolution were produced. The workers in the last two years have too often been submerged by their more or less sympathetic foreign observers, do not claim our interest in this matter. Our main interest in this first period of Spanish collectivization is in the important role played by the irreplaceable trade unions most characteristically represented by the workers of Catalonia and Valencia that until recently was attacked and despised by the prosperous trade unions and the powerful Marxist organizations of middle and eastern Europe as a utopian form doomed to failure in any serious situation. These syndicalist formations, anti-party, anti-centralistic, were entirely based on the free action of the working masses. Their whole activity as well as emergency activities, had been managed from the outset not by professional officials, but by the elite of the respective industries. That same conscious elite represented by revolutionary acting committees, created by the fighting workers without the unions to meet the various problems as they arose, furnished the initiative, endurance, example, and activity for the basic achievements of the new revolutionary period. This historic lesson of Spanish collectivization is of permanent importance for the economic and political rulers.

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those dealing with handicraft and commerce. The real contributions of
the Spanish revolution to these questions are only indirectly touched
in connection with the already-mentioned problem of agricultural produc-
ation and in the discussion (contained in parts 4 and 5) of the various
forms in which collectivization has been achieved on a local scale by
measures more or less affecting the entire production and mode of ex-
istence of the smaller cities and country districts.

The no longer theoretical but purely descriptive character of these
last two parts prevents rendition of even a small fraction of its rich con-
tents in this short review. Each of the fourteen small narratives, ap-
parently sketch-like, but touching all essential problems of society, reports
the more or less typical yet peculiar features of the new life under the
varying local conditions based on the general development of the country.
The description starts with the advanced industrial conditions in the
textile center, Tarrasa, near the capital, with its 40,000 inhabitants of
whom 14,000 were workers, 11,000 of whom were organized in the
syndicalist C.N.T., while the rest were in the social-democratic U.G.T.
From there through various intermediate stages it moves down to the
poorest, most primitive, small and s m a l l e s t villages of Catalonia, Aragon and LaMancha, located far
from all industrial and urban culture, yet deeply affected by the new
life. Here the publishers remark: "And we notice continually that
great and real revolutionary progress was made in the less highly popu-
lated cities and v i l l a g e s , a more important progress undoubtedly than in the cities
with the greater populations." This praise of simplicity and poverty is in
strange contrast to the materialistic ideas of the Marxist movement but
has long been characteristic of this other form of labor movement which
in the trenches of the Spanish civil war and in the equally heroic
endurance of the suffering populations of Madrid, Barcelona, and
Valencia carried on the struggle of the working class temporarily de-
feated everywhere in the rest of Europe. The sentiment here de-
scribed reaches its climax in the concluding sketch about a little country
town situated in an thinly populated province of La Mancha. There the
workers were at all times utterly deprived of modern material and cul-
tural comfort. Nevertheless, they had all been organized in their syn-
dicates since 1920 and had now been among the first to completely adopt
the new life of libertarian communism. Referring to this experience,
the book ends in the pathetic statement: "Membrilla is perhaps the
poorest city in Spain, but it is the justest."

Karl Korsch

MARXISM AND MARGINAL UTILITY
ECONOMICS

Recently the editors of Common Sense* have once more dealt with the
"unscientific" character of Marxism by pointing out that
"Ricardo's labor theory of value, taken over by Marx and embelished with
the theory of surplus value, was abandoned long ago by all but the Marxist
economists, and a whole branch of 'marginal utility' economics developed,
of which Marx could know nothing... that even in the Soviet Union (so far as
Five Year Plans go, if not at the Marx-Engels Institute) marginal utility
economics have displaced the useless and misleading Marxist economics.

However, what is brought forward here as an argument against Marxism is
in reality only another confirmation of it. Certainly, the Russian state-
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*Marx over Europe. Common Sense, September 1938, p. 4.

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science, for this science consists of nothing but the critique of those selfsame
capitalistic conditions, which characterize Russia and every other capitalistic
country. For the purpose of justifying the exploitation of the workers, the
incomes of capital, and the accumulation of capital that exist there, the
Marxian economic theories are certainly useless. What Marx had said* of
the science of bourgeois economy — namely, that it reached its limits with
Ricardo because,

"He consciously made the antagonism of class interests, of wages and
profits, of profits and rents, the starting point of his investigation,"

holds equally true for Russian economic "science." The continued class
society forces Russian economic theory to embrace those ideological weapons
of bourgeois society which appears as economic theory, and to attempt to de-
stroy even that kernel of truth contained in Classical economy, which served
the Marxists as a basis of attack upon the whole capitalistic society.

The development of marginal utility economics is closely connected with
the difficulty of the proponents of the classical theory to confute Marxist
theories, as both the Classicists and the Marxists based their argument on the
same objective value concept. The marginal utility school arose in defense
of capitalism, and its apology consisted in the construction of a value concept
which justified the prevailing class and income differentiations. The existing
inequalities based on the exploitation of labor were explained as an
un-defeatable natural law of diminishing utility. This theory, as was so well
stated by C. E. Ayres,**

"Only undertakes to demonstrate under any given conditions of income
distribution the automatic achievement of the maximum total of human
satisfaction: the greatest good of all. Even so, this poor-little-rich-girl
notion which proposes to balance the surfeit of the rich against the preen-
furious existence of the poor is so extravagantly complacent that most eco-
nomists have hesitated to give it clear and unequivocal expression."

Though single concepts of this theory were adopted by economists of other
schools, nevertheless, as a general theory, it was slowly abandoned. The
Neo-Classicists, for instance, did not bother themselves any longer with
questions as to the desirability or the justification of the prevailing economic
system: they simply took for granted that it was the best possible one, and
merely tried to find means of making it more efficient, a condition which forced
them to restrict themselves, as far as market phenomena were concerned, to
mere price considerations. The value concept was displaced by a cost-of-pro-
duction theory, which the Neo-Classicists thought sufficient to explain the
existing division of wealth.

However, the question of utility was raised anew in relation to the
problem of the allocation of resources in a socialist economy*** and it was
pointed out that even with an acceptance of the labor theory of value, the
question of demand must be dealt with. It is clear that no society can pre-


**The Problem of Economic Order. New York 1938, p. 43.


This book will be reviewed at length in the next issue of Living Marxism.