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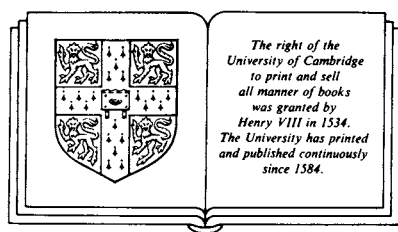
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Marxism and the failure of organised Socialism in Spain, 1879–1936

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In analysing the development of parties, it is necessary to distinguish: their social group; their mass membership; their bureaucracy and General Staff. The bureaucracy is the most dangerously hidebound and conservative force; if it ends up by constituting a compact body, which stands on its own and feels itself independent of the mass of members, the party ends up by becoming anachronistic and at moments of acute crisis it is voided of its social content and left as though suspended in mid-air.

Antonio Gramsci

There has been no lack of intellectuals in the Socialist Party; there has been a lack of theorists.

Emilio Lamo de Espinosa

With ruin upon ruin, rout upon rout,
Confusion worse confounded . . .

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

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Preface

This study sets out to examine the relationship between the theory and practice of a major European Socialist party, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), from its foundation in 1879 to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. During this period, the PSOE was, despite its slow growth, the largest working-class party in Spain, and for a crucial spell in the 1930s, the largest parliamentary party. Indeed, its political significance in both the creation and the collapse of the ill-fated Second Republic (1931–6) can hardly be overstated. As a result, published studies of the Spanish Socialist movement have understandably shown a marked tendency to concentrate on the PSOE's role during this five-year period. In particular, attention has been focussed on the divisions within the party which culminated in its notorious post-1933 'radicalisation', often seen as central to the breakdown of political stability in the Second Republic. Moreover, the divisions which so damaged the PSOE during the Republic have been seen as all the more noteworthy in that they represent a marked contrast to its apparently traditional unity and discipline: although relatively small in terms of membership, the PSOE prior to 1931 had supposedly manifested an organisational cohesion unique amongst the political groups opposed to the Restoration Monarchy (1875–1931). Remarkably, for all the PSOE's significance, there still exists no comprehensive study of the Spanish Socialist Party from its formation to the Civil War. This book aims to serve as a contribution to filling that gap.

Nonetheless, the main focus of the book – the relationship between theory and practice in the Spanish Socialist movement – may at first sight appear somewhat curious. Although the PSOE held explicitly to a Marxist self-image, it has become almost axiomatic to refer to the poverty of Marxism in the Spanish labour movement. Spanish Socialism has produced no Marxist theorists of international stature, and few who could be regarded as particularly important even in a local context. So much is this the case that most published studies of the PSOE have virtually excluded issues of theory as a factor in the party's divisions. The present study does not demur from the observation that Spain has never been noted for the fecundity or quality of its Marxism. Indeed, rather than 'illumine what was

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dark', Spanish Marxism prior to the Civil War merely manifested rigidity, schematism and a striking lack of originality. The PSOE remained inflexibly attached to a distinctively narrow vision of Marxist theory, imported originally from France and unsatisfactorily superimposed on a very different socio-political environment.

However, this study is informed by the belief that there is an important ontological distinction to be drawn between Marxist and non-Marxist political parties. The former, to be meaningfully termed as such, have to *believe* that their political praxis is derived from theoretical formulations in a conscious manner. Thus, even though the quality of their Marxism was poor, most leaders of the PSOE genuinely saw themselves as Marxists and attempted to act accordingly, or at least thought they were acting accordingly. This is not to suggest that the elaboration of Marxist theory figured prominently within the concerns of the PSOE leadership, still less, that Marxism provided a constant reference point for the party's day-to-day political functioning. Rather, it is to argue that Marxist theory, no matter how poorly conceived or understood, set the *parameters* within which the PSOE formulated its political policies, or its strategy for socialism. It is therefore my contention that the importance of Marxism in Spain lay precisely in its poverty: the influence of the PSOE leaders' devotion to a distorted vision of Marxism was paramount in determining the broad outlines of their political conduct.

I investigate three main inter-related issues. First, I attempt to analyse *why* Marxist theory in Spain has been so poverty-stricken. I have sought answers by returning to the period when Marxism was introduced into Spain and examining how the particular manner of its introduction influenced the origins and early development of the PSOE. Second, in doing so, I confront the question of whether the Spanish Socialist movement really was characterised by unity, discipline and cohesion prior to the Second Republic. Third, following on from this, I look at the question of what effect the poverty of its Marxism had upon the development of the Spanish Socialist movement, both before and during the Second Republic. It would be as well to mention here, however, two further things I specifically do *not* do: I do not argue that the poverty of the PSOE's Marxism was the only aspect of that party's complex make-up which contributed to its strategic and tactical deficiencies. In addition, I do not attempt to provide a detailed organisational or social history of the PSOE. Instead, in examining the relationship between theory and practice in the PSOE, I aim to provide a broad ideological and organisational overview through which to construct an explanatory framework for the party's failure in the period under consideration.

By its very nature, this study has had to marry different intellectual approaches and thus is to some degree deliberately syncretic. Indeed, the

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historical narrative and the political theory are informed by an awareness of their constant mutual interplay. Neither narrowly archival, nor based wholly on secondary literature, the book offers an original analysis of the development of Spanish Socialism before 1936. Inevitably, given that the study covers a period of nearly sixty years, it contains some variations in emphasis. Chapter 1, which deals with the period 1879–1914, serves as an extended introduction and sets out the main issues of the study. Since it provides a basic background, its approach is more thematic than narrative. Emphasis is laid upon the manner in which Marxism was introduced to Spain, how it was adopted as the ideology of the newly created PSOE, and the factors which led to its peculiar distortion. In addition, the chapter provides a brief analysis of the development of the Spanish state in the nineteenth century and of the nature of the Restoration Monarchy, established in 1875. This serves as a historical template against which are measured the pronouncements and activities of the PSOE in its early years.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 tend more obviously towards political narrative. There are two main reasons for this. On the one hand, they cover the PSOE between 1914 and 1931, the period about which least is known or has been written. They thus serve to some degree as expository chapters, providing the first systematic account in English of the Socialist movement during these years. On the other hand, the theoretical debates of the period, although clearly of importance for the development of the PSOE, were hardly of transcendental significance. Moreover, since virtually nothing has been written by historians about the Socialist movement in these years, there is as yet no standard orthodoxy with which to engage in debate. Hence the approach in these three chapters is more conventionally historical, although the main emphasis remains that of the relationship between the PSOE's Marxist theory and its political practice.

Chapter 2, on the years 1914–19, examines the Socialist movement's response to the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, as well as its involvement in the so-called 'crisis of 1917'. The chapter also analyses the emergence of a clear polarisation between an increasingly reformist leadership and a growing number of radical militants within the PSOE. The results of this polarisation form the subject of chapter 3, which covers the period 1919–23. In these years, the PSOE's activity was both dominated and disrupted by the issue of whether or not to join the Leninist Third International, formed in early 1919. The chapter examines in detail the three Extraordinary Congresses, held between 1919 and 1921, which culminated in the first major splits in the PSOE and the eventual formation of the Partido Comunista de España (PCE). In particular, new light is thrown on the selection of delegates and the manipulation of proceedings during the definitive 1921 Congress. Chapter 4 covers the PSOE during the Primo de Rivera Dictatorship and the collapse of the Restoration

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Monarchy, 1923–31. It centres on the question of why the Socialists collaborated with the Dictator, and suggests that the most common explanation, opportunism, merits some degree of qualification. The chapter also analyses the emergence of the PSOE as the central force within the opposition to the Monarchy and its role in the declaration of the Second Republic.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the Republic. In these chapters, the approach adopted moves away from straightforward political narrative towards a greater emphasis on theoretical debates. In part, this is dictated by the existence of a large literature on the Republic, both in English and ever more so in Spanish. Rather than repeat basic information that is widely available elsewhere, I have assumed a degree of familiarity with the main events of the Republic and concentrated instead on interpretation. This has allowed detailed consideration of much of the existing literature on the Socialist movement during the Republic. It is demonstrated that the divisions which so damaged the PSOE between 1931 and 1936 were in large measure the logical culmination of theoretical ambiguities which had marked the party since its inception. Chapter 5, on 1931–4, concentrates in particular on the PSOE's ideological response to the Republic and the theoretical debates which led to its leaving the government in 1933 as well as its subsequent involvement in the insurrectionary movement of October 1934. Chapter 6 covers the period from October 1934 to July 1936. It examines the debate over the causes and impact of the PSOE's 'radicalisation', and concludes that the establishment of the Popular Front coalition at the start of 1936 not only represented the final triumph of the reformists over the revolutionists, but also the effective abandonment of Marxism as the party's guiding ideological principle.

In addition, in order to contrast the Marxism of the PSOE with that of other leftist organisations in Spain during a period when Marxist theory was at its most fecund, chapters 5 and 6 briefly analyse the ideological development of the Bloc Obrer i Camperol (BOC) and the Izquierda Comunista Española (ICE) – which merged in 1935 to become the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) – as well as that of the PCE. This allows a comparison to be drawn between the relationship of revolutionary Marxism to the PSOE and that which obtained in two very different groups: on the one hand, dissident Communists untrammelled by either a large organisation or the responsibility of power; on the other, official Communists with no independent control over theoretical production, but nonetheless with the credibility and power of the Soviet state behind them. It is shown that greater sophistication in terms of Marxist theory was of little consequence while the PSOE retained political hegemony on the parliamentary Spanish Left: theories of revolution found no automatic translation into practice. Ultimately, the growing threat of fascism in 1930s Spain obliged even the radicals of the POUM to abandon their Marxist

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principles in face of the harsh realities of *Realpolitik* and join the expressly reformist Popular Front coalition.

This book is based upon a doctoral thesis presented at the London School of Economics. In the process of completing the original study and subsequently preparing it for publication, I have incurred a number of debts which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. In their different styles, both my supervisors have had a significant impact upon the elaboration of this study. Professor Tom Nossiter of the LSE has been a source of continued intellectual stimulation. He also cajoled and encouraged in the right measure to ensure that, although a long time in the making, the thesis appeared sooner than might otherwise have been the case. Professor Paul Preston of Queen Mary College has similarly been unstinting in his support. His vast knowledge of modern Spain is matched only by the infectious readiness and kindness with which he shares it. Indeed, his is the leading, and often guiding, influence on this work.

While researching in Spain, I received much warm support, advice and hospitality from Professors Santos Juliá, José Manuel Macarro Vera, Francisco Laporta, and, especially, Elías Díaz. Professor Juan Trías and Luis Arranz were also kind with their time and assistance. Among others who helped make my stay in Spain productive, if not always in an academic sense, Isabel Espuelas, Antonio Oporto, Maite Villar and Sheelagh Ellwood merit special mention.

Several friends have read all or part of various drafts of this study. I would like to thank Tom Buchanan, Julián Casanova, Nick Ellison, Helen Graham and Brendan O'Leary. I am indebted above all to Mary Vincent, whose advice and support were and continue to be of inestimable value. In a less direct but no less important way, Dave Edgerton and James Dunkerley have helped maintain morale in a period when academe has found itself increasingly beleaguered by financial constraints. I was, nonetheless, fortunate enough in the course of preparing this study to receive financial support from the then Social Science Research Council, the Vicente Cañada Blanch Fellowship Committee of the University of London, and the Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies, Queen Mary College.

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the patience and assistance of staff at the following libraries and archives: in London, the British Library of Political and Economic Science, the British Library Reading Room, and the Marx Memorial Library; in Madrid, the Fundación Pablo Iglesias, the Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas, the Biblioteca Nacional, the Archivo Histórico Nacional, the Hemeroteca Nacional and the Hemeroteca Municipal. In fact, amongst the very few things for which I can claim complete responsibility are the inevitable errors and misjudgements contained in what follows.

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Abbreviations used in text

1 Spanish parties and organisations

ASM	Agrupación Socialista Madrileña (Madrid Socialist Group)
BOC	Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers' and Peasants' Bloc)
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Right-Wing Groups)
CGTU	Confederación General del Trabajo Unitario (General Unitarian Confederation of Labour, PCE union movement)
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Labour Confederation)
CSR	Comités Sindicalistas Revolucionarios (Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees)
FJSE	Federación de Juventudes Socialistas de España (Federation of Socialist Youth of Spain, PSOE youth movement)
FNTT	Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra (National Federation of Landworkers)
FRE	Federación Regional Española (Spanish Regional Federation)
ICE	Izquierda Comunista Española (Spanish Communist Left)
ILE	Institución Libre de Enseñanza (Free Institute of Education)
IRS	Instituto de Reformas Sociales (Institute of Social Reforms)
JAP	Juventud de Acción Popular (Popular Action Youth Movement, CEDA youth movement)
JCI	Juventud Comunista Ibérica (Iberian Communist Youth, ICE youth movement)
JSU	Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (Unified Socialist Youth)
NFM	Nueva Federación Madrileña (New Madrid Federation)
OCN	Organización Corporativo Nacional (General Miguel Primo de Rivera's National Corporatist Organisation)
PCE	Partido Comunista de España (Spanish Communist Party, post-March 1922)
PCE	Partido Comunista Español (Spanish Communist Party, pre-March 1922)
PCOE	Partido Comunista Obrero Español (Spanish Communist Workers' Party)

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POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification)
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party)
SOMA	Sindicato de los Obreros Mineros de Asturias (Syndicate of Asturian Mineworkers)
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores (General Workers' Union)
UJC	Unión de Juventudes Comunistas (Union of Communist Youth, PCE youth movement)

2 Non-Spanish parties and organisations

ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
PCF	Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)
SFIC	Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste (French Section of the Communist International)
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (French Section of the Workers' International)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party)
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent German Social Democratic Party)