

# **inqaba**

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# Introduction

The course of the Spanish revolution of 1931-37 is filled with lessons that are highly relevant to our movement today.

Conditions in Spain then were different from those in present-day SA in some important respects. Spain was a less developed country, with the working class only a minority of the population. Peasant landlessness was the central problem facing the masses.

Yet the Spanish working class had a long tradition of socialist organisation and their own political parties. This allowed them to move rapidly into action as an independent political force under the pressure of crisis.

But Spain had certain crucial conditions in common with SA. The capitalist class was too bankrupt to meet the basic demands of the masses and govern through bourgeois democracy. The state machinery had been developed over generations as a repressive instrument of capitalist rule. No force in society except the organised working class was capable of demolishing this state and carrying through the democratic transformation of society.

In the 1930s the Spanish working class showed its magnificent combativity and readiness to struggle to the end. Why, then, did the revolution end in a terrible defeat?

The document reprinted here takes up this question. Written in 1973 by Ted Grant, political editor of the *Militant*, Marxist paper in the British labour movement, it meticulously examines the events and lessons of the Spanish revolution from the standpoint of working-class internationalism.

The document shows how the immense movement of the workers and peasants brought capitalism and its state in Spain to the brink of collapse, and fought relentlessly for three years a civil war against the forces of fascist counter-revolution. But their leaders, forming a 'Popular Front' and entering a

coalition government with the remnants of the 'progressive' capitalist politicians, capitulated again and again to bourgeois pressures.

Jose Diaz, General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party, expressed their general standpoint:

"We wish to fight only for a democratic republic with a broad social content...Libertarian communism, dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism of the state, a federal republic; we will speak of all these after the war."

Thus the workers' leaders refused to "speak of" the workers' and peasants' main purpose in fighting the war—the transformation of society, the social revolution. This more than any other factor, as the document carefully explains, paved the way for the victory of Franco and the reversal of all that had been achieved.

These lessons have still not been learned by the Socialist and Communist leadership internationally. In country after country—such as Chile in the early 1970s—they have persisted in following similar policies of class collaboration, exposing the workers to similar disaster.

## Future

Looking to the future of Spain, the document correctly anticipated the fall of Franco's dictatorship and pointed out the deepening social crisis which was leading towards a new revolutionary situation. Again, however, the question of working-class leadership has proved decisive.

During the 1970s the Spanish capitalist class have been given a breathing space by the weakness of the workers' leadership and their refusal to take the struggle forward—a potential danger already warned against in the document. This is prolonging and complicating the Spanish revolution.

But such is the strength of the working class today that there can

be no question of a decisive capitalist counter-revolution in the short term. The capitalist class internationally is in crisis. Above all, unlike in the 1930s, Marxism has already begun to take root in the Spanish workers' organisations and can grow into a mass force on the basis of events, defeating the false ideas of the Socialist and Communist leadership and opening the road to workers' power.

## South Africa

The same fundamental perspective that faced the Spanish working class in the 1930s is facing us in SA today: **in order to end poverty and oppression, in order to secure democratic rights and decent conditions for all, not only the government needs to be changed but the capitalist system itself must be decisively overthrown.**

But already imperialism is trying to prepare the ground for a 'national convention' at a stage when the regime is no longer able to hold the mass struggle in check by force alone. Its sole purpose would be to ensnare the workers' leaders and protect the state machinery in order to use it against the workers' movement when the tide of revolution begins to ebb—as it must if the chance to seize victory is missed.

Every ANC and trade union activist needs to be prepared for developments of this nature. Our movement and our leadership must stand absolutely firm and united against the treacherous manoeuvres of pro-capitalist 'progressives', and fight instead to complete the revolution that will transfer power to the working people.

Studying and discussing the lessons of the defeated Spanish revolution, and applying them in practice, will help us to ensure that the same tragic history is not repeated in our country in the future.

