

The Crisis of 1929, the Revolutions of the 1930s and Nazism¹

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyze the history of the 1929 crisis, and its political-economic outcome, with emphasis on employment fluctuations in Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA and the country's entry into World War II; the Spanish revolution, the French popular front and the civil war and the rise of Nazi-fascism as a product of the defeat of social revolutions. The absence of support on the part of the USSR and the social democracy for the revolutionary projects of the 30s of the 20th century contributed to this defeat; it resulted from the militant support of the German industrial and financial sector for this Nazi project, and of the inaction, if not active complicity, of social democracy and its alliances with semi-Bonapartist powers before Hitler's rise to power. Its outcome was the greatest tragedy in human history.

KEYWORDS

crisis of 1929, social revolution, nazi-fascism, WWII.

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‘For the ruling class of Germany, their support for fascism was not merely a response to crisis, it was rather a way of utilizing the crisis. Big business, the army and other remnants of the German Empire gave the Nazis power and a job to do. The problem was the German fascists got carried away, started a war and then lost it.’

William Pelz, *A People’s History of Modern Europe*²

The crisis of 1929

Sixty years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, capitalists literally fell off Wall Street buildings. They were suicidal, throwing themselves off from the buildings where the stock exchange activity of New York is concentrated. This image is still part of the memory that remained of the crisis of 1929. Following the crash of 2008, protesters wielded a poster that read, ‘Jump you Fuckers!’ And the same slogan would be adopted by the anarchist musician Gene Burnett in the Occupy Wall Street Movement against the global financial system, which mimicked the occupations of hundreds of thousands of people for several months in Tahrir Square in January 2011, following the Egyptian democratic revolution against Hosni Mubarak.

On 24 October 1929, New York Stock Exchange shares fell by 50 per cent in just one day.³ In the 1920s, the USA had become the lenders of the world. In 1925, more than half of the gold stocks were held by them, thus stealing the top spot from England, which eventually suspended debt repayments following the 1929 crash, when the USA withdrew its credit to Europe.

Shortly before, England had experienced the most important strike in its history. In 1926, the labour movement rose with a force unheard of since the Chartist struggles in a major general strike. The ruling classes were forced to accept, albeit reluctantly, an alliance between the Labour Party and the local bourgeoisie to deal with the effects of the general strike of 1926, which began with the demand for wage increases among the miners, but took insurrectional

² William Pelz, *A People’s History of Modern Europe* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 141.

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³ Osvaldo Coggiola, *As Grandes Depressões* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2009), 154.

proportions by reaching 1.7 million workers across the country and involving dockers, transport workers, etc.⁴

The economic cycles of capitalist production, described in Marx's *Capital*,⁵ which occurred in the nineteenth century roughly every ten years⁶ (they are mapped by the US Department of Commerce),⁷ can be described as follows: crisis, expansion, peak of accumulation, new crisis. The origin of cyclical crises is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall due to the need to increase constant capital (capital invested in plant, equipment and materials) vis-à-vis the variable capital (wages).⁸

Simply put, in the competitive struggle of capitalism – which is opposed to a planned economy – all capitalists must increase their investment in technology, machinery, etc. That represents a cost. The origin of value is work. The profit, following this ratio between investment and wages, tends to fall. There is deflation in prices. There comes a time when capitalists put their goods in the market below the desired average profit rate – or even with losses. The expression of this is the fall in the real value of property in general. A fall in the value of companies on the stock market is not the source of the crisis, but is a symptom of it. Shares fall when stockholders withdraw their investments because they consider that they do not have an acceptable average rate of return.

In the capitalist mode of production, crises are due to overproduction of capital rather than scarcity, as they were in the Middle Ages, when due to bad weather, agricultural plagues, diseases, etc., societies were sometimes ruined, without the means to react. In capitalist crises post-1820, when the cost of labour, the only source of value, rises against constant capital, there is an increasing devaluation of property, the average rate of profit drops. That is the crisis – of excess, not of scarcity. Part of the society, workers, small entrepreneurs, peasants, are called to pay the 'way out of the crisis' with brutal measures that imply reduction of wages, unemployment and concentration of capital by elimination of the most fragile competitors.

In 1929, shares fell by up to 80 per cent. Between 1929 and 1932, workers' income in the USA fell by half. Governments abandoned the gold standard, many betting on the devaluation of the currency and, in the early years, on protectionism. All these measures only worsened the crisis. It quickly spread

⁴ H. Pelling, *The History of British Trade Unionism* (London: Macmillan, 1987); and C.J. Wrigley, 'The Trade Unions between the Wars', in C.J. Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations 1914–1939* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).

⁵ Karl Marx, *O Capital*, Book I, (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2001).

⁶ Michael Roberts, *The Long Depression* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

⁷ US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions. The National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. Cambridge MA 02138, www.nber.org/cycles.html (accessed 2 February 2018).

⁸ Vide Jorge Grespan, *O Negativo do Capital* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2012), 183– 189.

to Europe – in 1932, world production had fallen by 33 per cent and world trade by 60 per cent. And there were more than 30 million officially acknowledged unemployed people, a figure far behind the reality.

In 1933, automotive production had been cut by 80 per cent and a total of almost 107,000 companies in the United States had failed – not counting the banks, which actually did fail later. With the new wave of strikes, protests and demonstrations having an epicentre in the USA, Britain, Austria and Spain, there was a radical shift from these protectionist policies to Keynesian policies, the New Deal – the capitalist state became ‘hoarder, banker and producer’.⁹

The Keynesian proposals focused not only on social protection, which was largely unknown until then, but also and mostly in fixing prices, in the mandatory allocation of labour power to some sectors and national agreements on conditions of production – it was a planned capitalist economy. This was associated with public works, which in turn were based on a controlled deficit.

However, contrary to what is commonly and mistakenly mentioned, these measures did not solve the crisis. By 1937, the decline in the average rate of profit had returned. The 1929 unemployment rates were only reversed when the United States entered the Second World War in 1941. It was the war economy, which turned unemployed people into soldiers and productive forces in factories for the production of destruction machines that reversed the crisis of accumulation.

Both Keynesian and monetarist theories failed:

In 1937, however, the economy was under the threat of a new sinking, the New Deal became, in the words of Art Preis, the War Deal, with the amputation, in 1938, of US\$800 million for social security and public works, and an increase in defence spending (\$200 million more in 1938, \$400 million more in 1939). Since 1939 the European states bought arms from the United States – and the USA also armed. The war economy was actually the way out of the crisis.¹⁰

Howard Zinn also recalls the limited impact of the New Deal measures. The new political agreements were decisive. With the change from the Communist International’s 1935 policy of class against class to the ‘popular front’, the US Communist Party supported Roosevelt in the second election and helped to appease the greater confrontational situation with the workers the ruling classes had experienced, sit-down strikes in the automotive industry.¹¹ The New Deal succeeded only in reducing unemployment from 13 million to 9

⁹ Coggiola, *As Grandes Depressões*, 150–154.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 164.

¹¹ John Newsinger, *Fighting Back: The American Working Class in the 1930s* (London: Bookmarks, 2012).

million, but managed to involve the main unions – during the war, the CIO and AFL pledged to call no strikes, thus ‘weaken[ing] the old labour militancy of the thirties because the war economy created millions of new jobs at higher wages.’¹²

Everything seemed to have been invented at the turn of the century: transatlantic crossings became faster due to new steamships, the Wrights took to the air in 1903; Henry Ford invented and democratised the automobile. The war, however, exposed the harsh reality of the limits of this optimism and, for the first time, questioned whether industrial development would always be synonymous with progress. The fact is that, for all the propaganda that was made to the ‘God of consumerism’, accumulation tended to absolute pauperisation, that is, to the inability of the working class to consume.

It would be Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher, unlike Marx, to conceive of revolution not as a locomotive of history, but as its emergency brake,¹³ to stop the history of capitalism, claiming the idea that progress is not synonymous with well being. We can walk forward towards a cliff.

But until 1914, it was unthinkable to question this Enlightenment notion. Man seemed capable of controlling nature, owing to the unusual scientific impulse brought by the Industrial Revolution. The crisis of 1929 shook as never before the belief not only in progress but also in capitalism itself. Marx was reborn due to the strength of this reality – ranks of starving people in countries that dumped production to avoid falling profits, oranges being thrown away to avoid the fall of its price. In Brazil, coffee was used as fuel for the locomotives. Maintaining profit meant the destruction of wealth.

In 1932, American businessmen commissioned the Mexican painter Diego Rivera¹⁴ to paint a mural, which would be installed at the Rockefeller Foundation, and to show the capacity of technique and science to overcome the problems that were posed to humankind. Jack London in *The Iron Heel*, published in 1908, anticipated the emergence of a tyrannical oligarchy against the revolutionary socialists.¹⁵ For the Rockefellers, technology was the answer to the problems that arose at the crossroads of 1929. But Rivera painted the mural responding to the crisis of 1929 with ... class struggle. The mural shows on its right side, below, the figure of headless fascism, severed by the workers. Today, it is among the main works of art of the twentieth century, exhibited in the Museum of Fine Arts in Mexico City, but at the time the Foundation had it destroyed because, although in the centre of the mural was the atom, science,

¹² Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 402.

¹³ Walter Benjamin (Gérard Raulet, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Band 19) (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 7–20.

¹⁴ Andrea Kettenmann, *Rivera* (Cologne: Taschen, 2001).

¹⁵ Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006).

technique, alongside were the Bolshevik leaders – Lenin, Trotsky and a white and a black worker holding hands, representing class struggle.

Crises do not give rise to revolutions, but they open up that possibility. Without crises, there are no revolutions.¹⁶ They are the most critical point in the history of capitalism. In the words of Fernand Braudel:

In the clock of the European world the fateful chimes sounded five times, and every time they sounded the displacements took place through consecutive struggles, confrontations and strong economic crises. In general, it is an economic storm that finally destroys the old centre, already threatened before, and confirms the emergence of a new one.¹⁷

Tom Joad, the main character in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*,¹⁸ is a young peasant who, due to land dispossession, becomes a proletarian (under-employed or unemployed). Along the mythical Road 66 in the USA, in the midst of the crisis of 1929, he transforms himself from Okie (a derogatory nickname for the peasants from Oklahoma) into an immigrant in California, from common criminal into political prisoner, from peasant into wage earner. Beliefs die, doubts awaken.

Expropriation, unemployment, dehumanisation ... each day the Joad family lives the capitalist march and gradually becomes aware of it. One of the key parts of this path to class consciousness is the role of the state throughout this journey. The Joad family, on the brink of misery, expropriated by bankers, deceived by labour recruiters, exploited by bosses, humiliated, runs into the state exclusively as the police: inspecting labour migration, infiltrating workers' camps, arresting 'agitators', provoking riots in order to intervene without a warrant and finally trying to arrest Joad because he killed a policeman who, in front of him, had just killed a former preacher and trade unionist who was leading a strike.

When Joad leaves the Rooseveltian camp where his family is, he metaphorically goes in search of 'something'. Ford expresses the quest for socialism as an alternative for an important sector of the working classes:

A fellow ain't got a soul of his own, just little piece of a big soul, the one big soul that belongs to everybody ... I'll be all around in the dark – I'll be everywhere. Wherever you can look – wherever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. I'll be in the way kids

¹⁶ Valério Arcary, *As Esquinas Perigosas da História: Situações Revolucionárias em Perspectiva Marxista* (São Paulo: Xamã, 2004).

¹⁷ Fernand Braudel, *A Dinâmica do Capitalismo* (Lisbon: Teorema, 1992), 94. ¹⁸ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the houses they build – I'll be there, too.¹⁸

Nazism

One day before the inauguration of the 1940 Portuguese World Exhibition in Belém, where Salazar built an image of a single nation undivided by social classes,¹⁹ a depiction allowed by the interdiction of workers' organisations achieved using state violence, the world saw France succumb to Hitler – in the very same place where Germany had surrendered 21 years before, after the First World War.

Today, it is clear to historiography that Nazism did not advance only by the force of military technique, where there were obvious failures,²⁰ but also through the political demoralisation of its opponents. One of Hitler's most potent tanks was the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, the end of hopes on the French popular front, the faltering German social democracy, the disastrous policy of the third period of the Communist International – the psychological environment that is not measured quantitatively. But there is no historical dignity without measuring the psychological impact, on the scale of millions, of political victories and defeats.²¹

The Second World War, like almost all historical facts that are politically central to societies, has been the subject of intense historiographical controversy, which rarely passes to the general public. Taking away recent works, such as *Apocalypse: The Second World War*,²² (not by accident a co-production of the major countries involved in the war in different trenches and that in a rare way comes to break a mythological vision of the war), in general, the disclosure of historical facts is made against the science produced. It was utilitarian to the division of powers between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War. And it is now necessary to maintain the status quo as well as the balance of powers of the regimes and nations of the central countries. But memory is not history.

¹⁸ John Ford (dir.), *The Grapes of Wrath* (film), 1940.

¹⁹ Philippe Schmitter, *Portugal: do Autoritarismo à Democracia* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 1999); and Fernando Rosas and Álvaro Garrido (eds), *Corporativismo, Fascismos, Estado Novo* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2012).

²⁰ Michael Howard, *A Guerra na História da Europa* (Lisbon: Publicações EuropaAmérica, 1997), 153.

²¹ Arcary, *As Esquinas Perigosas da História*.

²² *Apocalypse: The Second World War* (French: *Apocalypse, la 2e Guerre mondiale*) (2009) is a six-part French documentary by Daniel Costelle and Isabelle Clarke about the Second World War. The documentary is composed exclusively of actual footage of the war as filmed by war correspondents, soldiers, resistance fighters and private citizens.

Germany became a militarised society with a war economy, after having defeated its labour movement. Also to be taken into account as specifics of German imperialism: a newly unified country, without colonies, humiliated in the Treaty of Versailles, largely dependent on raw materials and energy from Eastern Europe and Russia and with the more organized working class of the world, which had attempted twice, in 1919 and 1923, a social revolution influenced by the Bolsheviks. All of these factors contributed to accentuate the accelerated reconstruction of the military industrial complex from the crisis of 1929 and, finally, from 1938, to the outbreak of a new world war.

Their labour leaders were the first to be imprisoned. Dachau, near Munich, was the first Nazi prison in 1933. Not by chance – the first Soviet republic (*Räterepublik*) had been founded there in April 1919, crushed by the Freikorps in May 1919, as we have mentioned.

Hitler, a soldier wounded in war who even won an Iron Cross, was described as a frustrated student who failed access to art school – and, shortly after, joined the ranks of the far right. In just one decade, he had risen to command one of the world's leading countries. But Nazism was not the work of one man. The idea of Nazism as an act of madness is closely linked to the revisionism of the 1950s, to the social pact, which sought to dissociate it from the crisis of capitalism, from the explicit support of the German bourgeoisie to the Nazi expansionist project²³ – and the inability of both the West and the USSR to prevent the war.

Munich, the Bavarian capital – which today is most easily identified with the Oktoberfest, a beer festival created by King Ludwig of Bavaria in 1810, or its famous football club, Bayern – is a symbol of Germany in the 1930s. It represents the class tensions that foreshadowed the war: on the one hand, a powerful labour movement, one of the most important in the world, and the threat of revolution; on the other hand, an agrarian and traditionalist world surrounding the city.

But it was not only in the countryside that Nazism had support. The German industrial bourgeoisie feared that – after the Ruhr strikes and attempts to take power by the workers in 1919 and 1923 – a new crisis (1929) would bring the proletariat to power as in Soviet Russia. Years of economic stability in the Weimar Republic were dramatically left behind during the crisis, millions being unable to find work, and famine became widespread. There was deflation of production prices (falling prices in production) that combined with a gigantic inflation in distribution, in consumption. All this led to a miserable

²³ See, for example, Dick Geary, *Hitler e o Nazismo* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2010); Robert O. Paxton, *A Anatomia do Fascismo* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2007); and T.E. Vadney, 'The German Problem', in *The World Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 21–25.

situation of the German proletariat, about two-fifths of whom were unemployed. In Britain, one-quarter couldn't find a job.

The Weimar Republic had been marked in its final period by the crisis of the constitutional regime and the growth of National Socialism. In 1933, the Nazi Party (NSDAP) came to power. The absence of democratic consensus, the humiliation in the Treaty of Versailles, loss of territories and heavy damages – the defeat in the war, along with the German Revolution of 1919–23, created panic in the German ruling classes, the petty bourgeois masses or the lower middle class, and drove them to despair. That despair came to light in the country's suicide in 1939 – when these layers decided to support Hitler and militarism as a way out for the crisis of 1929 and the threat of revolution.

Two questions emerge, however, from these facts: what was the social basis of fascism? Did the economic crisis and the depression explain their rise?

The deterministic temptation is strong. There is, however, no automatic translation between this economic chaos and the speed and breadth of support that the Nazi Party has gathered in German society.

The issue is very complex. Many sought the roots of Nazism in the cultural depths of the German and French 'souls', the nature of men comfortably outside parliament, or in the 'entrancing refusal of democracy'²⁴ of French philosophical currents who hated the 'vote craze'.²⁵ Thomas Mann, born in Germany, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929, seeks these roots further, in Luther, who defines 'the true German character', the man who began by criticising nobles and peasants and ended 'and with the most indomitable fury, simply condemning the peasantry'.²⁶

The fact is that not all fascisms 'did work'.²⁷ Not all fascisms went from cutting-edge cultural currents to mass parties that seized state power.

The origin of the Nazi vote doesn't lay mainly in the working classes or in the transfer of the Social Democrat vote to Nazism. German society's degree of support and commitment with National Socialism is more complex, as revealed by a few dozen investigations in this area.²⁸

Before this, however, a reminder: throughout the Nazi regime, 300,000 Germans were arrested, persecuted or killed for opposing Hitler. It is true that

²⁴ Zeev Sternhell *et al.*, *Nascimento da Ideologia Fascista* (Lisbon: Bertrand Editora, 1995), 212.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ Thomas Mann, *Um Percurso Político* (Lisbon: Bertrand, 2016), 164–165.

²⁷ Paxton, *A Anatomia do Fascismo*, 93.

²⁸ Dick Geary lists dozens of recent studies in this field and their differences, in *Hitler e o Nazismo* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2010), p. 36-45.

Nazism was defeated from the outside by allied forces but there was also internal opposition.

Another central debate, which does not fit here but must be remembered, is whether the German society that adhered to Nazism did so out of fear or ideological commitment. No one took this controversy as far as Primo Levi in his masterwork *The Drowned and the Saved*.²⁹ For him, a survivor of Auschwitz, German society has the historical burden of extermination camps because the fear they could have had does not justify the absence of action against the suffering in the work camps and in the extermination camps, where nothing could be done and there was no chance of resistance.

Bertolt Brecht, a socialist poet and revolutionary resistant to Nazism in his 15-year exile (an ‘ambassador of doom’, as he described himself), even wrote, reflecting on history and addressing the future: ‘You who will emerge from the flood in which we have gone under ... Think of us with forbearance.’³⁰ Brecht was not forgiving the Germans, nor necessarily referring to them in these verses, but recognising that the dimension of defeat was at that time unrecoverable.

In 1939, the German labour movement, which had the potential force to organise itself to resist, was defeated, and its main leaders were dead or exiled.³¹ Few were spared from Nazi terror – not even the Nazis in the end.

Let us get back to the Nazi Party and its electoral support. Still with another note: there is no automatic correspondence between social and electoral support in history. The two phenomena may be in disarray, a party can have much electoral support and little social support, and vice versa.³² That is, elections are a measure of reality that must be viewed with a critical eye – they are not exempt from mediations:

The reductionist conclusion that every people has the government it deserves is not Marxist. Nor is it a Marxist claim that each class, particularly the working class, has the direction that corresponds to their interests. This type of determinism is foreign to the theory that argues dialectically that political representation is the result of a struggle in which all classes influence each other, but the working classes are more vulnerable to the dominant ideology of their day.

²⁹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017). This is the author’s last work, written in 1986, a year before his death.

³⁰ ‘Ihr, die ihr auftauchen werdet aus der Flut in der wir untergegangen sind (...) Gedenkt unsrer mit Nachsicht’. Bertolt Brecht, To those born later – An die Nachgeborenen, first published in Svendborger Gedichte (1939) in *Gesammelte Werke* (1967), Vol. 4, 722–725.

³¹ Pelz, *A People’s History of Modern Europe*, 139.

³² Valério Arcary, *O Encontro da Revolução com a História* (São Paulo: Sundermann, 2006), 253–275.

Governments come to power as a result of a battle between interests in society, in which some interests are winners and others are losers, being therefore the product of a social and political relationship of forces ... Every struggle contains uncertainty and indecisiveness. Marxism is not fatalism.³³

The NSDAP mobilises votes but also organised social support – and military might; and in Protestant rural districts, more so than in the Catholic ones; in small towns, more than in big ones; among rural workers more than among industrial workers; and among bosses and white collars (about 20 per cent of the workforce then)³⁴ more than among industrial workers. It gathered support among the wealthy and proprietary classes. When in July 1932 its nationwide vote was 37.4 per cent, in the big cities it was 10 per cent lower.³⁶ In Berlin and Hamburg, the NSDAP incurred considerable losses. It is true that a number of polls show support among some sectors of the working class, but these, which represented 54 per cent of the German labour force, were under-represented in the NSDAP.

The majority of the unemployed did not support the Nazi Party. Areas where there was a high concentration of workers and unemployed, such as in the Ruhr region, saw the Communist Party obtain 60–70 per cent of the vote. According to Geary, the overall result of the factory council elections in 1931 elected only 710 representatives of the Nazi Organization of Industrial Cells (NSBO) against 115,671 free trade unionists (SPD-oriented) and 10,956 seats for Christian unions, predominantly Catholic. By January 1933, the NSBO had about 300,000 members, compared with one million Christian trade unionists and more than four million free trade unionists.³⁵

Pelz goes further in the argument, and recalls that if in July 1932 the Nazis had 37.3 per cent of the vote, in the November elections they had lost more than 4 per cent and 34 seats in parliament. That they used terror – the Reichstag fire – to regain influence, and that at that time the reaction of the leftist parties was nil. Shortly afterwards, their vote goes up. Yet, if all other parties had joined against Hitler, they would have prevented his victory. But, as the American historian underlines, Hitler had generous financial backing from Krupp and I.G. Farben, the big companies that would be at the basis of war production:

For the ruling class of Germany, their support for fascism was not merely a response to crisis, it was rather a way of utilizing the crisis. Big business, the army and other remnants of the German Empire gave

³³ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁴ Geary, *Hitler e o Nazismo*, 38. ³⁶

Ibid., 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

the Nazis power and a job to do. The problem was the German fascists got carried away, started the war and then lost it.³⁶

Dick Geary's conclusion is similar. We also share it because it refers to the centrality of politics – in other words, the existence of organisations and their leaders is decisive: 'The NSDAP was more successful where it did not have to deal with strong pre-existing ideological and organizational loyalties.'³⁷ In the words of Pierre Broué, it was a 'gigantic defeat without a fight'.³⁸

But if these loyalties were so strong and widespread in Germany, even though concentrated in large mining regions, working-class areas or larger cities, among a hostile rural environment, why was the Nazi path so fast, and, in a sense, easy?

Because of three factors: Nazism benefited from the lack of support by the USSR and social democracy to the revolutionary projects of the 1930s; it benefited from the active support of the German industrial and financial sector to its projects; and from the inaction, if not active complicity, of social democracy and its alliances with semi-Bonapartist powers before Hitler's rise to power.

Nazism counted among its supporters some of the biggest German capitalists, referred to above. They dominated the economy and bet on the war economy and territorial expansion through war.³⁹ Nazism was not a conservative and retrograde excrescence, a kind of feudal return, as the Third International already isolated in its 'socialism in one country' policy (that is, with the International transformed into a foreign policy instrument for Stalinism and not a for socialist revolutions),⁴⁰ has initially characterised, but a suicidal act of one of the most advanced world capitalisms. Even Robert O. Paxton, who does not share Trotsky's thesis that Nazism was 'the civil war against the proletariat' writes that Nazism was not *tout court* anti-modern, but an 'alternative modernity',⁴³ which was based on the most developed technique and science.

The Nazi state, observe this macabre example, was the first regime in the world to recognise the rights of dogs – in 1933. In the year Hitler opened Dachau for Communist, Trotskyist and Social Democrat prisoners and trade

³⁶ Pelz, *A People's History of Modern Europe*, 141.

³⁷ Geary, *Hitler e o Nazismo*, 41.

³⁸ Pierre Broué, *História da Internacional Comunista, 1919–1943, Vol. 1: Ascensão e Queda* (São Paulo: Sundermann, 2007), 684.

³⁹ Harold James, 'Banks and Business Politics in Nazi Germany', in Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener (eds), *Business and Industry in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 43–46.

⁴⁰ Broué, *História da Internacional Comunista, 1919–1943*.⁴³

Paxton, *A Anatomia do Fascismo*, 33.

union leaders, he made inflammatory public speeches against cruelty towards animals, and in 1934, he banned hunting. In 1937, he regulated the transport of animals by road and, in 1938, by train, so that the animals should be transported in decent conditions – the same wagons where the Jews would be shipped as pigs on their way to death. Hitler also banned scientific experiments with animals, but his regime made experiments with Jews accused of being non-humans for ... practising a medicine that used animals for experiments.

The destinies of man were not therefore solved with the instruments of progress, as the Illuminists dreamed, because the central question of economics and society was: who is to use these instruments? What, how, who and for whom do we produce?

For this reason, during the last, declining phase of the Weimar constitutional regime, reactionary Bonapartist (semi-dictatorial) regimes ruled under the presidential government of Hindenburg (Brüning, Von Papen, Von Schleicher), which while negotiating with traditional bourgeois elites did contribute to the persecution of the labour movement, mostly by not suppressing the fascist gangs connected with Hitler, such as the Freikorps and the SA, the storm troopers led by Ernst Rohm and mobilised against the trade unions.

But let's get back to the first argument. If fascism results from a series of complex factors – defeat in the war, Weimar crisis and despair of the bourgeoisie facing the crisis of 1929 – no one questions today the disastrous role of the policy of the Communist International known as the 'Third Period'. Those who 'could be saved' indulged in a delusional policy that likened social democracy with fascism. As Felipe Demier, a historian of fascism, points out, the force of Nazism also came from the bewilderment of the pro-Soviet communist left and the German social democracy: Until the last moment the Stalinist leadership of the German Communist Party (KPD), intoxicated by its "third period" sectarianism, dogmatically refused to close ranks in any area of the anti-fascist struggle (in trade unions, parliament, any kind of organisation) with the reformist leaders of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which not only kept it away from the bulk of the working-class bases of social democracy, as it dangerously divided the forces of the German working class in a conjuncture in which fascism spread rapidly among the petty-bourgeois masses of the country.

Regrettably, Trotsky's gloomy predictions about how ephemeral and unstable German Bonapartism was proved to be right and the German proletariat, including its Communist and Social-Democratic leaders, would learn the hard way what were the differences between Bonapartism and fascism,⁴¹ the

⁴¹ Felipe Demier, *O Que é Uma Revolução?* (with Varela and Arcary) (Lisbon: Colibri, 2016); and Felipe Demier, *O Longo Bonapartismo Brasileiro 1930–1964* (Rio de Janeiro: Maud, 2013).

differences between dictatorship and civil war, between a state that fought against the labour movement and another that sought to physically annihilate it.

What was this so-called policy of the Third Period? In the absence of a united front against Nazism,

The leadership of the Communist International considered that the balance of power regarding the possibilities of a world revolution entered its 'third period' after the Russian Revolution ... meaning the final agony of capitalism that would inevitably lead to a new revolutionary rise of the masses ... Given this characterization, the *Comintern* made an 'ultra-leftist' turn and directed its parties towards a policy of 'class against class'. In Stalin's words, Social Democracy, with its petty-bourgeois ideology, was branded as the 'twin brother' of fascism. This 'ultra-leftist' turn approved in 1928 was related to the reorientation of Soviet internal politics adopted in the same year. Breaking with Bukharin's line of 'socialism at a tortoise pace', Stalin abandoned the alliance with the Kulaks (considered as the bourgeois of the countryside, but who in fact were just relatively wealthy peasants), initiating the violent process of forced collectivization of agriculture.⁴²

The German proletariat, led by two powerful mass organisations, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), became disoriented due to the policy of the Third Period:

In the interpretive view of the German Stalinists, practically devoid of political nuances, an eventual victory of Hitler would only entail another fascist government which, like the preceding ones, would seek to save the crumbling capitalism of the country. This vulgar characterization of the national political reality, in which 'all cats were grey', led to an absolutely sectarian antifascist strategy, which rejected the possibility of building a united front with the SPD, labelled as 'social-fascist'.⁴³

The united front, which had its origins in the decisions of the Communist International's Sixth Congress in 1928, implying a front with other currents of the labour movement, was replaced in the Seventh Congress with the famous report presented by Dimitrov, where a policy of broad alliance between the

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ In 1932, Trotsky referred to the KPD leaders' view of the German political situation at the time: "Unfortunately, the Communist Party was also completely taken aback by the events. The Stalinist bureaucracy could not foresee anything ... Different varieties of fascism take power from one another through 'fascist' coups. Is it not evident that the

working class and some sectors of the bourgeoisie is endorsed. As historian Carlos Zacarias Sena Jr. puts it, ‘the popular front policy that foresaw broad alliances with sectors of the bourgeoisie considered progressive became the privileged tactic of the communist parties in the conjuncture of rising fascist or philofascist dictatorships throughout the world in the 1930s.’⁴⁷ The popular front was first tested in Blum’s France with the Socialists and then with the Radical Party. Spain followed and after that it was generalised.

The aim was, as Pierre Broué in the *History of the Communist International* (2007) states, to mobilise the communists for a policy of alliances with sectors of the bourgeoisie for the coming war.⁴⁸

The popular front policy was generalised and strengthened far beyond the end of the war, through the ‘peaceful transition to socialism’, the ‘détente’, the ‘peaceful coexistence’, and becoming an ‘old Soviet project of pan-European agreement for peaceful coexistence’,⁴⁹ culminating in Helsinki in 1975. In colonial or semi-peripheral countries, the popular front tactic was broadened to a ‘national front’ encompassing all ‘sincere democrats’, or ‘honest Portuguese’, in a local version, whether they were Social Democrats, Liberals, Republicans or even Monarchists.

Back to 1928, it was not only the communists loyal to the USSR who had a disastrous policy. The SPD, seeking an intermediary route between Nazism and Bolshevism, wanted to defend the Weimar Republic, and at the same time, it supported Brüning’s deflationary policy and his Bonapartist governance by decrees. They also supported Hindenburg, who appointed Hitler as chancellor, for the presidency of the Republic.

Stalinist theory was created expressly to clog the human brain?” Leon Trotsky ‘O único caminho’ [‘Bonapartismo e fascismo’]. *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 283–284.

⁴⁷ Carlos Zacarias Sena Junior, ‘Frente Única, Frente Popular e Frente Nacional’, In *Anais Cemarx*, V Colóquio Internacional Marx Engels, Unicamp, November 2007, 5–6, at: www.unicamp.br/cemarx/anais_v_coloquio_arquivos/arquivos/comunicacoes/gt7/sessao3/Carlos_Zacarias.pdf.

⁴⁸ Broué, *História da Internacional Comunista, 1919–1943*, 843.

⁴⁹ Massimo Salvadori (ed.), *A Nova Ordem Mundial*, Vol. 17, In *História Universal*, (Lisbon: Planeta DeAgostini, 2005), 126.

Again, nationalism had spoken louder. Hard Bonapartist or overtly fascist regimes did not seek political conciliation in the face of the economic disaster brought about by private property. This is how Hitler rises to power and performs the German miracle with massive public investment and stimuli to production, nationalisation of part of production, control of inflation and currency, and social protection. In 1938, the investment in armaments represented 21 per cent of the GDP.

Putting the war economy to work, while maintaining democratic regimes in their homelands (not in the colonial territories, where dictatorships were

cherished) was also the path of Great Britain and the USA. Unemployment in the USA only returns to the figures of 1927, when in 1941 the inactive factories are reconverted for the production destined to war. The substantial difference was that the United States had emerged from the First World War as winners and creditors, and Britain and France had reserves because they had colonies. Preparation for war, carrying out nationalisations, controlling wages and even militarising the labour force were possible while maintaining democratic regimes. But in Germany, to put it in a brutal and simple manner, there was no money either to contain the struggles between fractions of the bourgeoisie or to calm the working class – so the German war industry miracle comes with the massacre of the workers' parties and trade unions, the expropriation of Jews and others, while maintaining private property.

The cartelisation of factories promoted by Hitler was not obtained through the expropriation of goods, but through its organisation by the State while keeping profits private. This is how the labour and concentration camps were specialised in different sectors of production. In Mauthausen, for example, whose complex comprised 40 more sub-camps, there was not only a large quarry, munitions factories, mines, arms factories, but also a market for selling disinfection products for prisoners. It was barbarism.

'A las barricadas': The revolution again

It's 22 November 1936. Half a million people have marched on the streets of Barcelona in what is considered the greatest funeral in Spanish history – compact lines of people looking sad, singing songs. '*A las barricadas!*' 'To the barricades for the triumph of the Confederation!' – the anthem of anarchist National Confederation of Labour (CNT). It was not the king who was being veiled, but the most famous anarchist of the country, Buenaventura Durruti.

A romantic revolutionary born into a family of nine, this worker, an anarcho-syndicalist militant of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) had been sacked during the 'Bolshevik triennium' (the strikes of 1917–19, which occurred in Spain influenced by the October Revolution) and had immigrated to France in the early 1920s and then to Latin America.

He was part of the group *Los Justicieros* (The Avengers) to fight *Pistolerismo*, the hiring of assassins by bosses, clerics and landowners to persecute and assassinate trade unionists, mostly anarchists. As in Italy during the *Biennio Rosso* (Red Biennium), gangs of fascists or militias whose modus operandi was the assassination of union leaders spreads. Durruti will be one of the organisers of resistance to these methods of terror against the labour movement.

With the Spanish Civil War and the Spanish Revolution (how many times do historians forget the revolution, referring only to the civil war?), Durruti became a leading figure in the barricades of Barcelona. He would be assassinated in Madrid, shot on his back in November 1936, in circumstances which have never been clarified. His decisive role lies not only in the romanticism of the anarchist bank robber – which Brecht expressed so well when he asked: ‘What is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?’⁴⁴ Durruti defends the workers, but from a strategic conception that isolates him even within the anarchist movement, a polemic that will mark the whole Spanish Revolution and the Spanish Civil War and that can be summed up in this idea: we make the revolution to win the war, or we must win the war first?

The contradictions of an unstable regime between 1933 and 1936 set the framework of the Spanish Civil War that started in 1936, with the military pronouncement of 18 July. The Spanish Civil War would end in April 1939 with the victory of Francoism and 1 million dead. The Portuguese Estado Novo was also one of the protagonists in this event, helping Franco during the Civil War.⁴⁵

Anarchists and Trotskyists argued that the war could only be won if revolution were to take place – with land distribution and control of the factories; the USSR, Communists and Republicans did not want to question private property in order to have moderate republicans as allies. This strategy prevailed during the war – and it lost the war.

In 1933, Casas Viejas main square was the centre of the village and the centre of power, a reflecting mirror of Spain: a church, a barracks and the large dwellings of the landowners. In the upper part of the village, the old houses that baptised the village were home to workers, day labourers and shepherds. Spain was a country where, in the 1920s, after the First World War, capitalism had had a strong impulse; by 1930, those engaged in agriculture had dropped to under half the working population.⁴⁶ Proletarianisation was accelerated; peasants were moving to the cities, which became concentrations of industrial workers, those who would become, together with rural day labourers, the basis of the Spanish Revolution – one of the most romantic conflicts of the twentieth century, immortalised by the photographer Robert Capa, the writers George Orwell, André Malraux, Ernest Hemingway and many others.

But ‘Spain did not experience a classic bourgeois revolution in which the structures of the *ancien régime* were shattered.’⁴⁷ In Casas Viejas, peasants

⁴⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928); Macheath, Act 3, Scene 3, 92.

⁴⁵ César Oliveira, *Salazar e a Guerra Civil de Espanha* (Lisbon: O Jornal, 1987).

⁴⁶ Andy Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Palgrave, 2007), 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

lived as in most of southern Spain, where 2 million landless day labourers, the *braceros*, worked on average only half of the year in the large landed estates, the *latifundia*.

Women also worked in agriculture, with lower salaries, but also as seamstresses or raising chickens. Boys did not go to school, they had to keep cattle from when they were little; and girls served in the farms (*fincas* and *cortizos*) of the landowners. The family wage provided food – it was a subsistence wage, which meant that at times of unemployment, which were not uncommon in agricultural work, very much conditioned by the moods of the seasons, families went hungry.

To give an idea, in December 1933, there were 1,437,000 agricultural and forestry wage earners in Spain and almost 300,000 were unemployed. In the municipality of Medina Sidonia, 42 landowners possessed more than 61 per cent of the wealth. The inhabitants of Casas Viejas had the same level of education as the rest of Spain – almost none. They had old peasant traditions and religious dogmas. According to the 1931 Population Census, there were 113,290 members of the clergy in a population of 23 million.⁴⁸ Most children and youngsters did not learn to read unless they entered an anarchist-libertarian group and there, of course, they read the libertarian press. In Andalusia, the average life expectancy was ten years lower than among the urban workers, which was already low.⁴⁹

Between 1814 and 1923, there were 43 *pronunciamientos*, or military coups, some not victorious, and most to preserve the monarchy in agony – the last of which was led by Captain General Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923 to rescue Alfonso XIII.

In an interview with a French journalist on 16 November 1937, Franco, the *caudillo*, declared:

our war is not a civil war ... but a Crusade ... Yes, our war is a religious war. We who fight, whether Christians or Muslims, are soldiers of God and we are not fighting against men but against atheism and materialism.⁵⁶

Even today, some Spanish bishops express themselves in these terms referring to the ‘crusade of 1936’.

Anarchists had a very strong presence among the industrial and rural workers – a fact that was evident in Andalusia. Small villages such as Casas Viejas, among many others that experienced insurrections, had a local organisation of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Barou, *La guerre d'Espagne ne fait que commencer* (Paris: Seuil, 2015). ⁵⁶ Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 290.

the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) or the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation). Already in 1874, there was a local federation of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) in Medina Sidonia, which took a stand for Bakunin's ideas and broke with the Marxist sector of the First International. Some of these workers, led by the anarchists, would even oppose the agrarian reform: after all, they were for the collectivisation of the land, not for its distribution.

Anarchists are an embarrassing presence in the republican government, because it is they who led the majority of the very strong social movement of Spain in the 1930s. The misery of this period, the worsening unemployment and the failed Republican promises are the breeding ground for countless movements that burst throughout Spain in the form of insurrections, general strikes and occupations.

In January 1933, the CNT called for a general strike of the railways, which was to spread through Spain and take on an insurrectional character throughout the territory. The CNT at the time might have had about 1 million members. The anarchists of Casas Viejas were prepared to seize power and so they did in the night of 10 January 1933. The next day, they went to the village *alcalde* (mayor) and reported that the civil guard was to be dismissed and marched through the village carrying the red and black flag of the CNT. In the ensuing hours, three civil guards were killed in a confrontation with the anarchists. Reinforcements were called in. The family of an anarchist involved in the clashes, known by the nickname 'Six Fingers', took refuge in his house. At night, 90 assault guards, at the orders of the Republican government, shot the rioters and burnt the rest of the family by spraying the house with gasoline.

La Mañana daily newspaper, in its edition of 11 January 1933, states 'the Council of Ministers examined in detail the public order situation in Spain, subverted in these days by the anarchist plot.' The newspaper, sided with the Republican government, which had ordered the summary firing of the anarchists, writes that this plot did not have the support of the majority of the working class and that public order was promptly restored. *La Mañana* leaves a warning, which is already a clear demonstration of the class war that will extend to all Spain in 1936: 'The government will be inexorable and will make sure that all state institutions are as well.' This critical tone is common to almost the entire republican press in the days that follow. But news slowly begin to reveal the police brutality and injustice of the shootings, until it becomes a national issue that will contribute to Manuel Azaña's fall in late 1933.

The Republicans, victorious in the elections, had as their fundamental objective the institutionalisation of a liberal democracy that would carry out some social reforms. It was a matter of avoiding the discontent of the workers

and peasants. But the regime was beset by its own contradictions: the economic depression that led to the revolutionary uprising of the Spanish popular strata in 1930 was the same that prevented Republicans from making reforms and social concessions that might appease the popular movement.

On the other hand, the republican regime had very little support among the working class and the peasantry, heavily influenced by anarchism. Republican support laid in urban sectors and some intellectualised middle classes. But not all of it: important sectors of the middle classes of that time adhered to communist and anarchist ideas. Let us not forget that Europe of 1933 is the Europe in which Hitler rises to power and that more than ever the option between social revolution and fascism is present. The Republic could only have survived with the support of the people. But to win it, it took much more than good words.

The political right, aggrieved by the possibility of an agrarian reform, even if shy, does not wait for what it considers to be republican inefficiency and reinforces its structures. In 1933, José Antonio Primo de Rivera founds the Spanish Phalanx, the party that will support Franco's regime.

The Spanish Phalanx (*Falange Española*) was founded at the Teatro da Comédia in Madrid on 29 October 1933 by the Madrid lawyer José Antonio Primo de Rivera y Sáenz de Heredia. Son of Miguel Primo de Rivera, the dictator who ruled Spain between 1923 and 1930, José Antonio, Marquis de Estella, was an aristocrat, linked to the landowners and the most conservative military circles. Shortly after the fall of his father's dictatorship, José António becomes deputy secretary of the National Monarchical Union party, an organisation where some of the Fascist principles of the *Falange* are already clear: exaltation of national identity, creation and maintenance of a military corps who pledge to maintain the prestige of Spain 'one and indivisible', the preservation of discipline, order and conservative values. Shortly after an unsuccessful run for the 1931 elections, he is arrested in 1932 and accused of supporting General Sanjurjo's attempted *coup d'état*. He doesn't spend much time in prison though, and in 1933 he founds the Spanish Falange, that in 1934 will join the JONS (*Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*), a fascist party created in 1931 by Onésimo Redondo Ortega and Ramiro Ledesma Ramos, to form the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS*.

The Spanish Civil War is one of the major events of the twentieth century. Symbol of the political and social contradictions of the world between the wars, which emerges from the rubble of the crisis of 1929, in Spain some of the most important political projects were in confront: democratic Republicans, revolutionaries, nationalist and fascist movement. It is also a war of great international impact. In it, thousands of international volunteers fought

to defend the Republic mostly in the International Brigades. A few thousand Portuguese also fought on both sides.

The Spanish Revolution and the defeat in the civil war were the antechamber of the Second World War, painted by Picasso in *Guernica*. Its importance ran the world due to the militant international involvement in this war and to the scale of the revolution in Aragon and Catalonia, where workers controlled the production; due to the external interference of the Axis and the USSR and the ambiguous relationship of France and England, it was interpreted as the first conflict of the Second World War.

This is not a unanimous opinion among historians. Did the Second World War begin in Poland in 1939 or before, in the Spanish Revolution? Nor is it unanimous among the allies. They reject, in a struggle for memory, that the fact that they did not help the Spanish Republic opened the doors to Nazism. Franco told Adolf Hitler in 1941: in the Second World War, ‘the first battle was won here in Spain’. An American anti-fascist volunteer wrote the same: ‘To me, World War Two started on July 18, 1936. That’s when the first shot was fired in Madrid.’⁵⁰

Less well known but equally vital to the destinies of Europe was the revolutionary situation that opened in France between 1934 and 1937, during the ‘popular front’. For Pierre Broué,⁵¹ a Marxist historian and a Trotskyist militant with a remarkable work, a revolution was under way, slowed down by the ‘popular front’ with the complicity of the communists under the pressure of the USSR and its policy of ‘socialist in one country’ – meaning that the foreign policy for the communist parties outside the USSR should be in the first place the defence of the USSR, avoiding conflicts with the national bourgeoisies of each state where they were inserted. For Serge Wolikow, historian of the Communist International and a member of the French Communist Party, the ‘popular front’ was responsible for important social achievements but was doomed to failure because the Communist Party was caught between the mobilisation of the working masses and the middle classes who supported the Government of Léon Blum⁵⁹ and feared social radicalisation.

In 1934, Paris was experiencing an intense conflict with the threat of the organised extreme right, moralised by Hitler’s victory the preceding year in Germany. In February 1934, they summon large demonstrations against the left and centre, the bourgeois government of Edouard Daladier’s Radical Party.

⁵⁰ Donny Gluckstein, *A People’s History of the Second World War: Resistance versus Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 15.

⁵¹ Pierre Broué and Nicole Dorey ‘Critiques de gauche et opposition révolutionnaire au Front populaire (1936–1938)’, *Le Mouvement Social* 54 (January–March 1966): 91–133. ⁵⁹ Serge Wolikow, *Histoire de l’Internationale communiste* (Paris: Editions de l’Atelier, 2010).

Still in line with the ‘third period’ politics, on 5 February 1934, the Communist paper *L’Humanité* declared that the choice between the fascists and the government was between ‘plague and cholera’.⁵² The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) calls a general strike in response to the far right demonstrations for 12 February, the Socialist Party joins in a separate demonstration and later the Communist Party also joins, with yet another separate protest. Although many feared that everything would end in a confrontation among factions, when the demonstrations meet the population, many thousands, rejoice shouting: ‘Unity! Unity!’

From here, the political situation evolves at the speed of light. Unitary antifascist committees are created, electoral agreements are under debate. The USSR takes a turn refusing to support any social-democratic party and defending alliances even with the bourgeois Radical Party. In May 1936, the general elections give a majority to the Radical Party, the Communists and the Socialists. The Communist Party remains outside the Government but supporting it.

Paris is effervescent, commemorating the Paris Commune (1871) with half a million people on the streets to pay tribute to those who fell defending the Commune. In May, the Renault plant at Billancourt, Paris, struck and occupied. By the end of the month, 70,000 workers were involved⁵³ (the same year the automotive industry sit-down strikes started in the USA,⁵⁴ the largest ever in the history of the country). There were almost 700,000 workers on strike in France these days. Then they were joined by the dockers of the port of Le Havre – the commercial outlet of the most powerful industrial zones of France. In the Nord *département* alone, 1,144 workplaces were occupied, involving 254,000 workers.⁵⁵ There is, in fact, a situation of workers’ control in many factories, which are under the direction of the workers.

Fearful businessmen sign an agreement for salary increases, paid vacations, reduction of the working week to 40 hours, they accept collective bargaining and the election of workers’ representatives in the factories with more than ten workers. Communist Party membership increased from 29,000 in 1933 to 90,000 in February 1936 and 288,000 in December 1936. The Socialist Party grew from 131,000 in 1933 to 202,000 in 1936, and the CGT union federation from 785,700 in 1935 to around four million in 1937.⁵⁶

⁵² Harman, *A Peoples’s History of the World*, 494.

⁵³ Pierre Broué, *História da Internacional Comunista, 1919–1943*, 866.

⁵⁴ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 400–401.

⁵⁵ Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, 496.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 499.

Léon Blum had said in 1926 that it is dangerous to confuse the exercise of power with the conquest of power.⁵⁷ Ten years later, in 1936, his Government will face an insurmountable contradiction – it was not possible in the context of the crisis of the thirties to reassure business and landowners, guaranteeing the accumulation of capital, and at the same time allowing workers' control and a the maintenance of broad social rights for workers.

The Communist leader Maurice Thorez had declared that it was not time to seize power. Léon Blum's France declares non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War in 1937, disappointing the social basis of his government. In 1937, the crisis is back and the illusions of distribution of wealth, after all just a small interlude in the chaos of capitalist production, perish. But the chaos was there, with the fall of production in 1937 (which had also led the United States to backslide on New Deal policies). The government falls after a fiscal crisis still in that year. Workers are persecuted; some are killed during demonstrations with the complacency of the government that reacts to the 1938 strikes against rising prices of essential goods, with brute force. In 1938, there are mass sackings and the law limiting the working week to 40 hours is reversed.

In 1940, the Nazis occupy France. On the one hand, there is the collaboration of the right, fearful of the labour movement – the Vichy Government. On the other hand, the paralysis of the PCF tied to the 1939 non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin. And the initial apathy of the population, who had seen their rights recede and hope in the popular front government fail. Léon Blum will be imprisoned by the Vichy Government and incarcerated in Dachau and Buchenwald.⁵⁸

The government's class reconciliation policies failed and cleared the way for the defeat of the nation in face of the Nazi invasion and occupation in 1940.

This is not Hobsbawm's opinion as enunciated in a famous text published in *Marxism Today*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain:

The point I wish to make here is that the Popular Front strategy now adopted was more than a temporary defensive tactic, or even a strategy for eventually turning retreat into offensive. It was also a carefully considered strategy of advancing to socialism. It was, in my view, the first, and so far still the only, such strategy evolved for countries in which the classical insurrectionary situations of the type of the October revolution or of other types were not to be expected, though not necessarily impossible. This does not mean that it was bound to

⁵⁷ Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds), *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987).

⁵⁸ Tony Judt, *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 81.

succeed. ... The search for the magic pill, certified by white-coated or red-flagged scientists, and absolutely guaranteed to cure cancer, cholera, rheumatism and the common cold or their political equivalents, belongs to the field of self-delusion and advertisement rather than to the field of politics.⁵⁹

Pierre Broué has a different opinion: ‘The party puts into circulation the following formula: “The popular front is not the revolution.” Indeed, it was something else: in France in June 1936, it was the brake of the revolution, after having helped open its locks.’ A few months later, when the military-civilian plot of the French Francoists christened ‘*cagoullards*’ by those who want to minimise the case, is it not the strong man of the Popular Front, the radical Édouard Daladier, who decides to benefit all the military with total impunity, thus marking another point against the revolution?

It is also the Spanish government of the Popular Front that refuses to proclaim the independence of Spanish Morocco – something that might have destroyed Franco’s shock troops, the *moors*. French militants such as Louzon and Rousset offered to act as intermediaries between the Spanish republican government and the Moroccans. The British and French governments voiced their opposition: that would mean the beginning of the collapse of the colonial empires. “As they bowed to this, socialists and communists of the Popular Front became the defenders of property and order, even of colonial order. How, in such conditions, to win the war of the poor and the oppressed?”⁶⁰

In the same year of 1934, when Asturias rose in revolution and the popular front begins in France, Austria saw its short revolution crushed – in only two days, but it was an event that would remain in the memory of the country, with consequences to this day.

The dislocation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following the First World War implied a demographic, political and territorial rearrangement of the city of Vienna. In a climate of penury and devastation, the Social Democratic Party, more progressive and radical than most of the European Social Democratic formations of the Second International, but still rejecting a revolution like those that had happened in Russia, Germany and Hungary, assumed power in the city. The Social Democrats institutionalised, promoted and financed a type of neighbourhood that the workers themselves had illegally built during and after the war and extended to the outskirts of the city, inspired by the garden-city model, with partly productive vegetable gardens as a strategy to escape penury.

⁵⁹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, ‘Forty Years of Popular Front Government’, first published in *Marxism Today*, republished in *Australian Left Review* 61 (1977), 21.

⁶⁰ Broué, *História da Internacional Comunista, 1919–1943*, 868.

The social housing programme of 'Red Vienna' was one of aid to housing and social rights of the working class. The neighbourhoods of Red Vienna had day-care centres, health services, collective laundries, cultural activities (cinemas, theatres, etc.), sports centres as well as community centres. Even today one of these neighbourhoods, the Karl Marx Hof, one of the largest, more than a kilometre in length, has gardens and Laundromats. Between 1923 and 1934, 64,000 dwellings were built, housing 200,000 residents in a universe of 2 million inhabitants, the population of the city at that time.

On 12 February 1934 begins the Austrian civil war. The fighting begins in the industrial heart, in Linz (which Hitler will have among his favourite cities), following the opposition of the Socialists to a series of indiscriminate prisons. But the most dramatic moments are experienced at the Karl Marx Hof, where thousands of workers barricaded themselves to fight against the army, police and paramilitaries loyal to conservative and fascist politicians. They are definitely defeated four days later, on 16 February. The government suspends the parliament and outlaws the socialists. More than 200 people die. A Bonapartist corporative state is born. The Nazi Party ascended to power, the workers fell under the boots of fascism, and Social Democrats were persecuted. Austria had its *Anschluß* (annexation/connection) on 13 March 1938, with large sections of the population celebrating on the streets the entrance of the Nazi troops into the territory, unopposed – the opposition had been defeated four years earlier.

Today, the central square of the Karl Marx Hof in Vienna is called 12th February Square. In the name of the memory of 12th February, and unlike the majority of the European left that adopted anti-militarist positions, even today the Austrian Left, including the Social Democrats, is in favour of the conscription, because it considers that the army must not be made up of professionals, so that it cannot turn against the workers, or at least to favour its crisis and division when there is a revolution. This subject came back to the pages of European newspapers after the crisis of 2008, in response to the growing American protectionism after Trump's election.⁶¹

⁶¹ Connor Kilpatrick, Lester K. Spence, Liza Featherstone and Ethan Young, *Donald Trump and the Rise of the Nationalist Right, Essays* (New York: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2016).