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## Part III: Soviet Cultural Policy and the Spanish Republic

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On 24 February 1936, a Spaniard named José Rodríguez sat down to pen a letter to José Díaz, a deputy in the Spanish parliament and the general secretary of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). The purpose of this correspondence was to solicit Díaz for advice concerning a journey Rodríguez was to embark on with a friend. The trip in question was a voyage on bicycle from their home in Seville to the Soviet Union. Once in Russia, the pair hoped to cycle around the country and "study ... the great project being constructed by those true fighters, our Russian brothers." The documentary evidence tells us nothing more regarding the fate of these adventurers. Díaz did write back several weeks later, attempting to dissuade Rodríguez from making the trip, and calling the itinerary "rather difficult." <sup>1</sup>



Taken by itself, this eccentric travel idea could be chalked up to nothing more than youthful enthusiasm and might offer a rare point of cultural contact between Europe's extreme northeast and southwest. But in fact, during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-36), and even more during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), Rodríguez's plan for a Russian bicycle vacation would have seemed rather unremarkable. From 1931 on, a considerable number of Spaniards became increasingly fascinated by the Soviet Union. Some toured Russia and wrote up their experiences in travelogues. Many more wrote away to Moscow for information about specific developments the Bolshevik Revolution had brought to Russia. At the same time, to further relations between the two countries, Spaniards founded Soviet friendship societies in dozens of cities and towns. Conferences were given around the country on Soviet themes, and Soviet film festivals and art shows were organized. In short, Soviet Russia increasingly captivated the imagination of certain restless young Spaniards and emerged as a societal model through which some hoped to recast both their national and individual identity.

This section seeks to examine the origins and implications of Soviet-Spanish cultural contacts during the Second Republic and Civil War, and to assess a topic largely ignored in the existing historiography: Soviet cultural policy in Spain, and Soviet cultural exchanges with the Republic. That Moscow had a cultural policy in Spain cannot be doubted. Though some historians have incorrectly asserted that Soviet-Spanish relations of any kind were barely existent prior to 1936, <sup>2</sup> there were many points of contact. Communist front organizations whose focus was primarily cultural, including the Friends of the Soviet Union, had been active in Spain since the early 1930s. During the civil war, the Republican zone was awash with every variety of Soviet propaganda, a development noted by many contemporary observers. But to date, the secondary literature has lacked a substantive analysis of the extent of Soviet cultural activities in the Republic and the institutional foundation of this cultural policy. <sup>3</sup>

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Guerra Civil (AHN SGC), PS Madrid, carp. 385, fol. 33-34. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** Pierre Broué, for example, a leading French scholar of modern Spain, asserts that, before the war, Hispanic culture essentially ignored Soviet culture, and vice versa. See *Staline et la Révolution* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 23. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** There are no Western studies that take up the topic in any detail. The only Soviet work to concentrate on Soviet cultural policy in the Republic is V. V. Kuleshova, *Ispaniia i SSSR: Kulturnye sviazi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975). Kuleshova's study, though important for revealing the presence of relevant document collections in various Soviet archives, including the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), does not critically examine the source material cited, and thus never gets to the fundamentally ideological nature of what will be referred to below as Moscow's "cultural offensive." [Back.](#)

### [Stalin and the Spanish Civil War](#)