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## CHAPTER 58 Spain: Background to Revolution

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### THE UNKNOWN SPAIN

In 1938, a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, a highly evocative memoir, titled *Homage to Catalonia*, was published in Britain. It was written by a little-known author, Eric Blair, or as he pseudonymously called himself, George Orwell. Orwell had recently returned to England from Spain, which was in the midst of a tumultuous civil war in which semi-fascistic "Nationalists," led by General Francisco Franco and reactionary army officers, rebelled against an elected republican government. Orwell had volunteered in the fall of 1936 to serve in an obscure militia unit attached to the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, or POUM (its Spanish acronym). On its publication, Orwell's small book was bitterly denounced by liberals and Stalinist Communists alike because it revealed an aspect of the civil war that had hitherto been all but ignored by the Western press.

Most people outside of Spain understood the Spanish Civil War to be a bipolar conflict between republican loyalists and authoritarian reactionaries—or as the Communists and their liberal allies put it, between "democracy and fascism." Orwell, by contrast, insisted that the war was a complex social conflict between a revolutionary working class and peasantry on the one side, and semifeudal land magnates, wealthy industrialists, a conservative middle class, and an expressly reactionary, indeed virtually medieval, clergy on the other. Most of the workers and peasants who were resisting the Nationalists were fighting not only to prevent General Franco from establishing a ruthlessly authoritarian regime but also to create a revolutionary restructuring of their social relations into a radically new society.



Many people outside Spain had little or no idea about the profoundly social issues that marked the conflict. Fascism had begun its brutal march across Europe, and the liberal-Communist alliance promoted by Stalin found it useful to depict the conflict as a simple political struggle of a republic against fascism. This was not difficult to do. Spain was so isolated, politically and economically, from the rest of the world that its domestic conditions were scarcely known beyond the Pyrenees or across the Atlantic. In fact the economic and social burdens that weighed upon the Spanish people, buttressed by a medieval clerical hierarchy, semi-feudal land magnates, and a parasitic military, were immense. By comparison with other European countries, movements for social change in Spain were of a particularly radical nature: the dominant outlook of the Spanish Left was neither social democratic nor Communist but rather militantly Socialist and especially anarchosyndicalist in orientation. By the 1930s Spain had produced not only a large Socialist party but a huge revolutionary syndicalist trade union federation and a small, highly volatile anarchist federation—as well as the expressly anti-Stalinist Communist organization to which Orwell adhered. To all appearances, Spain by 1936 had become a repository of social movements that had all but disappeared from the rest of Western Europe. Unlike the relatively stable mass social democratic parties that flourished elsewhere, mass libertarian organizations in Spain gave rise to a seething and fecund radical political culture, one that was unparelled in the rest of Europe. It was in little-known Spain that Marxism, anarchism, syndicalism, collectivism, and libertarian individualism, with all their traditions, were obliged to answer to the challenges of a living history. Subjected by the civil war to the scrutiny of real-life conditions, all their strengths and weaknesses were laid bare.

Moreover, the relatively small Spanish industrial working class was the most militant and class-conscious in the world. In December 1937, after the Spanish workers had been badly pummeled by Franco's armies on the Iberian peninsula's battlefields, Leon Trotsky, a scrupulously discriminating observer of the international labor movement, still praised them in the highest terms: "The Spanish proletariat displayed first-rate military qualities. In its specific gravity in the country's economic life, in its political and cultural level, the Spanish proletariat stood on the first day of the revolution not below but above the Russian proletariat at the beginning of 1917."<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, we may ask: what conditions within Spain gave rise to such an extraordinary working class? Why did the Iberian peninsula produce a huge libertarian syndicalist trade union? To answer these

questions, it is necessary to situate Spain in the context of Western Europe's economic, political, and cultural history.

## ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

In the eighth century Muslims from North Africa conquered most of the Iberian peninsula and established an emirate there, with its capital at Córdoba. In reaction, the various regions of the peninsula—notably those that were subordinated to Islam, and the few in the north that were not—laid claim to a complex system of ancient rights or *fueros*, as well as distinct cultures and in some cases separate languages, all of which entitled them to a considerable degree of local autonomy. The assertions of such local and regional autonomy were part of the centuries-long struggle against Muslim occupation known as the Reconquest, which finally succeeded over eight centuries in expelling the invaders in 1492, during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. So extensive were many of the regional powers that Spanish kings and nobles were obliged to acknowledge local leaders as equals, regardless of wealth or status. As Christian monarchs ascended to the Spanish throne, they were expected to appear before each local assembly of the people and acknowledge their regional rights—and only then would the regional community leaders officially grant them royal sovereignty over people of that area.

The Basques, for example, who had never lived under Moorish rule and differed from other cultures on the peninsula ethnically, linguistically, and culturally, never quite regarded themselves as Spaniards; nor did the Catalans, the inhabitants of Catalonia, in the northeastern corner of the peninsula, who were oriented far more toward France and Italy than the occupants of the Castilian interior. In Aragon, the region adjacent to Catalonia, the local coronation vow contained an implied warning to the would-be monarch: "We who, each man apart, are worth as much as you, and who, all together, are more than you, we make you king."<sup>2</sup> Such declarations expressed the powerful decentralist tradition that prevailed in Christian Spain.

Claims to ancient *fueros* originated in the Iberian municipalities, or communes, with their longstanding traditions of municipal self-government and cohesiveness. In fact, real authority in Spain rested on the vitality of town and city life. Especially in times of crisis, a strong sense of local affinity would assert itself, stemming from the base of society rather than from its summits. Even after 1492, when the last Moorish stronghold



The seeds planted by Fanelli in 1868, however, bore fruit as Spanish Internationalists, scattering throughout Spain, proselytized in town and country alike. In June 1870 they were ready to convene at least a hundred delegates in Barcelona, representing 150 local societies scattered around Spain. The congress was authorized to adopt a program and create an organizational structure to mobilize Spain's masses for the impending class war. Although its proceedings were guided by a shadow group of *aliancistas*, or members of Bakunin's Alliance, the congress exhibited all the formality of a highly institutionalized apparatus; more significantly, its articulated structure attests to its essentially syndicalist character. Rafael Farga Pellicier, a Bakuninist and the congress's chairman, declared in his opening address: "The state is the guardian and defender of the privileges that the Church makes divine . . . We wish to end the rule of capital, of the state, and of the Church by constructing on their ruins Anarchy—the free federation of free associations of workers."<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of whether it constituted "anarchy," the highly organized congress officially established itself as the Spanish branch of the International, giving itself the name Spanish Regional Federation (*Federación Regional Española*, or FRE). The delegates were divided into three rival tendencies: one was committed to pure and simple trade unionism, to better the material condition of the workers within a capitalist framework; the second supported creating a practical form of communitarianism; and the third favored waging a systematic struggle against capitalism by means of the general strike and armed insurrection. The same three positions were to coexist uneasily in Spanish libertarian organizations for decades. Indeed, the FRE's Barcelona Congress may well be regarded as a template for Spanish libertarian congresses over the next 60 years.

The basic component unit of the FRE was the local section within a particular trade (*sección de oficio*), to which workers in a common enterprise belonged. All the various *secciones de oficio* that existed within a particular locality—such as a municipality, county (*comarca*), province, or region—were combined into a *federación local*. The *federación local* united all the locals in a given town, city, or area regardless of trade; and in the event of a successful libertarian revolution the *federaciones locales* were expected to manage the new municipal and regional economies. The *federaciones locales* thus were also instruments for the creation of a postrevolutionary society. To coordinate the entire structure, the regional plenaries and nationwide congresses of the FRE chose several national committees and a federal commission. In practice the commission had only nominal powers, however, and played mainly a symbolic role in the

FRE, whose components went their own way organizationally and often politically.

This firm commitment to organization was a striking feature of the Spanish libertarian movement and was unparalleled in any other libertarian movement; it goes some way towards explaining why Spanish libertarian organizations became relatively large and effective. Spanish libertarians were on the whole syndicalist rather than anarchist. Where anarchism avoided structured organization in favor of self-expression and individualism, Spanish libertarianism was strongly oriented toward mass labor confederations geared for insurrectionary general strikes.

Especially in southern Spain, however, self-styled anarchists adopted a kind of organizational structure that consisted not of mass trade union branches but of small, usually secret groups, loosely and informally linked. In deliberate contrast to *sindicalismo*, or trade unionism, this approach could well be named *grupismo*, characterized by small-group organization and episodic forms of practice. *Grupistas* geared themselves toward sabotage, riots, and direct action. This pure anarchism, as I will call it, developed its most fervent adherents in parts of Andalusia, where mountain villages celebrated the freewheeling guerrilla band and the secret conspiracy as the most effective forms of social resistance. In the late 1870s, in fact, the underground FRE found its greatest support in such peasant communities, which influenced the political culture of the better-known towns of Andalusia's plains.

The pure anarchist tendency radically decentralized the FRE into a loose federation of groups, stripping the FRE's Federal Commission of virtually all authority over the component *secciones de oficio*, and reducing it to a mere correspondence and statistics-collection agency. More significantly, from this time the FRE's locals could formulate their own policies and strategies, without regard for the views of other parts of the federation, let alone the federation as a whole. Individual groups could even leave or enter the International at will, with the result that almost no organizational ties remained to hold the FRE together.

In 1877 a new conception of anarchist tactics reached Spain from Switzerland: "propaganda by the deed." According to this doctrine, revolutionaries should seek to ignite a spontaneous workers' revolution by perpetrating explosive acts of violence, such as guerrilla warfare, robberies, bombings, and political assassinations. Anarchists in Europe were perpetrating a plethora of such acts. The new tactic gained popularity in Spain; in 1877 a conference of eastern Andalusian groups committed itself to waging "propaganda by the deed." In 1878 a FRE member tried to kill King Alfonso XII. Anarchist activity soon took on a



terrifying aspect in the imagination of the ruling southern elites, who lived in continual fear of a Spanish *pugachevshchina*. All outbursts of popular anger were now seen as the sinister handiwork of conspiratorial, secretive, and murderous anarchists. The FRE may or may not have been involved in such actions—probably it was not—but the government assumed that it was, and syndicalists as well as anarchists were soon the objects of blame for every act of sabotage.

As a result of these developments, the FRE all but lost its base among the proletariat. Finding underground existence to be of no advantage whatsoever, the Catalans—who inhabited one of Spain's most industrialized regions—turned to legal forms of activity, such as public expressions of grievance, strikes, and the publication of radical literature. Based in the cities and mainly in Barcelona, the urban segment of the FRE denounced "propaganda of the deed" as a harmful practice that merely provided the government with a pretext to clamp down on the workers. Instead, they formally embraced what might be called protosyndicalism. The divide between the FRE's commitment to mass organization and the anarchistic commitment to small-group or individual action was to constitute a permanent division in the Spanish libertarian movement.

In September 1881, as government persecution abated and the FRE was regaining legality, a general congress in Barcelona formally dissolved the FRE and replaced it with a successor organization, the Workers' Federation of the Spanish Region (Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española, or FTRE). This new organization agreed to accept the government's terms in order to retain its legality. Under a new Federal Commission that claimed the right to authorize strikes—presumably in the hope of preventing the often hopeless and irresponsible wildcat strikes often fomented by anarchists—it acquired a relatively centralized structure. To ensure the continuation of union democracy, however, the FTRE retained the practice of holding congresses at every organizational level and promoting organizational democracy.

The FTRE grew rapidly, leaping from 3,000 members in 1881 to 58,000 in September 1882. Apart from its Catalan protosyndicalist leadership, however, most of its avowed members were southern anarchists: at its peak membership in 1882, about 68,000 came from peasant Andalusia. The outlooks of the Barcelona leadership and the Andalusian membership differed markedly. Once again the drift toward pure anarchism alienated the skilled workers of the Barcelona section, until by 1882 the FTRE was torn, as its predecessor had been, by the old organizational dispute. The Barcelona protosyndicalists favored a mass trade union and sought to organize all Spanish workers, both industrial and agricultural, into a

close-knit federation. They advocated the use of strikes, particularly the mass general strike, which in their view was the means *par excellence* for achieving workers' aims. In marked contrast, the Andalusian ultrarevolutionaries favored an illegal, underground existence for the FTRE and "propaganda by the deed" as its most important tactic. Most proletarians regarded insurrectionary rural anarchism as unfeasible, but the power of the small-group anarchists within the FTRE was growing. In 1883 the federation's Valencia congress moved the Federal Commission's seat from Barcelona to Valladolid and replaced all the protosyndicalists on the commission with members more sympathetic to the Andalusians. Once again a split was inevitable.

After 1885 a new libertarian ideology—anarchocommunism—entered Spain, where peasant anarchists embraced it fervently. As we have seen, anarchocommunism had been spawned in Switzerland and France and was most concisely formulated by Peter Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus, and Errico Malatesta.<sup>5</sup> Anarchocommunists disdained mass organizations such as trade unions (which they saw as intrinsically reformist and corruptive of revolutionary impulses) and were strongly committed to small groups—precisely like the groups that already existed among Spanish anarchists. They favored "propaganda by the deed" as a means to ignite the masses into a libertarian uprising. The advent of anarchocommunism in Spain thus reinforced the Andalusians' commitment to *grupismo* and gave it theoretical legitimacy.

Generally, anarchocommunism triumphed over protosyndicalism in the FTRE, but at a steep price: the Barcelona workers departed from the organization in a mass exodus. Thereafter the FTRE became temperamentally and ideologically oriented toward the Andalusians. But under their dominance the federation dissolved into an aggregation of minuscule insurrectionary groups and finally went out of existence in 1888.

In the 1890s various small uprisings broke out in and around Andalusia. Typically, however, they were isolated events, sporadic and unplanned, and never came together in a sweeping regional uprising. The fact is that a movement based solely on the rural poor and landless, without the support of city-dwellers capable of planning and organization, has little chance of creating a significant uprising, let alone a successful social revolution. Peasant riots, fought with spades, hoes, and cudgels, were powerless before the state's armed forces. The hope that the peasant jacquerie could prevail over organized military force had come to an end.



## THE RISE OF SPANISH SOCIALISM AND SYNDICALISM

In 1888 a small group of Spanish Marxian socialists in Madrid, led by the typographer Pablo Iglesias, formally created the Socialist Workers' Party of Spain (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, or PSOE), which became the Spanish section of the Second International. Its membership was initially recruited from *madrileño* typesetters, proofreaders, printers, and their apprentices. That same year Iglesias's group also established a consciously socialist trade union: the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores, or UGT), with its headquarters in Barcelona. But UGT recruitment in Barcelona was painfully slow, while the trade union steadily gained members in Madrid (mainly among craftsmen) and in the Basque Country (among skilled factory workers). The UGT also became the most important union of the coalminers of Asturias, but these militant workers were to follow their own radical course quite different from and independent of that of the UGT leadership.

In contrast to anarchism and protosyndicalism, Marxism advanced in Spain at a snail's pace. While libertarianism echoed decentralist ideas that had been voiced for generations in Spain, with its deep-rooted cantonalist and federalist traditions, Marx's ideas had to be deliberately instilled in Spanish workers. The PSOE was very much in tune with literate skilled craftsmen but was of little interest to rambunctious, unskilled, and often illiterate proletarians. Spanish Socialists and *ugetistas* (as UGT members were called) tended to be staid, pragmatic workers; they were normally—in principle at least—organized along bureaucratic lines. The PSOE consciously imitated, both organizationally and programmatically, the German Social Democratic Party and often seemed more prone to class collaboration than to class war. Government authorities regarded the PSOE as a labor-oriented organization of moderate republicans, and hence relatively tolerable. After a decade of political and union activity between 1890 and 1900, the party still had fewer than 26,000 members. In fact, the inability of the UGT to gain any sizable following in proletarian Barcelona obliged it to move its national headquarters back to middle-class Madrid.

In 1908 the PSOE borrowed the idea of the *casas del pueblo* from a demagogic Radical Party leader, Alejandro Lerroux (who in turn had borrowed it from Belgian Socialists). This was an astute move. Socialists went on to create community centers or local clubhouses in working-class neighborhoods, which became very popular, especially in northern Spain. The centers organized classes for workers and gave them access to libraries and cafés, where they could discuss ideas and explore practical problems.

These grassroots activities, however, always remained peripheral to the PSOE's principal focus: parliamentary activity and pragmatic reforms.

It was in Barcelona, Spain's most industrialized city outside the Basque Country, that the libertarian movement achieved its greatest success. The social metabolism of the Catalan capital had no equal in any Spanish city, and its working class was the most volatile. Barcelona also enjoyed the distinction of being Spain's most bohemian city. By the tens of thousands, jobless peasants were drawn to the city, looking for work and selling their labor for subsistence wages at transient and physically demanding jobs. Barcelona was growing quickly, and its economic advances contributed to the rapid expansion of the city's labor force. In 1902–3 a wave of strikes swept over Spain, including the first general strike in Barcelona. These strikes usually ended in defeat, and in 1905 the strike wave came to an end, followed by a brief period of labor quiescence.

But the quiet was deceptive. In 1907 the new syndicalist ideology crossed the border from France into Spain, reviving the Catalan labor movement.<sup>6</sup> Syndicalism, as we have seen, was not entirely new to Spain—its precursor had existed in the FRE decades earlier. But as a formal ideology it was given a new impulse. Syndicalists regarded the *sindicato*, or trade union, as its fighting unit, be its goal to improve the lot of the workers or to foment a revolution. The more radical syndicalists saw the *sindicato* as the governing unit of the postrevolutionary society—a view that stood in marked contrast to that of the anarchists, who believed that free communes would provide the infrastructure of such a society. Syndicalists regarded pure anarchists as disorganized, adventuristic, and given to terrorism; by contrast, anarchists regarded syndicalists as focused on improving the economic condition of the workers at the expense of the revolution. Syndicalism, in fact, placed an emphasis on organization that was largely absent from anarchism.

Attempts to form an expressly syndicalist labor organization began in 1907, when Barcelona workers formed a citywide federation called Worker Solidarity (Solidaridad Obrera). After a few months the new federation began to publish a newspaper with the same name. In 1908 Worker Solidarity, which explicitly called itself syndicalist, became a regional federation, and within two years it enjoyed the support of the majority of the Barcelona proletariat.

In the spring of 1909, owing to the hostile policies of employers toward their employees, workers in the Catalan capital began to plan a citywide general strike for July. Around the same time the government announced a general military mobilization to support its failing war against rebellious Riff tribesmen in Spanish Morocco. The conjunction of events produced



an explosive situation, and resistance to the mobilization was soon massive. The planned general strike movement rapidly escalated from strikes and riots into a full-scale citywide insurrection. From July 26 to August 1, 1909, Barcelona was the scene of bitter street fighting. Huge crowds openly attacked the police with weapons and tried to win over the soldiers who were sent out against them—not without a measure of success. More than a third of the churches and monasteries in the city were torched, and barricades raised in the city's side streets against invading military and civil guards. So bitter was the fighting in the Clot and Pueblo Nuevo districts that the troops had to employ artillery to demolish the barricades and subdue the insurgents. The unplanned and poorly armed insurrection was crushed. On July 31 the last insurgents were subdued at a cost of several hundred civilian dead. The failed insurrection entered into history as the "tragic week" (*semana trágica*) and was followed by severe governmental repression.

In the wake of the "tragic week" the Barcelona syndicalists were convinced that a federation confined to a single city or region was inadequate: Spanish workers needed a nationwide labor federation. The Catalan Labor Federation (Confederación del Trabajo de Cataluña), the regional organization of the reconstituted Worker Solidarity, called a national congress, and on October 30, 1910, delegates from all over Spain convened at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Barcelona. There they agreed to form a nationwide organization. Their decision was implemented a year later, when the first congress of the National Confederation of Labor (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, or CNT), was held, again at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, during September 8–11, 1911. Although little more than a hundred delegates participated in the "congress," the large delegations from Barcelona, Asturias, Leon, and Galicia clearly indicated that the new CNT should concentrate on organizing urban workers, if necessary even at the expense of peasants and *braceros* (agricultural laborers). The new organization was to be primarily a proletarian rather than a peasant movement.

Like most trade unions of the time, and following in the tradition of guild artisanship, the CNT's structure was organized according to the skills of local unions or *sindicatos* for specific trades. In a classical syndicalist structure these *sindicatos* grouped themselves together into local and trade federations, or *federaciones locales* and *sindicatos de oficio* respectively. In time the *federaciones locales*, or federations based on geographic area, acquired greater importance than those based on trade. Coordinating this basically pyramidal structure was the National Committee, whose members rotated as the organizational center shifted from city to city.

Ostensibly the sole function of the National Committee was to collect statistics, engage in correspondence, and provide aid to the union's prisoners and their families. The CNT was thus, in theory, a loose organization, democratically controlled by the local *sindicatos* that comprised its rank and file. Since libertarian theory in all its forms agreed that money was morally corruptive, the only paid officials in the Confederación (as it was reverently called) were the general secretary of the National Committee and the secretaries of the various regional federations. The remaining union officials were not paid; CNT bodies that handled money were staffed with unpaid auditors who reported to *sindicato* members on all expenditures. Union dues were relatively small by comparison with those of the UGT, thereby opening membership to the most poorly paid workers.

As a matter of principle—moral as well as material—the CNT seldom established a strike fund. This decision was deliberate: the CNT professed to be a revolutionary trade union, whose goal above all was a "universal" general strike that would bring capitalist operations to an end, either violently (as its radicals believed) or by demoralizing the bourgeoisie (as its more constructive wing believed). Accordingly, syndicalist strikes were intended as short, militant, and insurrectionary.

In October 1911, only a month after the CNT's founding congress, a Barcelona judge declared it to be illegal. Even as a clandestine organization, however, the CNT continued to organize strikes. In 1913 a large textile strike of 24,000 workers succeeded in reducing the working week. In 1914, under a more liberal government, the CNT was permitted to resurface as a legal organization. Although its membership had fluctuated enormously, its morale was generally high and it expanded its influence until, by 1919, its membership soared to a half million.

Bakunin, notwithstanding his overly exaggerated status as the father of Italian anarchism, clearly exercised his greatest and most lasting influence in Spain. Here a mass libertarian movement included tendencies that extolled the value of violence over ideas and rapid-fire insurrections over carefully planned attempts to gain power. In practice, however, the CNT's actions were necessarily oriented toward improving the material lot of the workers, and it often behaved like a conventional trade union, notwithstanding its revolutionary rhetoric and a program that preached the overthrow of the capitalist economy. From the Confederación's inception, its workers exhibited an extraordinary level of solidarity and responsiveness to revolutionary slogans, making them the most class-conscious and militant in Europe. But they were by no means revolutionary saints: their most pressing demands were economic—the



eight-hour day, higher wages, improved working conditions, full employment, and job security—and they engaged in strikes and demonstrations in order to achieve them. Many workers joined the CNT, not out of revolutionary ideological conviction but because it was the largest labor organization in their area.

Nor was the CNT always able to convince its recruits that a libertarian society should be their goal. Although the members heartily sang the CNT anthem "To the Barricades," they often had only a limited understanding of what a libertarian social revolution would entail. The CNT leadership did not educate them well; its popular press tended to favor slogans over ideas, and appeals to the raw passions of the oppressed for "anarchy" were more common than a systematic education in working-class history and radical theory. It was more of a fighting organization than an educational one, and its popular press favored sloganeering over ideological exploration and theoretical analysis. Between its reformist and revolutionary wings, the majority of CNT members alternated their preference primarily on pragmatic grounds, depending upon the economic and political conditions that prevailed at any given time. Angel Pestaña, a longtime CNT leader, estimated that only a third of the union's membership could legitimately be called conscious libertarians, with the result that, its militancy notwithstanding, the CNT often teetered on the brink of reformism.

Nevertheless, for much of its life the CNT throbbed with a vitality unparalleled in any other labor union in Europe. Its workers' centers or *centros obreros* (libertarian imitations of the socialists' *casas obreras*), staffed by *cenetistas* (as CNT members were called) gave workers access to reading rooms with periodicals and books and a variety of lectures. *Cenetista* militants engaged in continual strikes and demonstrations; they carried on campaigns to aid prisoners and their families; and they zealously volunteered in support of CNT activities in other parts of Spain. By their example and their words, they recruited thousands more workers into the CNT's fold. In short, the CNT had deep roots in Spain's collectivistic traditions and sought to articulate the aspirations not only of the Catalan working class but of Spain's proletariat generally, as well as its land-poor peasantry.

During the First World War the CNT was led by Salvador Seguí, a textile-worker and moderate libertarian syndicalist of immense organizational ability and administrative talent. Seguí was one of the most pragmatic of all CNT leaders. He tried above all to better the lot of his fellow workers, even within the framework of capitalism. Victor Serge, who knew him well, describes him as "no anarchist, but rather a libertarian, quick to scoff at resolutions on 'harmonious life under the sun

of liberty,' 'the blossoming of the self,' or 'the future society'; he presented instead the immediate problems of wages, organization, rents, and revolutionary power."<sup>7</sup> He attempted to convert the CNT into an agent for improving the working conditions of its members, regardless of ideological considerations, and prudently concealed his nonanarchist views in order to keep the CNT united. Together with several other moderate syndicalists, especially Angel Pestaña (who became the editor of *Solidaridad Obrera* in 1916) and Juan Peiró (who served several terms as secretary-general of the CNT), Seguí led the syndicalist wing of the CNT with considerable astuteness. These men stood sharply at odds with the goals and tactics of the CNT's purist anarchist membership, who cast the workers as the historic and innately revolutionary enemy of capitalism, indeed the irreconcilable foes of the same bourgeois market system that moderate syndicalists were trying to reform.

Whether anarchism and syndicalism could exist within the same movement—even a libertarian one, committed to mutual aid, decentralism, and confederalism—was not at all clear. The CNT's membership was marked by a great deal of ideological diversity. Indeed, the history of Spanish libertarian organization was one of continual fracturing and division among its major wings. What most held the movement together was its freewheeling ambiance. Between anarchism and syndicalism a hybrid concept soon emerged—notably, anarchosyndicalism—that tried in curious ways to meld anarchism with syndicalism, in the hope of fusing the wayward spontaneity of the anarchists with the disciplined, decidedly structured organizational framework of the syndicalists. Anarchosyndicalists tried to use the CNT to strike revolutionary blows that would achieve a future society called libertarian communism. They supported the use of strikes, even general strikes, but not for the purpose of achieving reforms that would make the capitalist system more palatable to the working class. Instead, strikes were to be short, militant, and unswerving, aimed at planting revolutionary ideas among the workers. An ordinary strike should lead to a general strike they averred, indeed to an insurrection, and hopefully a social revolution that would end the existence of bourgeois society.

Lacking an Enlightenment commitment to rationalism, Spain easily gave rise to a fervent socialism of the heart and only secondarily a reflective socialism of the head. Bakunin had long believed that educating workers to become theorists would divest them of their ostensibly innate propensity for action and presumably for revolution. Many Spanish libertarian leaders and militants picked up the bias of their teacher with a vengeance and measured an individual's commitment to libertarianism in terms of courage



and personal heroism rather than the ability to develop ideas. Spanish libertarians thus suffered from a paucity of theory and creativity. Outstanding Spanish anarcho-syndicalists, such as Fermín Salvochea and Buenaventura Durruti, were celebrated not because they were gifted theorists or even able strategists but because of their personal example of moral steadfastness and physical courage—in sum, as men of great daring and fearlessness, rather than creative and provocative thinkers.

The pervasive influence of Catholicism abetted this propensity by making the movement seem like a crusade for moral regeneration; indeed, despite its intense opposition to religion and the clergy, it made free use of quasi-theological terms and ideas. Spanish libertarians were sustained by visions of a morally purified society—so much so that they did not hesitate to call their ideals “sacred” or to describe their martyrs as “saints.” While anarchists failed to articulate the nature of the transition between the old social order and the new one; and while syndicalists had a pragmatic knowledge of how to retain the achievements of their victories and restructure society along libertarian socialist lines; anarcho-syndicalism conjured up a social realm in which anarchist “saints” could link arms with syndicalist “realists.”

Anarcho-syndicalists therefore benefited greatly from their membership in the CNT. Without its combined anarchist and syndicalist components, they might well have languished in small, unstructured groups that had little influence on the mass of workers. But they and their anarchist supporters could glamorize their martyrs, those who had been killed in the struggle against the state. The anarchist lament “Give roses to rebels failed!” typified this reverence for sacrifice—and for failure. Martyrdom gave failed libertarian revolutionaries and their groups immense prestige. In a movement that often seemed committed to noble defeats, nothing could be more influential than a glowing martyrology. This idealization of failure, however, created a mindset that was not oriented toward long-term success in creating a libertarian communist society. As Gerald Brenan, a perceptive observer of Spanish libertarians, noted from personal observation in the 1930s, the Spanish libertarian movement focused more on mounting protests against social injustices than on constructing a thought-out process to achieve major social change:

To register a protest! This phrase sums up almost the whole of anarchist action during the last fifty years [prior to 1936]. In their newspapers and magazines no word is so common as the word *protesta*. Spanish anarchism early adopted an attitude of moral disapproval towards the bourgeoisie and all its doings which it never relaxed.<sup>8</sup>

In other parts of Europe libertarian ideas rarely developed a mass following; their supporters were confined mainly to small, scattered groups. In Spain, however, libertarian ideas gained a mass following that persisted for decades because it emanated out of village values (such as mutual aid, egalitarianism, and solidarity) that were also carried into the cities, to which peasants migrated, producing a politics of decentralization and confederalism; a strong emphasis on an egalitarian morality; and a distrust of the assumed corruptive role of the state and parliamentarism. These aspects of the libertarian critique matched the everyday experiences of the peasantry and working class who made this long and painful journey.

But could libertarian ideals and vague popular sentiments provide a guide for creating a new society? Militant Spanish workers and peasants clearly needed much more: to address the reorganization of an industrial economy, create new political institutions, and train technicians and professionals. An anarchism based on a celebration of “free spirits” and “natural instincts” could hardly provide a lasting challenge to bourgeois society, be it existing or still in emergence.

## NOTES

1. Leon Trotsky, “The Lessons of Spain—The Last Warning” (December 17, 1937), in *The Spanish Revolution (1931–39)* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 322.
2. Cited in Éléna de La Souchère, *An Explanation of Spain*, trans. Eleanor Ross Levieux (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 41.
3. For more on the development of the libertarian movement in Spain, see Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (1977; repr. Edinburgh and San Francisco, CA: A.K. Press, 1998).
4. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 52.
5. See Murray Bookchin, *The Third Revolution*, Vol. 2 (London and New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 258–9.
6. On syndicalism, see *ibid.*, pp. 263–70.
7. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901–1941*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 56.
8. Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 163.



## CHAPTER 59 Syndicalist Organization and Anarchist *Atentados*

### SINDICATOS ÚNICOS

During the First World War Spain remained neutral, and as such became a source of supply for the belligerents on both sides. Orders for foodstuffs and manufactures poured into the country from abroad, with the result that Spanish capitalists and agricultural landlords enjoyed unprecedented affluence. Although Spanish workers and peasants to some extent shared in the general prosperity, their wages lagged well behind the levels of their employers' profits. Gradually, as Spain sold off most of its crops and usable manufactures to the belligerents, what remained for domestic consumption was not enough to feed the Spanish people. Indeed, wages barely kept pace with profits. In 1915 inflation caused by domestic scarcity severely eroded working-class gains and heightened discontent. By 1917 inflation was rampant, causing acute economic hardship among the mass of Spanish proletarians and peasants.

While the CNT's membership was growing both in size and in militancy, the year 1917 began with a thunderclap: news of the February revolution in Russia reached Spain. Spanish revolutionary socialists were jubilant; the revolution in Russia seemed like the opening curtain to revolution throughout Europe. When news of the Bolshevik seizure of power arrived in October, many Spanish workers and peasants were convinced that the Russian workers and peasants had finally taken control of their own social destinies and had thereby opened a new horizon for the exploited masses of the world. They mistook the hitherto virtually unknown Bolsheviks for kin of anarchists, syndicalists, and left-wing socialists.

In a spate of revolutionary enthusiasm and solidarity with their

Russian comrades, the Socialists and the *cenetistas* collaborated to prepare a revolutionary general strike. In August 1917 the CNT initiated a strike in the transport industry that, contrary to the hopes of the organizers, failed to become general. Still, the syndicalists' militancy vastly enhanced the prestige of the CNT. In March 1918 the country elected a new Cortes, in which for the first time 17 republicans, 25 Catalan liberals, and 6 Socialist deputies occupied seats—an outcome that Seguí justly claimed was the direct consequence of the CNT's role in the revolts of July and August 1917. Accordingly Seguí insisted that the CNT deserved a quid pro quo from the Cortes liberals, namely legislating into existence the reforms demanded by the syndicalists.

Seguí's chief demands—for an eight-hour day, the abolition of child labor, secular education, and political equality for women—were actually modest reforms. To ordinary *cenetistas* they seemed eminently desirable, but to the anarchist tendencies in the CNT, Seguí and his allies seemed to be reformists who, by working with bourgeois politicians, were diminishing the "revolutionary instincts" of the proletariat and reducing the CNT to a conventional labor union. Seguí's willingness even to negotiate with parliamentary parties angered them bitterly, widening the rift between pragmatic syndicalists and ultrarevolutionary anarchists.

Even as he was taking this reformist course, however, Seguí was proposing to significantly change the CNT's internal organizational structure in such a way as to transform it into a more effective weapon against employers. His proposal would replace the CNT's traditional components—the craft unions—with *sindicatos únicos*. These *sindicatos* were intended to unite all the workers in a given locality, even those engaged in such different trades as metalworking and textiles, into a single, unified local union. The woodworkers in Barcelona, for example, would unite with the textile workers and metalworkers in the same city. A *sindicato único* would thus consist of all the workers, skilled and unskilled, in the same place, not simply those in the same trade. This major structural change was adopted on June 28, 1918, at a congress of the Catalan Regional Federation in Sans, a suburb of Barcelona. A year later, in December 1919, a national congress of the CNT in Madrid formally confirmed the change. The archaic craft system, characteristic of small shops, was abolished, and *sindicatos únicos* became the CNT's basic organizational unit, united in federations at local, district, and regional levels.

This structure allowed unskilled and often untutored workers to ally with their more educated skilled co-workers. Where previously workers in a given factory or shop had been compartmentalized into separate craft



divisions, they were now joined together in a single *sindicato único* where they were obliged to make common decisions. The change effaced the privilege that skill conferred on work, placing all workers on a social par with one another irrespective of trade, skill, and experience. Not only did unskilled workers in the same enterprise make decisions alongside skilled workers, but as workers in an enterprise pooled their resources, CNT was better able to conduct unified strikes.

As a result of the new *sindicato* structure and the neosyndicalist program, unskilled workers poured into the CNT, far outnumbering the skilled workers and making the Confederación highly volatile. By the end of 1918, *cenetistas* in Catalonia alone numbered about 200,000; a year later this number increased to 750,000. Many anarchosyndicalists and most anarchist militants in the CNT did not welcome the change. They remained oriented toward *grupos de afinidad* (affinity groups), formed around existing personal relationships, loosely linked into local and regional federations. These organizational ties, far from enhancing social solidarity, enabled groups to maintain the autonomy that anarchism fostered as a matter of principle. Highly dismaying to the anarchists, the Sans Congress adopted Seguí's neosyndicalist program, with its "reformist" demands for, among other things, the eight-hour day, the abolition of child labor, and gender equality. The anarchists could console themselves, however, that they had gained a victory at the Madrid Congress on the ideological issue of syndicalism versus anarchocommunism: the congress had adopted "libertarian communism" (*comunismo libertario*) as the CNT's official ideology. Moreover, the Madrid Congress also devolved some of the powers of the broader confederal bodies to regional and thence to district federations, considerably increasing the autonomy of individual *sindicatos*.

These various concessions made it possible for the two wings to fulfill a common need: to remain in the same union. The unity between them was strangely symbiotic: the syndicalists needed the anarchists to provide them with a militant patina, while the anarchists needed the syndicalists to provide them with a mass movement. The Sans Congress preserved the old equilibrium within the CNT leadership as well: it created an *ad hoc* national committee encompassing five anarchists (Manuel Buenacasa as the secretary-general, Evelio Boal and Vicente Gil as secretaries, José Ripóll as auditor, and Andrés Miguel as treasurer). However, the real power in the CNT remained in the hands of the Catalan Regional Federation, headed by Salvador Seguí and Angel Pestaña, who called their new program "possibilism." Anarchist radicalism in the south was now engaged in contesting "possibilism" in the north for dominance within the Confederación.

## THE TRIENIO BOLCHEVISTA

The countryside, meanwhile, was still buoyed up with revolutionary enthusiasm generated by the October Revolution. Rumors abounded that a peasant war was flaring up in the south, indeed that Lenin had personally landed on the Spanish coast to lead a peasant revolution on the Iberian peninsula. In the spring of 1918, as Gerald H. Meaker observes, "a rising wave of organizational activity, strikes, confrontations, and meetings" swept through Andalusia, developing into a virtual *jacquerie*. This agrarian wave, continuing until 1920, came to be known as the "Bolshevik triennium" or *trienio bolchevista*.

As Juan Díaz del Moral, who personally observed the events in Córdoba, wrote, the "evocative word" that resounded throughout the countryside was "Russia."<sup>1</sup> A keen sense of self-worth was awakening among the exploited and starved rural workers, who normally endured unspeakable degradation at the hands of Andalusia's landlords. Peasant militants, who functioned as rural proletarians working in gangs for large plantations, formed *sindicatos únicos* as well as libertarian *grupos*; indeed, entire villages were enrolled into *sindicatos*. Tactics were coordinated through the libertarian press, and inspiration and leadership was provided by anarchosyndicalist agitators from the cities. Never had anarchism and syndicalism formed so close a fit as they did in the south of Spain. These rural agitators "advocated some sort of collectivization as the ultimate and ideal solution to the agrarian problem," notes Gerald Meaker.<sup>2</sup>

But the rural masses were not eager to form collective farms and for the most part did not desire collectivization; as Gerald Brenan observes, "except perhaps in some parts of lower Andalusia, 90 per cent of the field labourers continued to prefer parcellation."<sup>3</sup> Still, the "Bolshevik contagion" spread from town to town, generating popular protests against all the ills of modern society. These protests were voiced by field-hands and house servants alike. They were quickly followed by strikes and local insurrections. Barns and harvests were set on fire, and reprisals were taken against particularly onerous foremen. Many landowners and their managers took flight to the safety of urban areas.

Government repression was not long in coming. In May 1919 General Emilio Barrera was sent into the south with a division of troops. Barrera occupied most of the restive towns and villages, closing workers' centers and radical newspapers and arresting rural workers in the thousands. By late 1920, as one uprising after another was brutally stamped out by troops and Civil Guards, the rural movement all but vanished, and the southern countryside remained quiescent for the greater part of a decade.



The industrial workers were not silent during this remarkable development. Paralleling and to some extent fueling the *trienio bolchevista* were industrial labor disputes that greatly heated up working-class militancy, in some cases to the point of insurgency. During the summer and autumn of 1918 the CNT had increased its membership in industrial Catalonia fivefold, from 75,000 in June to 350,000 at the end of the year. Two major rural organizations—the National Federation of Spanish Agricultural Workers and the Regional Workers' Federation of Andalusia—joined the Confederación, making the CNT Spain's largest peasants' as well as workers' union. The precipitous growth and intensification of militancy terrified the bourgeoisie, which was determined to repress any anarchosyndicalist trade union. In mid-January 1919 the prime minister, Count Romanones, suspended all constitutional guarantees in Barcelona and outlawed the CNT, imprisoning its leaders and closing down its newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*. But his action proved to be counterproductive: a furious outcry against the government's authoritarian behavior rocked the city.

At the end of January office workers at Barcelona's main electrical utility, the Riego y Fuerzo del Ebro (known informally as the Canadiense because of its Canadian ownership), received wage cuts. Surprisingly, these white-collar employees turned for help to the newly outlawed CNT. Management, outraged, responded to this move by firing eight workers. The entire clerical staff staged a sit-in at their offices, only to be physically removed by the Catalan police. To protest against their expulsion, many blue-collar workers walked out in support of a clerical strike. At this point the Canadiense management, with the support of the bitterly reactionary captain-general of Catalonia and the Employers' Federation, declared a full-scale lockout. The CNT, in turn, called a general strike, virtually immobilizing the city. Most of the city's proletariat, in effect, was now arrayed against the Employers' Federation of the city. Negotiations between the CNT and the employers broke down, at which point the Madrid government declared a state of siege, placing the Barcelona proletariat under martial law. The workers were forced to return to their jobs at gunpoint.

Negotiations were then reopened under the aegis of a new and less harsh civil governor, Carlos Montañés, a onetime engineer, who prudently offered terms that satisfied many of the workers' most important demands. In fact, they amounted to a capitulation by the employers: strikers could return to work without reprisals, wages were to be increased and the working day would be shortened to eight hours. These were substantial concessions, and a mass meeting of 25,000 workers was held on March 20 in Barcelona's bullring to decide how to

respond to Montañés's terms. Salvador Seguí delivered an impassioned speech urging the workers to declare victory and accept the benign terms. But no sooner had he begun speaking than anarchist *grupistas* in the stands called out and heckled the syndicalist leader, denouncing the civil governor, and insisting that the workers continue the strike—presumably to drive it to the point of a revolution. The anarchists carried the day: under their influence the feckless workers tossed their victory out the window, rejected the terms, and four days later resumed the strike.

The government, whether it wanted to or not, had to declare a "state of war." It suspended civil rights and arrested more CNT leaders and militants, including 200 members of the general strike committee. It even brought the army into Barcelona's streets, deploying cavalry units and machine guns. Gradually over the next three weeks hunger forced workers back to their jobs—without the gains that they might have acquired at the bullring. This mindless adventurism all but wrecked the Confederación in its most important stronghold.

## THE PISTOLERO WAR

Although the employers and the state had succeeded in banning the CNT, they by no means destroyed it—they merely drove it underground. Its new clandestine nature certainly hampered the CNT in its operations, especially in leading strikes. But given the volatility of the Barcelona proletariat, the CNT after a while began to grow. Additionally, a new generation of workers and peasants, youths uprooted during the postwar economic and social chaos and inflamed by the Bolshevik Revolution, migrated in large numbers to the large cities, especially to Barcelona, where they swelled the union's ranks. In early 1920 General Severiano Martínez Anido, the ruthless civil governor of Barcelona, resolved to stamp out the CNT altogether. Launching a campaign of repression (which he called "pacification"), he allowed employers to hire professional *pistoleros* to shoot down Confederación militants—literally to eradicate them. Armed thugs began to steal through Barcelona's side streets and lurk with pistols in hand in darkened entranceways to homes, union headquarters, and stores, awaiting the opportunity to assassinate unwary *cenetista* activists. Martínez Anido further placed the city in the hands of a so-called Auxiliary Police Force, which was actually a terrorist band led by one Baron de Koenig, an adventurer who was suspected of spying variously for the Germans and for the British during the war.



Many of the new anarchosyndicalists had joined the CNT with little knowledge of ideology. Some even accepted the appellation "anarcho-Bolsheviks" with a measure of pride; others were little more than criminals. As agrarian *grupistas*, however, these young people were all conversant with illegal lifeways and with violent methods. The CNT's underground existence allowed its various groups—as the anarchosyndicalists had long desired—to become independent of the larger organization to which they ostensibly adhered. Forming themselves into "action groups"—or what amounted to small affinity groups oriented toward very specific and practical tasks—they were free in underground conditions to operate independently of any control from local CNT federations, let alone its National Committee. The deadly gangsterism of the employer-hired *pistoleros* fired up the normal militancy of young *cenetistas*—who chose to respond in kind.

Thus in January 1920, after a *pistolero* acting on behalf of the employers tried to kill Salvador Seguí, the workers retaliated a few days later by trying to kill the president of the Employers' Federation, Jaime Graupera. Practiced in the use of arms, *grupistas* were determined to rid the city of intractable employers and their minions. At the end of January the leaders of CNT's syndicalist wing, Seguí and Pestaña, denounced the use of terror by *cenetistas*, warning of grim consequences for the Confederación as a whole. The violence proliferating between the anarchic element and the employers drove workers out of the CNT in large numbers and into the arms of the alternative *sindicatos libres*, organized by Christians. But nothing could stop the firebrands on both sides from carrying out reprisals. The violence became routine, achieving nothing for the workers. Terrorism replaced politics: not knowing how to make a revolution or even organize a strike, the extreme anarchosyndicalists waged terror as a surrogate.

In December 1920 the government instituted the *ley de fugas* (law of fugitives), permitting police to shoot to kill any alleged suspect who attempted to "flee" the police or otherwise evade arrest. The *pistolero* war reached its peak during the following year: in March 1921 anarchist *grupistas* in Madrid succeeded in murdering the Spanish prime minister, Eduardo Dato, while employers' *pistoleros* killed Evelio Boal, the general secretary of the CNT. *Pistoleros* had been using CNT dues, paid by workers, to finance their *atentados*, but when the workers either left the Confederación or refused to pay dues for such dubious purposes, the *grupistas* turned to alternative financing: they began to "expropriate" banks and jewelry stores and even engaged in kidnapping.

The following year, 1922, saw the *pistolero* war subside, mainly from

exhaustion on both sides. Between 1917 and 1922 an estimated 1,500 people had been killed, including workers, government officials, policemen, employers, and foremen. Approximately 900 were killed in Barcelona alone. In the relatively peaceful interlude that followed, the CNT was once again legalized—and Seguí and Pestaña, hoping to rebuild its membership, assured the public that its activities would remain within the bounds of the law. But in April, *grupistas*, in defiance of the CNT syndicalists, mounted a new insurgency of their own, based on *atentados*. On August 25, 1922, gunmen tried to murder Angel Pestaña and succeeded in wounding him. As the syndicalist leader lay in hospital recovering, the gunmen openly loitered under his window, awaiting his reemergence so they could finish the job. Juan Peiró and Manuel Buenacasa, who vigorously denounced the violence of CNT gunmen, were arrested simply for being *cenetistas*.

In October 1922 Los Solidarios, an affinity group particularly focused on undertaking reprisals against employers and foremen, was formed in Barcelona. Its leading members—Buenaventura Durruti, Francisco Ascaso, Ricardo Sanz, and Juan García Oliver—gained legendary status for their bravado. Indeed, a certain amount of macho competition developed among the *grupistas*, encouraging personal recklessness and promoting personal freedom from organizational controls. In 1923 Los Solidarios took the life of the archbishop and cardinal of Saragossa, a notorious opponent of the CNT and a founder of the Catholic trade union movement. In March of the same year Salvador Seguí himself was killed in Barcelona. With the assassination of Seguí, leadership of the CNT passed into the hands of Angel Pestaña and Juan Peiró, as secretary of the National Committee, who vehemently supported Seguí's increasingly moderate orientation.

## THE ADVENT OF THE DICTATORSHIP

The *pistolero* war came to an abrupt end on September 13, 1923, when General Miguel Primo de Rivera, the captain-general of Catalonia, issued what in Spanish tradition is called a *pronunciamiento* (pronouncement)—a declaration establishing military rule to stabilize society. Primo de Rivera, inspired by Mussolini's success in Italy, was eager to establish a highly authoritarian government. While the king would be the nominal head of Spain, Primo would be its dictator. His army coterie would rule Spain, with the goal of finally ending the intolerable *pistolero* war and, more



immediately, putting an end to the Cortes investigation of a costly military defeat that the army had suffered in 1921 at Annual, in Spanish Morocco, which had badly tainted the monarchy and the army leadership.

After five years of tumult, during which Spain had seemed continually on the edge of chaos, the country was exhausted. Large sectors of the public, particularly the lower middle classes, were glad of a respite from social and political disorder. Ordinary people, including many workers who had been seriously impoverished by failed strikes, were eager to see the restoration of social peace. Many Spaniards thus found themselves willing to grant the dictatorship a measure of support.

Primo suspended the constitution of 1876, terminated all civil rights and press freedom, and disbanded the Cortes. This was not fascism. With regard to labor, for example, he was shrewdly paternalistic: he offered workers programs for health care, shorter working hours, and improved working conditions. Many Socialists, in fact, welcomed these beneficences and made no serious attempt to oppose the dictatorship; indeed, Primo actually granted the UGT legality. The Socialist trade union remained in full possession of its offices and records throughout Primo's seven-year dictatorship; its benefit societies were permitted to function, and its salaried employees continued to be paid. The UGT even enjoyed a modest increase in its membership. Socialist leaders went so far as to accept positions within Primo's regime: Francisco Largo Caballero, the UGT chieftain, agreed to become labor minister in the new government, a position he used to build up the Socialist trade union. He even tried to recruit erstwhile CNT members into the UGT and sent out UGT scabs to cross picket-lines in CNT-sponsored strikes. Caballero's union-building efforts were eminently successful: by 1930 the UGT had become a truly mass organization.

The CNT, in turn, declined significantly in numbers and influence. Less than two weeks after the *pronunciamiento*, on September 24, 1923, Primo named Martínez Anido—the CNT's nemesis in Catalonia and an instigator of the *pistolero* campaign—as subsecretary of the interior. Actually *cenetistas* were divided over their basic strategy on how to cope with Martínez Anido and the dictatorship as a whole. The CNT's syndicalist wing favored operating legally (the organization was at this point actually legal), in order to gain bread-and-butter improvements for workers, while the anarchist and anarchosyndicalist wing insisted that the CNT abandon legality and operate clandestinely.

Martínez Anido proceeded to invoke an old law that required trade unions to maintain membership records and account books and present

them to the government for inspection. The CNT chose not to comply. On May 28, 1924, a violent attack that caused the death of a judge underlined the CNT's noncompliance. Gunplay in the streets of Barcelona provided Primo with an excuse to arrest every CNT militant he could find. He prohibited publication of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT's principal organ, declared the organization illegal, and ordered its suppression.\*

For the remainder of the seven-year dictatorship, the CNT all but ceased to exist as an organized entity. Many rank-and-file workers departed and joined the "free unions" or *sindicatos libres* that employers had established and controlled, and used them as best they could to improve their lot. Other erstwhile *cenetistas* overcame their revulsion for the UGT's reformism and accommodation to the dictatorship and joined its local unions. Still others fled to France or Latin America, where they worked to spread their syndicalist ideas.

In November 1926 Primo de Rivera decreed the establishment of *comités paritarios* or "mixed commissions." Before a trade union could call a strike, or an employer impose a lockout, both sides were required to arbitrate their dispute in one of these bodies. The UGT leaders promptly announced their willingness to participate in the *comités*. As for the CNT, the anarchosyndicalists scorned the decree, but Pestaña and Peiró argued that the CNT should participate and become legal. The willingness of the syndicalist leaders to accommodate the dictatorship in this regard was the last straw for the anarchosyndicalists, who believed that their rivals were hopelessly compromising the union by trying to take it along their own insufferable reformist path. Two months later, on March 20, 1927, the Regional Plenum of the Federation of Anarchist Groups in Catalonia met to plan a congress that would found a new explicitly revolutionary anarchist federation, one that would base itself structurally on local *grupos de afinidad*, keep the revolutionary spirit of the CNT unsullied, and dedicate itself to the creation of *comunismo libertario*.

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\* To be sure, Primo allowed the anarchist theoretical periodical *La Revista Blanca* to continue publishing (albeit in censored form. Its title, *The Blank Review*, referred to the blank spaces in its pages created by censored articles). Started in 1923, the magazine was edited by Ricardo Mella, Federico Urales, and Federica Montseny, who biased the magazine toward individualism and mysticism. The editors kept mention of radical social change to a minimum. Like many individualist anarchists, they were strongly influenced by Stirner, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and the French anarchist Elisée Reclus. The syndicalists, who commonly viewed pure anarchism as obscurantist rather than a source of working-class enlightenment, disdained the periodical; Primo de Rivera was indifferent to it.



## THE FORMATION OF THE FAI

Spanish anarchosyndicalists defined the meaning of libertarian communism with little theoretical reflection.\* But that an organization dedicated to putting libertarian communism into immediate practice could gain any substantial following could only have happened in Spain.

In 1927 the most militant members of several preexisting anarchist federations came together at a congress in Valencia, where they created a new peninsula-wide organization, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (Federación Anarquista Ibérica, or FAI). Two delegates from the Portuguese anarchist federation participated, as well as a miscellany of observers from European groups outside the peninsula, including the newly formed International Working Men's Association, the syndicalist answer to the Communist International of Trade Unions.

The new federation had as its purpose to prevent the CNT from deviating from its commitment, stated explicitly in its program, to achieving libertarian communism. *Faístas* (as FAI members were called) believed that the CNT must rededicate itself to inciting an anarchist revolution—and must openly declare itself to be anarchist. The major function of the FAI would be to disseminate its vision of anarchism, especially but not exclusively to the CNT's membership. According to a manifesto issued by some of the participants:

As workers, we are almost all active in the ranks of the [CNT]. But our mission is not wholly consumed by being active in trade unionism ... [I]t is not enough to be active inside the union ... Outside of the unions, absolutely independently, we disseminate our theories, form our groups, organise rallies, publish anarchist reading materials and sow the seed of anarchism in every direction.<sup>4</sup>

Structurally, the FAI was to be a federation that existed both within the CNT and yet apart from it as a parallel organization. It insisted both on organic unity with the CNT and on the preservation of its separate identity. According to its founding conference in Valencia, the FAI:

\* The most important works were Diego Abad de Santillán's attempt to outline a syndicalist society in some detail, *After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain Today*, trans. Louis Frank (New York: Greenberg, 1937); and Isaac Puente's sketchy 1932 pamphlet "Libertarian Communism" (Sydney, Australia: Monty Miller Press, 1985).

should be established *alongside* [the CNT], with the two organizations working together for the anarchist movement ... The groups and their federations ... shall extend an invitation to the unions and the National Committee of the CNT shall hold joint plenums and local, district, and regional meetings. It is further proposed that the labour organization [CNT] and the organization of groups [FAI] be united in the anarchist movement without losing their own character.<sup>5</sup>

The FAI, in effect, intended keep the CNT on a revolutionary anarchist track by seeding the trade union with revolutionary anarchosyndicalist nuclei. These *grupos de afinidad* were not merely educational or propaganda groups: they were definitively anarchist cadres that tried to play a vanguard role in leading the CNT and Spain towards a libertarian communist society, here and now. FAI *grupos* typically numbered anywhere from half a dozen to twenty members. Commonly they adopted heroic or libertarian names, such as *Via Libre* (Free Way), *Voluntad* (Free Will), *Impulso* (Impulse), and *Los Justicieros* (Justice Fighters)—which revealed their affinity for impulsive, voluntaristic, and vaguely idealistic values.

In theory, the FAI tried to reconcile the old freewheeling *grupista*-type network favored by pure anarchists with a syndicalistic structure—an endeavor that led to constant tension between the FAI and the CNT. The *grupos de afinidad* were conceived as components of local, district, provincial, and regional federations. The FAI's sole federation-wide executive body, the Peninsular Committee, was hardly able to function as an executive; it merely gathered useful data, kept records, and carried on correspondence with the component federations. All other functions were the responsibility of the local *grupos*. As Stuart Christie observes:

The term "organisation" hardly fits the FAI: it had no collective identity other than a commitment to libertarian communism as an immediate objective. It did not issue membership cards or collect dues ... so there was never a roster of members ... Above all, it was not a representative body and involved no delegation of power either within the affinity groups or in the regional or national administrative bodies to empower those bodies to make decisions on behalf of the collectivity ... the FAI was ... structured in such a way that its coordinating function did not deprive its constituent members of their autonomous power.<sup>6</sup>

With the FAI, in fact, Spanish anarchosyndicalists seemed to have



finally attained their dream of complete autonomy from the center. Although the federation saw itself as part of the CNT, many FAI affinity groups ignored the CNT's syndicalistic structure and its insistence on accountability to the center. They did whatever they chose, acting on their own initiative, with no direction from any higher-level confederal body. They even undertook strikes without the approval of other components of the FAI, let alone the CNT leadership. As one *faísta* later recalled: "Each FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit . . . without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding, for there was no intergroup discipline such as was found between Communist cells in respect of territory, etc."<sup>7</sup> The CNT could not have controlled the FAI *grupos* had it tried to do so. As José Peirats notes, "The autonomy of the individual unions in the declaration of strikes, their fierce attachment to freedom of action, and the total lack of influence of higher committees in professional matters and in economic claims made any attempt by the CNT to direct from above an exercise in fantasy."<sup>8</sup> Some FAI affinity groups engaged in armed robberies and even uprisings without the consent of any higher confederal bodies and sometimes in marked opposition to them.

Nor were individual members of an FAI affinity group obliged to agree with or accept actions that their own group undertook. As a result of this extreme individualism, some members of the same affinity group worked at odds with others. Nor did the FAI have any control over who claimed membership in its organization. Its very informality and clandestine nature made it possible for irresponsible individuals who were not FAI members to claim membership and thereby taint the organization with responsibility for actions that it had never approved. The highly influential *Nosotros* group, for example, which was guided primarily by Buenaventura Durruti, Francisco Ascaso, and Juan García Oliver, undertook daring actions that made headlines in Spain and was widely regarded as part of the FAI. Indeed, it exercised a stronger influence on FAI groups than did the Peninsular Committee itself. But to this day it remains unclear whether or when *Nosotros* actually joined the FAI. In the early 1930s García Oliver was commonly regarded as a FAI spokesman, but he may not even have been a member at all, as he later claimed.<sup>9</sup>

This looseness was clearly deleterious to the Spanish labor movement. Many young *faístas* lacked political experience, which reinforced their emphasis on activism and led them to denigrate theory and knowledge as effete and petty bourgeois. Diego Abad de Santillán, a leading libertarian theorist, noted in *Solidaridad Obrera* on July 29, 1931, "When you ask [the FAI], where shall we go after we have thrown ourselves

into the street, they reply when we are in the street we shall know where we must go."<sup>10</sup> Russian sailors and workers had heard this same doctrine from anarchists in July 1917, when the uprising of the "July Days" was soundly defeated in Petrograd for want of advance planning, let alone leadership. This antitheoretical bias resulted in an extraordinary absence of strategic sensibility within the FAI. Individual affinity groups, particularly the *Nosotros* group and its similars, acted out their impulses in displays of sheer bravado, but with little apparent thought for the consequences. Lacking the capacity to develop strategies to address complex situations, FAI groups reinforced the image of anarchism as a wantonly irresponsible, instinct-based outlook in which any given struggle had only two possible outcomes: immediate triumphant victory or immediate total defeat.

Many Socialists saw the FAI as a wildly uncontrollable entity that evinced a strong propensity for disorder and whose behavior stood at odds with the effort to create a rational society. Precisely what the FAI would actually have done if it had taken power, and by what methods it would have combated a serious reaction on the part of the army, landlords, well-to-do peasantry, and fanatical Catholics—not to mention urban middle-class and even Socialist opponents (who taken together formed the greater part of the Spanish population)—was barely addressed, let alone explored. Tellingly, the miners of Asturias, one of the most admirable and militant sections of the Spanish proletariat, eschewed the FAI and entered the ranks of the UGT, constituting to its most left-wing and revolutionary segment.

## NOTES

1. Juan Díaz del Moral, *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas* (Madrid: Revista Derechos Privado, 1929), p. 276.
2. Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain: 1914–1923* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 137.
3. Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 181n.
4. Quoted in Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927–1937* (England and Australia: Meltzer Press/Jura Media, 2000), p. 19.
5. In Juan Gomez Casas, *Anarchist Organization: The History of the F.A.I.*, trans. Abe Bluestone (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), p. 110; emphasis added.
6. Christie, *We, the Anarchists!*, p. 29.
7. Francisco Carrasquer, quoted *ibid.*, p. 28.



8. José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 78.
9. See Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organization*, p. 123.
10. Diego Abad de Santillán, in *Solidaridad Obrera* (July 24, 1931), quoted in Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 624.

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## CHAPTER 60 The Second Republic

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### THE END OF THE DICTATORSHIP

As the relatively placid 1920s gave way to the turbulent 1930s, Spain's social problems became acute. The American stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent international depression were felt less severely in Spain than elsewhere, but the economy still deteriorated seriously, eroding whatever public confidence Primo's dictatorship still enjoyed. The effects of the depression were exacerbated by Primo's failure to follow through on reforms whose promise had previously gained him a measure of support among the peasants, the conservative workers, and the bourgeoisie. Land reform, promised to the agrarian poor, never materialized, lest it antagonize Primo's strongest supporters, the Andalusian landowners. Peasant life remained as squalid as ever, and workers still lived in grim poverty. Capital was emigrating from Spain to more lucrative fields in Europe. Municipal reforms, which liberals sought in order to increase their influence in government, never came to fruition. Calvo Sotelo, the foremost ideologist of Spanish reaction who served as José Primo's finance minister, found that his efforts to introduce a responsible tax system were thwarted by one means or another, and he finally abandoned them.

Primo de Rivera, who flattered himself that his genial personality and light hand could gloss over the problems in Spanish society, soon found the old ruling classes withdrawing their support. These classes, especially the moderates, deeply resented the General's suspension of the 1876 constitution. In the void thus created he had ruled by decree, arbitrarily creating and discarding laws as he saw fit. His growing interventions into economic life had worsened Spain's domestic depression and alienated the bourgeoisie. The land magnates too were suffering heavily from the



early impacts of the oncoming worldwide depression, and the Church—ignoring the disposition of Spanish workers—complained that Primo had supported the UGT rather than the Catholic trade unions.

Above all, the military—his main pillar of support—was impatient with Primo's failure to increase sufficiently the pay and promotions of officers. In his greatest miscalculation, Primo refused to accede to the seniority demands of his artillery officers, creating widespread discontent in the army. Army officers had provided the bayonets that brought him to power in 1923, and he desperately needed those bayonets to remain in power. In January 1930 he decided to find out whether he still enjoyed the military's support by directly asking Spain's captains-general (the top military officers in the provinces) for a vote of confidence. Their response was less than enthusiastic.

Sensible of their dissatisfaction, Primo resigned on January 28, 1930, and went into exile in Paris, where he died before the year was out. To replace the dictator, the king appointed General Dámaso Berenguer, a conservative officer known for his criticisms of Primo's policies. No constitutional monarchist, Berenguer continued to rule by decree and delayed for a year before convening a constituent Cortes.

Meanwhile, popular discontent with Alfonso himself, who showed no ability to ease Spain's growing social unrest, was rising. By 1930 the king had earned the scorn of the army, the rural land- and property-owning classes, the large and small bourgeoisie, and the workers and peasants who formed the bulk of his subjects. They had not forgiven him for imposing the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1923; nor were they disposed to ignore his failure to create prosperity. So low had the prestige of the monarchy fallen that even the elderly Conservative leader José Sánchez Guerra, once a stout defender of the king, publicly acknowledged that Spain had a right to sample the virtues of a republic.

Finally several republican leaders of various tendencies agreed that Spain should become a republic as soon as possible. In August 1930 they, together with a number of Socialists, met in San Sebastián (in the Basque Country) and signed a pact in which they expressly committed themselves to an end to monarchical rule. To gain the support of the Catalan Left, which was very strong in the northeast, the republicans agreed that the formation of a Spanish republic would be accompanied by a considerable degree of Catalan autonomy. To carry out the transition to the republic, they chose a revolutionary committee, headed by an Andalusian Catholic Conservative, Niceto Alcalá Zamora; the committee, in fact, was to become Spain's provisional government when the republic was declared. Although their conceptions of the coming republic varied

greatly, the republicans and Socialists behaved with notable prudence, constrained by the need for unity.

In February 1931 Berenguer announced elections to a constituent Cortes, but his plan for the elections evoked no support, and he was compelled to resign. A desperate Alfonso now chose as Berenguer's successor Admiral Juan Bautista Aznar—a man whose principal virtue may have been his lack of a political past. But the public saw Aznar as an empty cipher in contrast to the San Sebastián revolutionary committee, which enjoyed growing political stature.

That Alfonso's reign was on its last legs was painfully evident to everyone but the king himself. To test public sentiment, the Aznar government organized a three-phase series of popular elections, which were to be held first in the country's municipalities, then in its provinces and finally in the nation as a whole. The first elections—the municipal ones—were held on April 12, 1931, and revealed, to everyone's astonishment, that the Spanish people overwhelmingly rejected royal rule and favored a republic. By a large margin, most of the country's 50 provincial capitals (including Madrid and Barcelona) supported the Socialist and republican candidates and wanted no truck with a king and a court.

The republicans declared the vote was a referendum against the monarchy, and the newly elected municipal councilors simply proclaimed a republic. Student uprisings and workers' strikes swept through the universities and the industrial centers. On April 13 the government ministers hastily resigned, and General José Sanjurjo, head of the Civil Guard, pointedly advised Alfonso that in the event of a popular rising, his troops would refuse to fire on the people. The army too warned him that it could not come to his aid. These none-too-subtle warnings were decisive. The next day, even as crowds seemed poised to invade the palace, Alfonso and his family hurried into a car and were driven to Cartagena, from which they departed for Marseilles. (The king, it should be noted, had personally given up the kingship but did not renounce his dynasty's claim to the throne, leaving Spain's status as a republic ambiguous.)

On April 14, the day Alfonso left Madrid, the Second Republic was proclaimed by the masses in the streets.\* The San Sebastián revolutionary committee assumed power and became the provisional government, with Alcalá Zamora as president. (As a conservative republican and a staunch

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\* The First Republic, as we have seen, lasted very briefly, from 1873 to 1874.



Catholic, Alcalá's presence was intended to reassure the Spanish bourgeoisie that the republic was in safe hands.) Streets throughout Spain were thronged with wildly cheering crowds. Workers, students, and middle-class people waved the Spanish tricolor and sang the "Marseillaise," which had become the anthem *par excellence* of liberal bourgeois democracy. Understandably, the workers expected the republic to finally grant at least their minimum demands and hoped for sweeping reforms in working and economic conditions. The great masses of landless or land-poor peasants, in turn, with millennial enthusiasm, expected the republic to solve Spain's corrosive agrarian problems—and sooner rather than later.

In Catalonia the Esquerra (or Catalan Left) swept the elections. Luis Companys, the party's Esquerra leader, declared a Catalan republic, and the ancient Generalidad was revived in Barcelona as Catalonia's traditional governing body.\* The landowning classes, aghast by the proclamation of Catalan and national republics, acceded to the liberal revolution only in the hope that the republics would prevent a "red revolution."

Slightly more than two months later, on June 26, 1931, Spaniards went to the polls to officially elect the Constituent Cortes. The electoral results revealed that the PSOE was now the country's largest single political party: out of a total of 457 deputies. The Socialists gained the largest single bloc (117). Their party would therefore dominate this Cortes, as well as the writing of a national constitution and its fundamental laws. Their parliamentary spokesman would be Francisco Largo Caballero, the trade union bureaucrat. The next largest party was the old Radicals, whose 93 deputies were led by Alejandro Lerroux, an infamous Catalan demagogue who was now eager to become a respectable middle-class statesman. Politically, his party was the voice of shopkeepers, white-collar employees, middling peasants and government bureaucrats. The third largest delegation (59) came from the Spanish Radical Socialists, a 1929 split-off from the Radicals, who tried to retain militant features that Lerroux had abandoned. They were followed numerically by Luis Companys' Catalan Esquerra, which had 32 deputies, and trailed off into numerous smaller parties, such as the left-wing

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\* The Catalan Esquerra was not a separatist party; it wanted Spain to be a federation composed of all its different peoples rather than a unitary nation-state. After the various regions of Spain gained autonomy, the Esquerra maintained, they should voluntarily form regional and national federations.

Galician ORGA and the strongly Catholic Basque Nationalist Party, as well as independents, who gained a few deputies each. The prime minister of this constitutional government would be the conservative Catholic Alcalá Zamora.

The absence of monarchists from this register is striking. Very few deputies were eager to call for a restoration of the monarchy, let alone of Alfonso. The old republican-monarchist divide was now replaced by a multicolored leftist component that totaled 251 deputies, an equally variegated liberal component of 155, and a very small conservative bloc that numbered between 41 and 60 deputies.

Using their very substantial majority, the deputies of the Left gave Spain one of the most liberal constitutions that the world had yet seen. Ratified on December 9, 1931, it declared at the outset that Spain would be "a democratic republic of workers of all classes." It proclaimed the existence of universal suffrage without any property qualifications for all Spaniards 23 years and older, irrespective of gender, and guaranteed free speech and assembly. It liberalized the right to divorce and instituted the radical separation of Church and state. Economically, the constitution recognized existing rights to private property, for the time being at least, but affirmed that all the sources of wealth in Spain were in fact owned, not privately, but by the state, in the name of the Spanish nation, and that existing private property would eventually give way to a gradual socialization of property.

On the national question, the constitution declared that the Spanish republic was a "federative" entity and was compatible with some degree of municipal and regional autonomy. It thereby gave a nod to the centrifugal forces in Spanish society, allowing any region that sought autonomy—which could be construed to mean anything from symbolic liberties to virtual independence from Madrid—to receive it. Catalonia did not wait for ratification of the constitution to claim virtual independence; its new Generalidad prepared a Statute of Autonomy, which it submitted to the Catalan people in a plebiscite. On August 2, 1931, they enthusiastically and overwhelmingly endorsed it. It was then presented to the Cortes, which passed it as well. Spain's central government was not prepared to get into a fight with its strongest regionalist tendency; thus Catalonia was now all but an independent state.

On October 13, 1931, the Constituent Cortes adopted several constitutional articles that governed religious affairs, placing far-reaching restrictions on the Church. Article 3 declared that "the Spanish state has no official religion"; Article 25 proclaimed freedom of religion and stated that religious observances had to be practiced indoors, a provision that



barred the outdoor processions traditional to Spanish communal life. Article 26 stated that religions are associations subject to the general laws of the country, and it dissolved the Jesuit Order by outlawing all religious orders that required "a special vow of obedience to an authority distinct from the legitimate authority of the State." (The Jesuits took a vow of personal obedience to the Pope.) It barred the remaining religious orders from holding "property beyond that necessary to their maintenance." And it prohibited orders from engaging in trade and industry, which was highly onerous since many orders subsisted on the handicraft work of their members. Religious orders—such as the Jesuits—had to submit to the country's tax laws and render annual financial accounts to the state and could be dissolved if they presented "a danger for the security of the state." Finally, where formerly the Church and orders had played a monopolistic role in Spain's educational system, the new constitution explicitly barred clergymen from teaching in state schools.<sup>1</sup>

The next day, shocked that the Cortes had adopted these articles, Alcalá Zamora and other conservative republicans resigned from the provisional government. At that point Manuel Azaña, the leader of the Republican Action Party, formed a second provisional government around a coalition of left and liberal parties. A writer by profession, Azaña had previously breathed the rarefied literary and political air of Madrid's intellectual world, and his thinking was profoundly shaped by the anticlerical traditions of the French Revolution. Although a liberal, he required the Socialist Party's support to keep his left-leaning coalition in power.

The political leader who did most to keep Azaña's coalition in power was Spain's most eminent Socialist, Francisco Largo Caballero. Gruff, forceful, and idolized by the UGT workers and Socialist Youth (despite or perhaps because of his collaboration with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship), Caballero brought a proletarian earthiness to Azaña's government. A longtime trade union leader, as labor minister he drove the government to establish sick pay, paid vacations, the eight-hour day, and the minimum wage—gains that were irresistibly attractive to the Spanish working class. And to settle labor disputes, on May 7, 1931, he reinstituted the old machinery of the *comités paritarios* (or mixed commissions, from the Primo dictatorship), but increased labor's representation in them.

For the Socialists, the advantages of working within the government (what the anarcho-sindicalists called class collaboration) were manifold. Not only did the new labor reforms materially improve working conditions and wages for workers, but the UGT itself benefited from its association with power, gaining inroads into CNT strongholds in the south

and recruiting among militant (and mostly anarcho-sindicalist) dock workers. As a result the UGT grew at a phenomenal rate: by the spring of 1932 it had established more than 5,000 sections throughout the country, and its membership soared past the one-million mark, surpassing even the CNT in membership for the first time in history (aside from the dictatorship, when the anarcho-sindicalists had been legally repressed). As for the Socialist Party, or PSOE, its membership rose from 15,000 in the 1920s to 71,000, comprising the largest single bloc of voters for any political party in the national electorate.

Despite its proliferating labor legislation, however, the republican government was remarkably tepid in economic affairs: it left the power of the bourgeoisie intact. It did not nationalize the railroads, and it permitted the banks to remain as powerful as they had been under Alfonso. It allowed the old regressive tax system to remain in place. Most astonishingly, it failed to take significant steps to improve the lot of the country's largest social stratum, the peasants, nearly a million of whom—particularly those in the southern provinces—were virtually landless. The anguish of these long-suffering people remained Spain's most urgent social problem. Many Spaniards expected the Cortes, dominated as it was by Socialists and republicans, to enact an agrarian law that would provide significant and thoroughgoing land reform. Such a law might well have broken up the *latifundia* and, in the name of social justice, transformed them into functional farms for either individual or collective cultivation.

But such sweeping agrarian changes were not to be. On May 31 the government did establish an extraordinary commission to formulate a basic agrarian law. The commission spent nearly a year exploring Spain's highly complex systems of land ownership and then proposed only half-hearted legislation, whose passage was delayed until well into 1932. Turmoil in the countryside grew. Finally, in September 1932 the Cortes enacted an extremely intricate agrarian law that specified in excessive detail the various types of land that could and could not be confiscated. The lands of the king and the *grandees* were liable for confiscation without compensation, but for all other confiscated lands the government had to pay compensation to the former owners. Thus, for its land reform to be thorough, the government would need a great deal of funding. But no such funds were available, and as a result the law gave rise to widespread public anger. In fact the law did not even target the big estates for confiscation, as Stanley G. Payne observes:

Of a total of 80,000 owners liable to partial or total confiscation, only



10,000 to 12,000 were large holders, and approximately 60,000 were small-medium and medium holders from northern and central Spain, not the latifundist regions . . . [T]he bill's unbalanced effects, which in most instances hurt most small-medium owners rather than latifundists, discredited the reform among moderates and made it easy to rouse strong opposition.<sup>2</sup>

Thus in a single blow did the agrarian law manage to alienate the smaller landowners and middle peasantry, without satisfying the needs of the most land-hungry peasants. Bureaucratic delays in implementing the law only exacerbated the hungry peasantry's mounting anger. "During the twenty-seven months in which the agrarian law was applied at least nominally," observes Éléna de La Souchère, "a total of 116,837 *hectares* (about 200,000 acres) was distributed to the peasants, whereas the *latifundios* of over 500 *hectares* occupied an overall land surface of 4,916,590 *hectares* (over 12,250,000 acres). At this rate, the completion of the agrarian reform would have required nearly a century."<sup>3</sup> The peasants had already waited a century, since the first attempts at land reform were undertaken; in the 1930s it was apparent that they would not wait another century. Their support for the republic waned, while the big landholders, fearing expropriation, began to pour large amounts of money into several right-wing parties that opposed the Azaña coalition and in many cases the republic itself.

## THE CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH

So mild were the economic reforms of the provisional government that one might have expected Spain's old ruling classes to give it their support. The bourgeoisie and the large landholders, as we have seen, had good reason to be content. But several other sectors of Spanish society were so intractable and so infuriated by the republican government that their hatred became intransigent, and reconciliation impossible.

The first such sector were the Spanish nationalists, the chauvinistic reactionaries and even mild conservatives who supported a cultural "Spanishness" or *hispanidad*. These chauvinists opposed federalism of any kind and anathematized the devolution of autonomy to Catalonia and the Basque Country. The second sector was the army, which was one of Spain's most regressive forces both culturally and politically. It was pervaded by reactionaries, particularly its officer corps. As for the soldiers,

many lacked military training and experience but made up for it in brutality. The army's backbone was its foreign legion or Tercio (composed mainly of Spaniards with a criminal background, who were loyal to their officers rather than to the nation) and the Regulares, or Moorish mercenaries, drawn from the colonial population, who were well versed in fighting local tribesmen in North Africa. A cruel disrespect for human life characterized both the Tercios and Regulares, making them an extremely effective—and fearsome—fighting force for Spanish reaction.

The third sector to oppose the republic was the Catholic Church. The new constitution, as we have seen, instituted the legal separation of Church and state, disallowing any official religion in Spain and establishing religious freedom; it all but dissolved the Jesuits. But the republican-dominated Cortes did not stop there: instead of facing up to the primary task of the bourgeois revolution—addressing the social and economic inequalities that plagued the country—it passed further anticlerical legislation. In fact, in 1932–33 it plunged into a classical Jacobin assault on *l'infame*—a particularly vital target for Azaña and his fellow liberals—which climaxed in the Law of Religious Confessions and Congregations in May 1933.

This assault made it possible for the Spanish Catholic Church to portray itself as an innocent victim of political persecution; it called upon the rest of the Spanish Right—the nationalists, the military establishment, and the land- and property-owning classes—to unite against the republic as an "atheistic" endeavor bent on eliminating the Church itself. The Right obligingly launched a massive propaganda campaign—a self-designated "religious reconquest"—to restore the Church's old privileges in Catholic Spain. In defiance of the constitution, it organized outdoor processions in which children carried crucifixes that had been banned from schools, and nuns piously paraded relics that had "miraculously" survived the church and convent burnings that had recently erupted throughout the country.

This propaganda campaign helped give rise to new political parties on the Right. One was Renovación Española (Spanish Renovation), made up of militant monarchists. Another was Acción Popular, led by José María Gil Robles, a lawyer from Salamanca who promoted a policy of Catholic social reform that he hoped would divert working people from socialism and anarchosindicalism. He fashioned Acción Popular to appeal to dissatisfied religious workers in the hope that they would join Catholic trade unions. But the party's orientation toward workers barely concealed its true aim: to repeal the republic's anticlerical legislation and restore the Church's former privileges. Finally the Falange, a party led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera (the late dictator's son), espoused a seemingly



radical form of corporate fascism. Its members—young *señoritos* and neo-Proudhonian corporatists—greeted one another with open-palmed salutes in the Italian fashion and were notable for using violence to break up strikes, even as they tried to win working-class support.

The republican government was only too mindful that it had to guard itself physically against this growing and rapidly consolidating Right. As a matter of military policy, it allowed liberal military officers to advance rapidly to higher positions in the regular army, and it established a new urban police force, the Assault Guards or *Asaltos*, to counter the traditionally reactionary Civil Guards. As early as October 20, 1931, a week after Azaña's government took power, it introduced a law for the defense of the republic, which gave the Minister of the Interior the authority to declare an emergency situation for 30 days in which he could suspend constitutional guarantees and assume dictatorial powers. At its very inception the Left was gearing itself for a violent conflict with the Right.

The Right's first attempt to strike at the republic came on August 10, 1932, when General José Sanjurjo, nationally renowned as the "Lion of the Riff" for his exploits in Morocco, "pronounced" against the government and initiated a military rising in Seville and Madrid that he hoped would lead to a nationwide uprising. But the rising was poorly planned, and a CNT general strike easily defeated it. Sanjurjo fled to Portugal—but the "Lion of the Riff's" boldness won him the admiration of many officers and taught them that any future military coup would require careful preparation. The failure of Sanjurjo's endeavor, in short, by no means quashed the idea of overthrowing the republic; on the contrary, the prospect of a military rebellion was now an ever-darkening cloud on the horizon.

## THE SHIFT TO THE LEFT

The general strike's defeat of the Sanjurjo uprising also served to heighten leftist revolutionary agitation. The Socialists, especially the Federation of Socialist Youth, and the anarchosyndicalists felt—not without reason—that they were living in a revolutionary period similar to that between Russia's February and October 1917 revolutions.

Notwithstanding Spain's shift from a monarchical to a republican government in 1931, the country remained burdened by a historical legacy of baronial lassitude, industrial inefficiency, and gross inequality

in the distribution of wealth, pernicious military and bureaucratic parasitism, and one of Europe's lowest standards of living. The Great Depression deepened steadily in the republic's first two years. Spain's foreign markets were closed off by tariffs, and unemployment rose significantly. The countryside suffered disastrously: the inability to export Spanish agricultural products meant that the poorer sectors of the peasantry faced economic disaster. Edible crops were not harvested because there were no markets in which they could be sold. The rural poor were obliged to watch food rot in the fields or be eaten by livestock, while they and their families went desperately hungry for want of land and its produce.

With many promises of the republican revolution unfulfilled, the urban and rural proletariats became impatient for more thoroughgoing changes, leading to an ever larger and more desperate labor movement. By 1932, approximately half a million of the many new members who rallied behind Socialist organizers had joined the UGT's new agrarian section, the National Federation of Land Workers (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra*, or FNTT). They consisted overwhelmingly of the *braceros* and poor peasants who only a generation earlier had formed the backbone of the libertarian labor federations in the south.

This growing agrarian labor movement catapulted the Socialists leftward on the political spectrum. From its inception, as we have seen, the Spanish socialist movement had been guided by a gradualism redolent of Germany's evolutionary social democracy. In the 1930s, however, the volatile, land-hungry workers and peasants of the south were in no mood for lethargic trade unionism and reformist politics. When militant young Socialists from the cities, speaking for a new generation in the PSOE, recruited thousands of agrarian radicals into the UGT, the Socialist Party's outlook began to change profoundly. Caballero, the most important UGT leader, followed the leftward trend, if only to retain his influence among the workers and the militant Socialist youth. The PSOE and the UGT—once bulwarks of reformism—were soon reacting to labor problems by calling for revolution.\* The left wing of the PSOE and UGT rediscovered Marxism, and many longtime members mouthed decidedly revolutionary socialist concepts, such as a

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\* The leftward shift within the UGT and PSOE was not achieved harmoniously. The PSOE was increasingly polarized into a left wing, headed by Caballero, and a center-right wing, led by Indalecio Prieto, who controlled the party apparatus with the aid of Julián Besteiro, and Juan Negrín.



"proletarian dictatorship." They saw the Socialist collaboration with liberals and republicans in the government politically as anachronistic and denounced it as a heretical transgression of Marx's ideas. A seismic shift began taking place within the entire Spanish labor movement, as Spanish Socialists found themselves in a wild spiraling race with the anarchosyndicalists to establish whose organizations were the most revolutionary in Spain.

### THE FAI AND THE "CYCLE OF INSURRECTIONS"

When the republic was proclaimed in April 1931, the CNT—under the control of its syndicalist wing—welcomed the new, relatively liberal political order. The CNT could once again operate legally, with a headquarters and an open press. Its membership skyrocketed on its reemergence, and during that summer many local CNT unions showed a decided willingness to cooperate with the government authorities.

But the CNT's watchful cordiality toward the republic quickly turned into intense hostility. The Socialists' control over the Labor Ministry gave the UGT distinct advantages over the CNT in recruiting new members, while the Socialist majority in the Cortes allowed the PSOE to pass legislation improving workers' wages and working conditions and to work within the mixed commissions—achievements that the CNT's nonpolitical strategy could not hope to equal. Moreover Caballero's Labor Ministry was still hostile to the CNT. It put down CNT strikes and then tried to win the defeated workers over to UGT. In short, Socialist governmental power posed a threat to the very existence of the CNT. In 1932, as we have seen, the UGT's membership surpassed that of the CNT.

But since the CNT's membership also swelled, the Spanish libertarian movement remained a formidable force in its own right. Its enlarged membership, moreover, was becoming more radicalized. Egged on by the FAI's anarchic "revolution now!" mentality, it shifted from relative moderation toward an insurrectionary outlook. *Faístas*, who had never welcomed the republic, tried to use any sizable strike not only to challenge Caballero's labor policies, especially the mixed commissions—but also to demonstrate that workers' grievances were caused not by individual profit-minded corporations but by capitalism itself. On June 6, 1931, militant *faístas* declared a strike against the Madrid telephone company, leading thousands of workers—many of them politically

inexperienced—to stage a walk-out. Caballero's Ministry of Labor was quite eager to rule the strike illegal, seeing it as an opportunity to weaken the CNT's position in Madrid and prevent it from advancing into territory traditionally dominated by the Socialists. Accordingly, the Socialist union provided scabs to the telephone company. The strike's largely FAI leadership urged the workers to continue, and the strikers soon found themselves caught up in violent clashes between FAI militants and UGT scabs. Finally in August the demoralized and hungry strikers returned to their jobs and in many cases entered the UGT.

The FAI, emerging more openly in the labor movement, was becoming ever more influential within the CNT: its stature was growing among militant young workers, and *faístas* did not hesitate to take over leadership positions in many CNT locals and committees. The moderate syndicalists—especially Pestaña and Peiró—loathed the FAI for its violent and extreme tactics. On September 1, after the Madrid telephone strike was defeated, 30 leading CNT moderates issued a joint *Manifiesto of the Thirty*, denouncing FAI adventurism as the product of a "simplistic" concept of revolution that could well lead to "republican fascism." While the *treintistas* agreed that the state and capitalism must be overthrown by a revolution, the revolution, they said, would have to come not from a revolutionary clique but from the people. Relying on small groups to carry out direct actions would create only a right-wing backlash; the revolution could be furthered only by slowly building up the strength of the *sindicatos* and educating the workers. Among the *treintistas* were CNT secretary-general Angel Pestaña, *Solidaridad Obrera* editor Juan Peiró, and the leading CNT organizer in Valencia, Juan López.

The FAI denounced *treintismo* as treachery and betrayal and called for the *treintistas* to be expelled from CNT committees. Some individual *treintistas* left the CNT voluntarily, but so powerful had the FAI become within the Confederación that those who did not leave voluntarily were expelled. In September the FAI gained control of the most important CNT *sindicatos* in Barcelona. In October a *faísta* editorial board took over *Solidaridad Obrera*. Nevertheless, *treintismo* remained popular in many parts of Spain, notably in large parts of Catalonia, Asturias, the Levant, and especially Valencia. Here entire *sindicatos* opposed what was openly called "FAI domination" and supported the *treintista* leaders. The FAI-led CNT's response was to shift from expelling individuals to expelling entire *sindicatos*. At Sabadell, the pro-*treintista sindicatos* refused to pay their dues to the CNT—with the result that on September 24 the CNT expelled Sabadell's entire local federation. These and other expelled unions proceeded to form *sindicatos de oposición*.<sup>\*</sup> In March 1932 Angel Pestaña



resigned as national secretary of the CNT—to be replaced by Manuel Rivas, an FAI member—and later that year he was expelled from his local Barcelona metalworkers' union.†

In the early 1930s many strikes erupted in Spain (734 in 1931 and 681 the following year), of which the FAI inspired an unknown number. In June 1931, even as some *faístas* were leading the Madrid telephone strike, others were turning their attention to another strike, ongoing among the Seville telephone workers. This strike was initially peaceful and showed some promise of achieving its aims, but local *faístas* saw fit to use the action to test the republic's labor policies and even its very existence. Accordingly, when the Seville telephone strike became a general strike on July 20, armed *faístas* and CNT militants occupied strategic parts of the city with a view toward staging an insurrection against the republic. Furious pitched battles took place between the army and the workers, whose weapons were allegedly supplied by *faístas*. Martial law was declared; the army bombarded the CNT's headquarters with artillery fire, and after nine days the general strike came to a tragic end. About 40 people had been killed and 200 wounded.

Undaunted, FAI-dominated CNT committees went on to apply the same tactics to other strikes that broke out in Spain. Between 1931 and 1934 the FAI also carried out a series of hopeless strikes—or what they called “revolutionary gymnastics,” supposedly to keep the proletariat's revolutionary muscles well-flexed. But FAI leadership was of doubtful quality, as Stanley Payne accurately observes:

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\* Two syndicalist unions later emerged. In the spring of 1933, the *treintistas* and opposition *sindicatos* created a Libertarian Syndicalist Federation (Federación Sindicalista Libertaria, or FSL). Initiated by some 50 *sindicatos*, it had 26,000 members and adhered to a cautious and flexible syndicalism that acknowledged that the majority of Spanish workers and peasants, however militant, were really not anarcho-syndicalists and that the growth of libertarian ideas among the working class would be a slow process, requiring a considerable amount of work and patience. Workers would have to be educated in libertarian ideas before they could be organized into a libertarian movement. The official CNT, which retained the majority of the Confederación's membership, followed the FAI's policies. Many CNT *sindicatos*, despite their revolutionary élan, soon felt that they were heading nowhere, except in providing martyrs and prisoners for the state, and abandoned the FAI's strategy after it nearly led to the CNT's self-destruction.

† Pestaña and his supporters later formed a Syndicalist Party, participated in parliamentary elections, and sat in the Popular Front Cortes of 1936. Before his death Pestaña returned to the CNT and was revered by many anarcho-syndicalists as one of the libertarian movement's great elders.

Anarcho-syndicalism relied on spontaneity, and the FAI rushed recklessly from one local disorder to another. In anarchist ideology, the state and society were so rotten that they could be expected to collapse at any time . . . None of [the FAI's] local insurrections was well organized, and each was quelled without too much difficulty, though in the main centers the Army had to be called out to assist the police. In none were as many as 100 people killed. In between the main revolts, there were numerous local acts—bombings, riotings, church burnings, brawls, and shootings. As one [moderate CNT] leader later wrote: “It will be hard to equal the narrow fanaticism of the Spanish anarchomystics in their course from September, 1911 to July, 1936.”<sup>4</sup>

FAI militants held a deep-seated faith that a revolution could be undertaken with little more than the sheer inspiration generated by enthusiastic militants. Indeed, so profound was the *faístas'* distrust of organized leadership and strategic planning that they prepared only the most rudimentary logistics for an assault—say, on a town hall—believing that a dramatic gesture, such as raising a black and red flag, was all that would be needed to inspire the masses to rise up on a wave of exaltation. Thereafter, it was expected, the masses would discover—or recover—their own instinctive drive for freedom and capacity for social self-management, then carry out a revolution that would transform Spain and the world into a libertarian communist society.\*

Having acquired considerable power within the CNT, the FAI and its supporters set about initiating insurrectionary general strikes that would presumably culminate in libertarian communism. For two years, starting in January 1932, it undertook what José Peirats has called a “cycle of insurrections.” These attempted risings formed a distinct pattern: FAI insurgents would go to a village town hall, raise the black and red flag of anarcho-syndicalism, and proclaim *comunismo libertario*. Sometimes they would burn property deeds and announce the abolition of money.

The first such insurrection was staged in January 1932 in Alto

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\* Underlying this conviction was the profoundly regressive belief that reason was an artificially induced faculty that paralyzed humanity's alleged instinct for liberty and that could best be overcome by assaults against the state and bourgeois society. This belief accounts not only for the cultic primitivism nurtured by pure anarchist ideology but for the distrust that many anarchists felt for theory and strategic planning as such. Anarchists who disclaimed such antirational and antiorganizational beliefs were most often influenced by Marxism and syndicalism, both of which had roots in Enlightenment rationalism.



Llobregat, a mining region in the Catalan Pyrenees. Here, when insurgents—including Durruti and Ascaso—raised their CNT flags and proclaimed the advent of a libertarian society, they were joined by the militant proletariat of nearby towns that were home to the region's large textile mills.<sup>5</sup> This movement swept into Barcelona itself and then into the Levant. For five days the workers waged a full-scale rebellion in their towns against the better-equipped and better-trained government military forces. But the uprising was as strategy-free as it was ill-conceived. Pitted against the arms and discipline of the troops, it was doomed to defeat. After troops brutally suppressed it, the government rounded up anarcho-syndicalists, regardless of whether they had participated in the rising, and deported 110 of the ablest CNT and FAI militants—including Durruti and Ascaso—to Spanish West Africa and the Canary Islands. Their involuntary departure from the scene simply caused young *faístas* to revere them more, and to stage still more ill-conceived "insurrections" in the months to come.

Small-scale actions continued throughout 1932. Anarchist groups in Catalan, Andalusian, and Levantine towns occupied town halls and proclaimed libertarian communism—invariably to be suppressed. But FAI militants, influenced by the Nosotros group, in time became dissatisfied with these small-scale risings. They began to plan a major revolutionary insurrection, the immediate aim of which was to free the prisoners who had been exiled as a result of the January 1932 uprising. The strategic aim was to spark a social revolution throughout Spain. To carry it out, they established a network of "defense committees," composed of local armed cadres, and fixed the date for the insurrection as January 8, 1933.

The insurrection, the epicenter of which was Barcelona, was to be sparked off by a forthcoming nationwide strike on the part of the railway workers. According to the FAI plan, the rail strike would shut down all rail transportation throughout the country, preventing the government from deploying its troops against risings in key localities. Unfortunately for these apocalyptic expectations, however, the railway workers were anything but revolutionary; in fact, the majority were UGT members who simply wanted the CNT to support their efforts for higher wages. In the event, the workers delayed calling a strike, then finally settled with the operators for a minuscule pay rise. (The prospect of a reckless anarchist uprising may have frightened the workers more than possible government repression.) The unexpected settlement doomed the prospect of an insurrection, since the trains were now running without obstruction and the government could freely use them to move its troops.

The FAI-guided Catalan Regional Defense Committee—whose members included Durruti, García Oliver, and Ascaso, among others—nonetheless insisted on proceeding with their "revolutionary" scenario. On the morning of January 8 armed anarchist groups assaulted Barcelona's military barracks, expecting that segments of the army rank and file would give them support. That support was not forthcoming. Intense fighting occurred in Barcelona's working-class quarters, but the workers were put down without difficulty. The rising was crushed by noon that day—but this news did not travel quickly to the rest of Spain, where uprisings occurred over the next few days, involving Tarrasa, Sardañola, and Lérida, as well as Andalusian towns and villages. These attempts, too, were subdued without difficulty. For the anarcho-syndicalists, the January 1933 rising was a calamity. About 9,000 *cenetistas* were jailed, including nearly every leading *faísta* in Catalonia together with the entire Peninsular Committee. The CNT was outlawed, its presses were closed down, and its militants were arrested *en masse* by the republican police, the Asaltos—whose ranks, ironically, were filled with Socialist recruits who detested the *cenetistas*.

In other wildcat "insurrections" that occurred throughout the country, *faístas* vied with each other in revolutionary recklessness. The police claimed to have discovered plans to assassinate major government figures, including Azaña. The continuing roundups of CNT and FAI activists paralyzed both organizations. These fruitless episodes exhausted the energy of the workers. Militants who were still at large tried to unsettle the government by setting off bombs in strategic parts of Barcelona, but none of these acts—strikes, "insurrections," or armed assaults on police stations—had any effect except to produce a widespread popular desire for public order and to discredit the republican government for failing to assert its authority.

## COMMUNISTS AND DISSIDENT COMMUNISTS

Spanish Communists began to use similar adventurist tactics, albeit in a smaller theater of operations. In this respect they were guided by Stalin's Communist International. In 1928 the Comintern had adopted an ultraleftist "third-period" policy, predicated on the notion, however dubious, that an international revolutionary upsurge was forthcoming in the immediate future. The third-period policy was driven not by any Russian analysis that international capitalism was about to collapse,



however, but by the needs of Stalin's domestic policy: peasants had once again been holding back grain, and Stalin was eager to force it from them by intensifying the collectivization of agriculture. He also wished to accelerate industrialization. By advancing a policy that had no relevance to the state of international capitalism or revolutionary movements worldwide, the Comintern was reduced to a mere instrument for pillaging the Russian peasantry to gain funds to industrialize the country.

The new policy required Communist groups everywhere to shift sharply to the left. Instead of working within Socialist-led trade unions, Communists were directed to renounce all such unity of common action with Socialists and instead form their own Communist "dual" unions. In Spain this meant that the very small Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista Español, or PCE) forbade its members to work within the ranks of the UGT. Instead, Spanish Communists were expected to urge rank-and-file *ugetistas* to abandon the UGT, become "revolutionary Communists," and join the newly formed Communist trade union. Not surprisingly, Spanish Communists had very little success in advancing this fatuous strategy. The PCE remained an isolated near-sect well into the mid 1930s, with few roots in the working class.

Several dissident and independent Marxists, including Joaquín Maurín, a former PCE leader, were appalled by the new Comintern policy, which they scorned as nonsensical. In March 1931, already independent of Moscow, they decided to consolidate their own forces and met in the Catalan town of Tarrasa for a joint congress to create a new party: the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (Bloque Obrero y Campesino). As Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz ironically observe, the congress contained fewer "guests" than could be found at "any middle-class wedding."<sup>6</sup> Its social program called for, among other things, the formation of revolutionary councils, the distribution of land to its tillers, self-determination for nationalities, and the creation of a union of Iberian republics.

The Bloc identified neither with Stalin nor Trotsky, and it was neither anarchist nor social democratic. Many decades later Victor Alba described the Bloc's orientation as follows:

It had positions that were anything but simple: it was Communist but outside the Communist International; revolutionary and worker-based but defending at that moment [1931] the necessity of a bourgeois democratic revolution in favor of the [Second] Republic, while working to avoid illusions among the people about it; Marxist, and, therefore, an adversary of anarchism, but working within the ranks of

the C.N.T.; internationalist, but defending the right of nationalities to self-determination.<sup>7</sup>

Programmatically, the *bloquistas* held that

Spain need[ed] a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which must be carried out by the working class, since the bourgeoisie had demonstrated and would continue to demonstrate its incapacity to achieve it. Thus the road was open to socialist revolution, a revolution to be undertaken with complete international independence, without submitting to any political line not determined by the Iberian workers themselves. The international line of the new party was: to affiliate with none of the existing internationals and to defend the Bolshevik Revolution without abandoning the right and the duty to criticize what were considered to be the errors of the Muscovite leaders.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the Stalinist Communist parties, the Bloc allowed for the existence of internal factions; indeed, it thrived on discussions and disputes. Unlike most other labor organizations in Spain, which placed a high premium on activism and squandered their energy in ill-conceived escapades, the Bloc prized theory, discussion, and education. It was disciplined and coherent without being authoritarian.

Most important, the Bloc was democratic. Organized in small cells, which in turn elected delegates to local committees, its infrastructure was pyramidal: its local committees elected delegates to its city committees, and so forth, up to its provincial committees. But significantly the local committees also elected delegates to its congresses, making the base the ultimate authority for the Bloc's most important assembly, which chose the organization's central committee. As Alba and Schwartz note, "What distinguished the Bloc from the 'official' Communist parties was that the democratic aspects of the system of organization really functioned and were not limited to an existence on paper."<sup>9</sup>

Soon after its founding, the Bloc had 700 members, most of whom were extremely devoted to the party and gave generously of their energy and resources without becoming docile followers. They were tangible evidence that an organization need not become totalitarian by accepting discipline and coherence as preconditions for membership. Equally remarkably, about 90 percent of Bloc members were workers who gave roughly 6 percent of their wages to sustain the party's operations. No officials were paid, except the Bloc's general secretary, who received half



of an average worker's wage. (Maurín was elected general secretary at the founding congress.) Despite the Bloc's very limited means, the membership's élan had a multiplier effect upon its activities.

Meanwhile, an old comrade of Maurín's, Andrés Nin, had been residing in Moscow (where he had traveled in 1921) as a member of the Russian Communist Party. There he had personally witnessed the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. In the mid 1920s he cast his lot with Trotsky's faction. In 1928, however, Trotsky was arrested and exiled from Russia, and Nin was expelled from the party and placed under house arrest. Upon his release in 1930 he finally—and wisely—returned to Spain.

Maurín welcomed the return of his old Trotskyist friend and comrade, whom he highly esteemed, and fervently hoped that he would join the Bloc. The Bloc, after all, accepted Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution; it defended the accomplishments of the October Revolution, which Trotsky also did consistently, even after his expulsion from Russia; and it pledged to retain an independent and critical attitude toward the Comintern. But the Bloc refused to become a Trotskyist organization because of Trotsky's fatal insistence on interpreting the Spanish revolutionary situation in Russian terms and on regarding the October Revolution as the template on which to model all European revolutions. Trotsky demanded, for example, that Communists call for "all power to the soviets," but the *bloquistas* understood that soviets were not indigenous institutions in Spain and instead called for all power to the revolutionary *juntas*, or traditional local councils that the Spanish people associated with their war of national liberation against Napoleon's armies. Trotsky, annoyed by this recalcitrance, insisted that his Spanish followers remain independent of the Bloc. Nin may have wished to join the Bloc, but he deferred to his famous Bolshevik mentor. Hence, a year after his return, Nin and Juan Andrade founded the Communist Opposition (Oposición Comunista Española, or OCE), which became the Spanish section of the international Trotskyist movement. Trotsky urged the OCE to criticize the Bloc, which it obligingly did in one of its periodicals, but the OCE's membership languished, retaining perhaps only a hundred or so members.

In March 1932 Nin was elected general secretary of the OCE, which changed its name in the same year to the Spanish Communist Left (Izquierda Comunista Española, or ICE). Relations between the Nin and Trotsky were deteriorating. Then in 1934 Trotsky, convinced that the French Socialist Party was moving to the Left, ordered French Trotskyists to enter the party and try to gain control of it. Generalizing from this

particular situation, in what was called the "French turn," he instructed Trotskyist groups in all countries to enter their respective socialist parties as well and attempt to take them over. To Nin, and to many other Trotskyists, this strategy seemed at best irrelevant and at worst regressive. The Spanish Socialists, he thought, were much too conservative and institutionalized to provide an effective arena for Trotskyist activity. At the same time, the Bloc was becoming a relatively large movement in Catalonia, with a highly educated leadership and a membership that was ideologically very close to Trotsky. The Bloc had developed a respectable trade union base that consisted of thousands of Catalan and Spanish workers. But Trotsky remained obdurately and inflexibly committed to his strategy.

In September 1934 the ICE—perhaps the most politically conscious group in Spain—broke with the international Trotskyist movement and a year later fused with the Bloc to form a new party: the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, or POUM). This remarkable dissident Marxist organization initially counted only 7,000 members, concentrated in Barcelona and Lérida, but went on to become the largest workers' political party in Catalonia. The Spanish Trotskyists, who remained with Trotsky after the POUM was formed, took on the highly sectarian name "Bolshevik-Leninist section of the Trotskyist Fourth International" and, following Trotsky's instructions, disappeared into the PSOE. Neither the POUM nor the Trotskyists, as we shall see, ever gained sufficient strength to counter the aggressive tactics of the well-funded Stalinists.

## NOTES

1. Article 26 of the Spanish constitution of 1931, in Dante A. Puzzo, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York and London: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1969), pp. 101–2.
2. Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), pp. 97–8.
3. Éléna de la Souchère, *An Explanation of Spain*, trans. Eleanor Ross Levieux (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), p. 146.
4. Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, pp. 118–19. However tendentious Payne's view of Spanish anarchism and syndicalism may be, it is difficult to challenge his description of *faïsta* behavior in this passage.
5. Peirats places the epicenter of the insurrection in Figols, a mining district located between Barcelona and the French frontier. See José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (Detroit: Black and Red Books, n.d.), p. 87. See also Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the*



*Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 240, and Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 118.

6. Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism and Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M.* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), p. 23.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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## CHAPTER 61 The Popular Front and the Generals' Rising

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### THE COLLAPSE OF THE AZAÑA COALITION

The *faístas'* foolhardy January 1933 insurrection might well have gone down in history as a footnote, were it not that its sparks caused a flame in Casas Viejas, a small pueblo of a few thousand peasants in Cadíz. The Barcelona rising, as we have seen, was quickly suppressed, but its failure did not immediately become known on the other side of the peninsula. Casas Viejas's local CNT *sindicato* unknowingly went ahead with its plans to take over the village and declare libertarian communism. Armed with shotguns and a few pistols, the villagers attacked the Civil Guard barracks, cut the telephone wires, and marched around the pueblo while waving the CNT's red and black flags.

Azaña, imbued with fears of a regional jacquerie, decided to take firm action to end the rebellion, ordering Civil Guards and Asaltos to teach the peasants a lasting lesson. Some of the villagers, realizing an attack was imminent, positioned themselves in strategic spots in and around the village, while others fled into the mountains. One small group of peasants hid with their meager weapons in the thatched cottage of an elderly charcoal-burner nicknamed Seisdedos, or Six Fingers, who was inadvertently caught up in the events. The Civil Guards and Asaltos attacked Seisdedos's cottage, setting its roof on fire—and burning alive all those inside. They then made their way through the village, setting other houses on fire and randomly executing the local peasants. In all 24 villagers were killed; only three guards died, and four were wounded. It was in fact a massacre of naïve and terrified people.

Spain was shocked by the government's grisly massacre of ordinary peasants at Casas Viejas. All sectors of the political spectrum, from left to



right, condemned the Azaña government for its insensitivity to the plight of the poor and its recourse to excessive violence. An investigative committee concluded that the government's response had been unnecessarily harsh; all parties in the coalition, including the Socialists, were compromised. In June 1933 Azaña resigned as prime minister, and Alcalá Zamora, the president of the republic, called for new national elections, to be held in November 1933.

Meanwhile, spurred on by the growing antigovernmental sentiment, the FAI-led CNT launched its most massive strike wave to date. In late January and early February a plenum of regional federations at Madrid resolved to initiate a general strike to deliver a death-blow to the republic. The strike would demand the release of prisoners, freedom for *sindicatos*, and press freedom. The CNT-FAI (as the Confederación was now ubiquitously called) demanded an end to compulsory arbitration by mixed commissions. In mid-April the potash workers in Cardona walked out, followed a few days later by the building workers in Barcelona, and the city's dock workers. Before the spring was out, the country was rocked by strikes of nearly all CNT *sindicatos*.

The Socialists, having veered sharply to the left, led their own strikes during these doleful months, while Caballero, bitterly disillusioned by his experience of collaboration with the bourgeois republic, turned against Azaña and resigned as Labor Minister. He and other left Socialists announced that they were ready to abandon parliamentary methods to defend workers' rights and adopt a revolutionary strategy for social change. Quickly transforming himself into a quasi-Bolshevik, he began stirring large Socialist rallies with rousing ultraleftist speeches, even alluding to the inevitability of a proletarian dictatorship in Spain. In anticipation of the November elections, he joined with other left Socialists as well as the POUM to launch a revolutionary Marxist electoral campaign, independent of all bourgeois allies, calling for the eventual achievement of a proletarian revolution.

The CNT-FAI, for its part, mounted a vigorous campaign of its own, opposing the coming elections and urging its supporters to abstain from voting altogether. To all appearances, the *faístas* seemed to hope that the Right would gain the electoral victory, thereby provoking the inflamed masses to rise in a social revolution.\* As November drew near, the CNT-

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\* This principle, "The worse, the better," sometimes invoked by the Left, is very dubious. At a time when fascism was on the march in Europe, it made all the difference whether a government veered toward the extreme Right or remained a liberal democracy.

FAI's "Don't vote" campaign blanketed its presses, its workers' centers, and its union offices. The union held rallies in seemingly every city, town, and village, condemning the government for the Casas Viejas affair (and conveniently forgetting that the uprising had initially been brought about by the FAI's mindless adventurism). *Faísta* putschists, demanding freedom for 9,000 imprisoned militants, even claimed credit for the courage and militancy of the Casas Viejas victims. The anti-electoral movement reached its crescendo on November 9, in an immense rally of 75,000 workers who assembled in the Barcelona bullring, where they heard oratory on the theme "Instead of elections, social revolution." Durruti shouted: "Workers, you who voted yesterday without considering the consequences: if they had told you that the republic was going to jail 9,000 working men, would you have voted?" The question was almost rhetorical; the crowd roared back with a vigorous "No!"<sup>1</sup>

At a FAI plenum held in Madrid during the last days of October 1933, the delegates agreed that, should the anti-electoral campaign yield a victory for the Right, even the fascist Right, the FAI would throw itself into an outright insurrectionary struggle. The threat of fascism was not an idle one. Less than a year earlier, in January 1933, Hitler had become chancellor of Germany and initiated the brutal suppression of workers' parties and trade unions. In Spain the Right had greatly consolidated its forces since 1931. In March 1933 José María Gil Robles, who had previously founded and led Acción Popular, formed a new coalition of right-wing parties and groups, the Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightists (Confederación Española de Derechos Autónomos, or CEDA).

Thereafter they acted as a single party—the party of order, stability, religion, family, work, and property, as its rhetoric proclaimed, in opposition to the "atheistic Reds" who were said to be fomenting anarchy and a host of other social ills. CEDA was not at its outset a fascist bloc: it expressly opposed political violence, while committing itself to a parliamentary system of government. It even condemned the fettering of civil rights. Like its predecessor Acción Popular, its main focus was to defend the Catholic Church and restore its old privileges by promoting a Catholic social policy. In short, it hoped to generate a Catholic corporatist society. CEDA made no inroads among the working class. But many monarchists and *señoritos*, together with agrarian and middle-class reactionaries inspired by Mussolini and Dollfuss, urged CEDA to become more fascistic (as it in fact later did). Not even the prospect of a CEDA victory, however, could deter the anarchosyndicalists, who simply-mindedly embraced the belief that the advent of fascism would compel the proletariat to rise in revolution.



## EL BIENIO NEGRO

On November 19, 1933, Spaniards went to the polls and returned an overwhelming parliamentary victory for the Right. CEDA, the Agrarians, and the Monarchists together soared from 41 to 201 deputies, while the former Azaña coalition, including Socialists and the Republican Left (but without the Esquerra) fell from 247 to 97 deputies. The parliamentary Left was shattered.

The Right gained its stunning victory in part because it was united and organized and had thoroughly consolidated its forces. The old cacique system in the countryside—in which local bosses who controlled jobs and credit could coerce peasants into voting against their own political interests—contributed to the high vote totals for the Agrarians (the Partido Agrario, the party of Castilian landowners) and possibly the Monarchists. Women voters, newly enfranchised by the Constituent Cortes, were free to vote for the first time in Spanish history. Heavily influenced by their local priests, they bolstered the electoral tally, not of the Left that had eagerly given them the vote, but of the parliamentary Right. The Right's victory was most clearly a direct result, however, of the abstention of the anarchosyndicalists, whose anti-electoral campaign deprived the Left and Center parties of as many as one million votes. The total abstention rate for Spain as a whole was 32 percent, and in Catalonia it reached a stunning 40 percent. "There is no doubt," writes José Peirats, "that the rout of the Left was caused by the CNT's widespread abstentionist campaign."<sup>2</sup>

The republic was now in the hands of its enemies, and the period of their dominance, known as the *bienio negro* (two black years), began. No single party of the Right had been the clear winner; the result was that during those two years the coalitions frequently changed. As the largest single party in the Cortes, CEDA would, under normal circumstances, have gained ministerial positions—and Gil Robles, the CEDA leader, might well have become prime minister. But the Left understood that the accession of any CEDA member to a ministerial position would constitute a signal that fascism had arrived in Spain; Alcalá Zamora (still the president of the republic) realized that the Left might well erupt in unified outrage and make an armed bid for power. The right-wing parties therefore united to keep CEDA out of the cabinet, and Alcalá Zamora chose Lerroux, the old Radical leader, to be prime minister.

The right-wing majority in the Cortes was in a position to roll back the hated anticlerical and agrarian laws. In return for CEDA's assent to a republican constitutional government, Lerroux agreed that the Radicals

would help carry out part of CEDA's program. Between December 1933 and October 1934 CEDA and the Radicals revoked most of the Azaña government's social legislation. Implementation of the Agrarian Law was brought to a abrupt halt; the agricultural wage increases achieved under the Azaña coalition were scaled back by 40–50 percent; and the government hired an additional thousand Civil Guards to police the countryside. And on the mixed commissions, entrepreneurs replaced Socialists as chairmen, giving the commissions' decisions a pro-employee tilt.

The anarchosyndicalists were less interested in governmental shakeups and the status of legislation than in continuing their "cycle of insurrections." As we have seen, the insurrections of January 1932 and January 1933 had been abysmal failures, resulting in the imprisonment of thousands of *cenetistas* and *faístas* with no tangible result except to deplete significantly the resources of the CNT-FAI. Far from heightening the revolutionary passions of the masses through "revolutionary gymnastics," the morale of the proletariat had been gravely diminished. Yet at a December 1933 plenum of FAI national defense committees, Durruti called for still another uprising. The Aragonese militants supported him, but most of the other participants were opposed. Even García Oliver, who had initiated the January 1933 uprising, expressly broke with his fellow *Nosotros* member and denounced the proposed insurrection as essentially adventuristic. By persisting in his efforts, Durruti received reluctant promises of aid—but with their scarce resources, the anarchosyndicalists could provide aid only in the form of rhetoric.

The uprising was set for December 8, the opening day of the new Cortes. The government, alerted to anarchosyndicalist plans for an insurrection, declared a state of emergency in Barcelona, Madrid, and other cities. It arrested more leading *cenetistas* and *faístas*, imposed press censorship, and closed down the *sindicatos* in Barcelona. FAI notables such as Durruti, the theorist Isaac Puente, and the Madrid CNT construction worker leader Cipriano Mera traveled to Saragossa, in Aragon, to help organize the insurrection in this devoutly anarchist city, even more libertarian than Barcelona. But before the insurrection could get under way, the government arrested nearly a hundred militants, including Durruti, Puente, and Mera. Nevertheless the zealous Saragossa workers raised barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in street-fighting. The insurrection then spread to Asturias and parts of Catalonia. Many villages declared *comunismo libertario*. Perhaps the heaviest fighting raged between the authorities and the vineyard workers in Rioja. But again, the rising was so poorly organized that within four days the entire



insurrectionary movement came to an end. Anarchosyndicalist militants were arrested in the thousands, their printing presses were closed down, and the doors of their *sindicatos* were shut and sealed.

This third and final attempt at an uprising brought to a merciful end the FAI's adventurist two-year "cycle." The *faísta* pattern of an ill-prepared rising, a short-lived local victory, and a swift triumph by the army did little more than claim lives and fill prisons. Far from providing "revolutionary gymnastics" for a coming revolution, these insurrections proved to be demoralizing and destructive exercises in anarchic irresponsibility. They achieved no benefits whatsoever for the workers' movement; in the broader libertarian movement they served mainly to discredit the FAI and greatly strengthen the hands of the syndicalists and reformists. Significantly, they served also to discredit the republic: Azaña quite correctly observed that—together with the CNT-FAI's abstentionist electoral tactics—the insurrections contributed to his government's downfall. As Stanley Payne concludes: "The doctrine of the permanent apolitical insurrection, isolated from all other leftist groups, was a complete failure as a revolutionary tactic."<sup>3</sup>

As the "cycle of insurrections" waned, the initiative for class conflict passed to the militants of the UGT, who were known for their methodical sense of purpose. However bitter they were about their defeat at the polls, the Socialists did not seek to restore the Azaña coalition; on the contrary, they reaffirmed their commitment to joining the revolutionary Left. In February 1934 the Socialists watched in horror as, in Austria, Dollfuss suppressed the Viennese Socialists in their rising on behalf of the republic. The Austrian counterrevolution seemed to resemble the situation brewing in Spain: Dollfuss's Spanish counterpart was Gil Robles, while the Austrian Christian Socials seemed to be a fascistic equivalent to the Spanish CEDA. Should CEDA ever come to power in Spain, the PSOE felt, the Left would have to undertake a rising to topple its authoritarian regime.

Accordingly, in early 1934 Caballero and other left Socialists threw themselves into the formation of a revolutionary coalition of working-class parties and trade unions in Spain. This Workers' Alliance (*Alianza Obrera*) was created to unite all leftist groups in combating fascism, but in reality it embraced mainly Marxist and Marxist-type organizations, including Maurín's Bloc and Nin's Communist Left, as well as the *treintistas'* *sindicatos* that had been expelled from the CNT. Like the Austrian uprising of February that year, the Alliance intended to initiate a revolutionary struggle the moment CEDA might succeed in gaining any ministerial position in the government. With even greater determination

than the Austrian Socialists, the Alliance established a revolutionary committee that, if necessary, would actually carry out a transfer of power to the workers and create a federal socialist republic in Spain.

Inasmuch as the Alliance expected to establish a revolutionary government, which implied the existence of a state, the CNT-FAI refused to participate in it. Nor was it eager to cooperate with the Socialists, its recent persecutors. Asturias, Spain's main coal-mining region, was a notable and rational exception: there on March 28, 1934, the CNT and the UGT united to form a regional Alliance local. Indeed, Asturias was the only place where CNT *sindicatos* joined this emerging antifascist united front.

On October 1 CEDA made its long-contemplated move. When the Cortes reconvened, CEDA withdrew its support from the government, thereby bringing it down. Alcalá Zamora, president of the republic, could no longer keep out the *cedistas*, whose party was the largest in the Cortes, if they demanded representation in the cabinet. He invited Lerroux to form a new cabinet that included three CEDA ministers—including Gil Robles—in relatively minor posts. The unthinkable had happened: CEDA had entered the government.

To the Socialists and the Alliance, CEDA's entry signaled the onset of their long-planned revolution. On October 4 in Madrid the Alliance's revolutionary committee issued instructions to its locals for an uprising; the next day the UGT called a nationwide revolutionary general strike throughout Spain. Madrid responded with a strike that began on October 5 and paralyzed the city for several days. However, the action was poorly planned: the strike was half-hearted, and the insurgents' leaders faltered, unwilling to raise the uprising to a revolutionary scale. The UGT's rank and file were more militant than their leaders, but they lacked sufficient arms to wage a serious battle. Contrary to all expectations, no troops came over to join the insurgents, and after ten days the strike petered out.

In Barcelona, the Esquerra, which had agreed to rise with the *madrileños*, suddenly became timorous in the face of an authentic revolution. For two days the party's leader, Luis Companys, failed to call a strike in the Catalan capital. Finally on the early evening of October 6 he took to the airwaves to announce perfunctorily that a Catalan republic existed within the Federal Republic of Spain, whereupon he prudently confined himself to his Generalidad office and did nothing to enforce his own *pronunciamiento*.

The most serious flaw in the rising was that it did not have the support of the CNT-FAI, which despite its exhaustion after the "cycle of insurrections" was still the dominant working-class organization in



Catalonia. Without its support no revolution could hope to succeed in Barcelona. For the most part the CNT considered the rising to be a project of the Socialist-led Alliance in conjunction with bourgeois nationalists, which in anarchosindicalist eyes meant that it was grounded in "bourgeois politics" rather than in the revolutionary will of the proletariat. The Madrid government required only 1,500 troops and a few rounds of artillery fire to quell the "insurrection" in Barcelona. On the morning of October 7 Companys surrendered; the government rounded up Socialist and Alliance militants without difficulty, filling the jails with thousands of would-be insurgents.

### UPRISING IN ASTURIAS

It was the workers in Asturias, especially the miners, who rescued the honor of the Spanish Left. Asturians rose up in a proletarian insurrection that Stanley Payne has appropriately called "unprecedented [in Western Europe] since the Paris Commune."<sup>4</sup> Gerald Brenan, in turn, called the revolt "an epic which terrified the bourgeoisie and fired all the working classes of Spain."<sup>5</sup> Asturias's miners, notable for the tenacity and the extraordinary good sense they had exhibited in their earlier struggles against the mine operators, revealed that in stability, sense of purpose, and deeply rooted class-consciousness they were second to no working class in Europe. Life in the northern mountains had taught them to act with a stern sobriety, courage, and solidarity in addressing all the social and political issues of the period. When they found the policies of the UGT bureaucrats in Madrid too reformist, they disregarded them and followed their own social wisdom and course of action.

In 1934 an estimated 50,000 miners worked in the Asturian basin (mining mainly coal and iron) and 60,000 in the provincial towns. Of these 110,000 workers, almost 70 percent belonged to trade unions, making them the most unionized working class in Spain. Nearly 40,000 Asturians were *ugetistas*, half of whom were miners. The CNT had about 25,000 members, most of whom worked in the factories of coastal industrial towns, especially in steel plants. Even those who joined the CNT tilted more markedly toward libertarian socialism than toward anarchism, whose acolytes they viewed as irresponsible, much to the embarrassment of Asturian *cenetistas*, who had not been caught up in the FAI's dizzying "cycle of insurrections." In flat disregard of the *faísta* position against unity with the UGT, they had joined the Alliance and

shared common local struggles with their fellow workers regardless of union affiliation. The Asturians were among the most sophisticated and militant workers in Spain.

When CEDA entered the government, the Asturian miners and factory workers were ready for an insurrection. On the night of October 4 sirens sounded throughout the region, and the miners—particularly in the towns of the Aller and Nalón river valleys—attacked Civil Guard and Assault Guard barracks, besieging police outposts across southern Asturias. Some 200 workers—equipped with only 30 rifles—assaulted the police force in the mining town of Mieres and succeeded in taking the town. A miners' column of 8,000 laid siege to the provincial capital, Oviedo, and by October 9 the workers had taken the entire city except for two barracks, where government troops tenaciously held out against their besiegers. The Asturian *dinameteros*—the skilled blasters who were renowned for their artful use of dynamite—appeared in force, and in only a few days the workers managed to take over most of the province, including the CNT-controlled industrial city of La Felguera.

In all the occupied areas the miners proclaimed a revolutionary regime and set up committees or assemblies to manage the affairs of the province and the defense of their uprising. With a characteristic ability for planning and administration, the committees that took control of Oviedo, for example, carefully calculated the consumption needs of its wards, managed its transportation system, and assumed responsibility for medical care and sanitation. During their occupation the miners made it a point of honor to behave with exemplary dignity and moral rectitude: everyone in Oviedo—bourgeois, middle-class, and proletarian—was accorded the same food rations, health care, and protection.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Lerroux, doubting the reliability of mainland Spanish troops, dispatched the Tercio (Spanish Foreign Legion) and the Regulares (Moorish mercenaries) to Gijón and Avilés, two coastal cities where they could disembark and move against the insurgents. The command of this notorious "Army of Africa" was vested in one General Francisco Franco, who had gained notoriety for molding the Tercio into the most effective fighting force in the Spanish military. The government's deployment of the Tercio and Regulares was unprecedented: for the first time since the Reconquest an army of mercenaries and Muslim tribesmen was being used to suppress a rebellion on Christian Spain's "sacred soil" (ironically, in a region that had never been subjected to Moorish occupation). "By this single act," Gerald Brenan observes acidly, "the Spanish Right showed that neither tradition nor religion—the two things for which they professed to stand—had any meaning for them."<sup>6</sup>



Ships bearing the Tercio and Regulares appeared in the harbor of the coastal cities on October 8. Alliance delegates from Avilés and Gijón rushed to Oviedo to ask their comrades for arms to resist the government troops. But the other leftist parties ignored their pleas because, Gabriel Jackson notes, as Socialists and Communists they "clearly mistrusted" the anarchosyndicalist delegates.<sup>7</sup> On October 9 the CNT resistance in the two cities, for lack of arms, failed to prevent the government troops from disembarking at Gijón, and nothing impeded their way into Asturias. The two seaports in fact became the government's principal military base for launching a savage attack on the insurgents. On October 13 troops entered Oviedo and after several days of bloody street-fighting took the city. The Asturian insurrection as a whole lasted for nearly two weeks, finally collapsing in defeat on October 18. The repression that followed was marked by unprecedented brutality. Many of the captured miners were shot in batches without trials and on the slightest whim of their captors. Others were tortured and horribly mutilated. An estimated 3,000 workers were killed and 7,000 wounded, while more than 40,000 were imprisoned.

The government brought legal charges against the miners for their uprising, but the very extravagance of the charges, coupled with favorable testimony on the miners' behavior from their alleged victims, made legal action self-defeating. One investigating group after another revealed that the government's claims were false and that it was the Tercio, Regulares, and police who had performed acts of unspeakable barbarity. As the facts about the massacres filtered out to the rest of Spain, the country was engulfed in a wave of revulsion. The Asturian uprising was, like 1905 in Russia, the prelude to a social revolution. The time for left-wing organizations to prepare for the coming upheaval had finally arrived.

## THE RISE OF THE POPULAR FRONT

The Right had a growing sense of the course it would have to follow. After the uprisings of "Red October" (as it was called) it looked for a pretext to punish the liberals and leftists and neutralize them as a political force. At Gil Robles' instigation, several leading Asturian Socialists were convicted of inciting the uprising and sentenced to death, including even a PSOE moderate who had actually opposed the uprising! Alcalá Zamora and Lerroux balked at imposing the death penalty on innocent Socialists and commuted their sentences. Gil Robles then tried to pin the Asturian

uprising on Manuel Azaña and even subjected him to a trial in the Cortes, in the hope of finding him guilty merely by association with the insurgents and thereby delegitimizing liberal republicans generally. But on the eve of the Socialist revolt Azaña had in fact gone to Barcelona—not to instigate the revolt but to persuade the Esquerra against participating in it. The ludicrous trial was too much even for conservatives to defend.

CEDA's vindictiveness had the effect of unifying the various leftist parties in their common conviction that the Right was out to destroy them but only pushed the Socialists still farther to the left. Some right-wing Socialists, such as Julián Besteiro and Indalecio Prieto, who had either opposed the rising or fled in its aftermath, lost their prestige among the UGT workers. Caballero had spent those October weeks in the safety of his Madrid apartment, precisely to guard himself against later legal charges. Nevertheless, he ended up in prison. As the aging Socialist leader sat behind bars, he read Marx and Lenin for the first time in his life. When he emerged, he assumed the pose of a fiery left-winger and exulted in his new sobriquet, "the Spanish Lenin."

Meanwhile Gil Robles was set on accumulating more power for CEDA. His plan was to use republican institutions to undo the republic, precisely as Hitler had done in Germany. At the end of March the *cedistas* withdrew from the cabinet, provoking another ministerial crisis, but no new government could be formed without CEDA, still the largest party in the Cortes. Finally, in May 1935 a government was formed in which CEDA occupied or controlled five of the fifteen ministerial seats. Most of the remaining ministers were Radicals. In rapid order the new coalition rejected land reform, restored Jesuit properties, and underfunded the republican lay educational system, restructuring the tax system to favor the wealthy and privileged. Perhaps most significantly it reorganized the army, removing all officers whom it suspected of leftist or republican sympathies. Despite the odium that surrounded Francisco Franco after his repression of the Asturian miners, he was appointed chief of staff of the Spanish army and advanced fascist-minded officers at almost every echelon of command. No longer could Spain's military forces be considered protectors of the republic. Gil Robles even attempted to transfer control over the Civil Guard from the Interior Ministry to the War Ministry—a step that would have placed this formidable force under the control of the reactionary officers.

By the end of 1935 the Radical Party had become a useless parliamentary anachronism: it stood for no political ideology, and its leaders seemed intent primarily on lining their own pockets. In December Lerroux and his associates became involved in several scandals around



gambling licenses and army supply contracts, at which point CEDA abandoned its alliance with the Radicals. In reprisal Lerroux tried to raise inheritance taxes from 1 to 3.5 percent, an increase that the landlords refused to tolerate. CEDA withdrew from the cabinet in protest, terminating the two years of center-right rule. His party having destroyed itself, Lerroux was obliged to step down and soon disappeared from the political scene.

Gil Robles, priding himself on being Spain's Dollfuss, believed that the time had come for his party to take power and establish an authoritarian regime. As the leader of the largest Cortes party, he expected that Alcalá Zamora would appoint him prime minister. But the CEDA leader had misjudged the president. Alcalá was intent on preserving Spain from the embrace of the quasi-fascistic Right. On December 14, 1935, to CEDA's utter astonishment, Alcalá turned the government over to Lerroux's old interior minister, Manuel Portela Valladares, making him caretaker prime minister. As Gil Robles seethed on the sidelines, Portela Valladares lifted the press censorship that, in the year since the Asturian insurrection, had stifled critical discussion, and dissolved the Cortes, announcing new national elections for February 16, 1936. *El bienio negro*, the "two black years" of reactionary rule, were about to come to an end.

The coming elections, everyone realized, would be a plebiscite on the legitimacy of the republic, and all the parties mobilized to wage energetic electoral campaigns. CEDA aimed for a massive victory at the polls, which would give Gil Robles an indisputable mandate to form an authoritarian government that would jettison the republic. The liberals rallied around Azaña and formed a new coalition called the Republican Left (Izquierda Republicana). Indeed, only three years earlier such a radical label would have been unthinkable for liberals. Azaña and the liberals then agreed that they must join with the leftists to fight the threat of fascism. On January 15, 1936, the Republican Left, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Catalan Esquerra, Martínez Barrio's Republican Union, the POUM, Angel Pestaña's newly created Syndicalist Party, and a few other small groups signed a pact to form a new electoral coalition called the Popular Front.\*

The choice of this name was remarkable: the Popular Front's electoral

\* Most Socialists and *poumistas* saw the Popular Front pact as simply a continuation of the Alianza Obrera, not as a permanent agreement with bourgeois liberals. The Communists, however, wanted to give the pact a strategic meaning as conforming to the policy of the Comintern, and they lobbied for the name "Popular Front" until the non-Stalinist members more or less accepted it.

program, in content, was ostensibly social democratic. It called for the nationalization of the land and the banking system but not for workers' control. It would release the estimated 30,000 political prisoners from the 1934 uprisings, most of whom were still languishing in jails and on prison ships, and reinstate workers who had been fired from their jobs owing to political activity. It would purge and reform the corrupt Spanish judicial system.

Initially the newly radicalized Socialists were divided internally about whether to join the Popular Front. Caballero, mindful of the bruising consequences of his earlier collaboration with the bourgeoisie, argued against joining. The "Spanish Lenin" preferred to work outside the government to create a revolutionary proletarian movement. The more right-wing Socialists such as Indalecio Prieto, however, were determined to join the coalition. In the end Prieto had his way, but Caballero was able to extract a concession: if the Popular Front electoral coalition should be victorious at the polls, the Socialist Party—the Front's largest party—would renounce participation in a Popular Front governing coalition. That is, he would support the election of the coalition, but he would not support the government that the coalition formed. The Popular Front government, minus the Socialists, would then go on, in his view, to complete the "bourgeois democratic" revolution by instituting its reformist program. Meanwhile the "Spanish Lenin" would build a revolutionary proletarian movement and, when the time came, would overthrow the Popular Front government and replace it with a socialist republic.

The name "Popular Front" actually had its origins in Moscow.\* From 1928, Stalin had directed Communist parties around the world to follow an ultrarevolutionary policy, the "Third Period" line, that had mainly had the effect of isolating Communist parties from the broader labor movement. In the summer of 1935, however, Stalin reversed himself and called upon all Communist parties to form "united fronts" in a common struggle against fascism with the recently despised Socialists—indeed, with "petty bourgeois" liberal parties and later even with moderately conservative parties. This new policy, adopted in 1935, was known as the Popular Front and was designed to demonstrate to the

\* The origins of the Comintern's new policy lay in France, which for years, ironically, had pursued a policy of attempting to isolate the Soviet Union. In 1934 France reversed itself and reached a rapprochement with the USSR, signing a Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact against possible German aggression. Thereafter the Kremlin pursued an aggressive policy of seeking similar mutual assistance treaties with other Western European republics.



liberal bourgeoisie that the revolutionary phase of Bolshevism was dead and that the Soviet Union would oppose all revolutionary tendencies within the labor movement. Communist parties outside Russia (including Spain's PCE) were transformed from fanatical ultrarevolutionary sects into models of patriotic and parliamentary virtue. Their role would now be to mute rather than foment class conflicts and to prevent rather than instigate proletarian revolutions. Some Communist parties attempted physically to destroy revolutionary organizations that seemed to be becoming too effective and even assassinated revolutionary spokesmen.

The PCE, the Spanish Communist Party, had for most of its brief existence been tiny and inconsequential. Most radical Spanish proletarians and peasants were already strongly committed either to the PSOE or the CNT. Starting in 1935, however, the PCE undertook to build its membership, initially among politically inexperienced workers who drew few distinctions between Socialists and Communists. To enhance its credibility, the party invoked the Bolshevik Revolution, still regarded as a beacon of light by most revolutionary leftists internationally. It actively participated in the 1934 Asturian rising, and Stalin's International Red Aid, a Comintern agency, gave food and money to the families of Spain's 30,000 political prisoners, irrespective of their political affiliation. The PCE also mounted a strong propaganda campaign, funded by Moscow, with the result that by mid 1935 it had 42 newspapers in Spain. In that year, as a result of all these efforts, its membership increased by 50 percent (while the Socialist Party membership remained stationary), and in February 1936 reached 30,000.

The PCE built up its membership most effectively by infiltrating other workers' organizations and merging them with Communist organizations of a similar type. The Popular Front electoral alliance, which the PCE strongly supported, proved highly useful in that it made the party a legitimate participant in any coming Popular Front government.

The Spanish Socialists, anarchists, and syndicalists were surprisingly oblivious to the true nature and aims of the PCE and the Comintern. They assumed that the PCE was still what it appeared to be at face value—a revolutionary party—and that Soviet Russia was in some sense a "workers' state" committed to Marxist and Leninist ideals. Left-wing Socialists were particularly susceptible to this idyllic image of Bolshevism. Caballero, who had only just learned the rudiments of Marxism while in prison in 1934, extolled the October Revolution and the Comintern—although his knowledge of Russia was scant. He hoped, in fact, to transform the PSOE into a disciplined Bolshevik-style party. "It would seem impossible," he wrote, "that there are 'socialists' who fear the

concept 'bolshevization.'"<sup>8</sup> Naïvely he enjoined Socialists to work closely with Communists, indeed to unite with them in a common revolutionary front. So unschooled were many Socialists that they expected to hold the upper hand in such an alliance. Left Socialists even thought that the PSOE should join the Comintern as an expression of solidarity with the international Communist movement.

Such an alliance was precisely what the Communists wanted as well. In fact, their immediate aim was to merge the PCE with the PSOE into a united revolutionary party that they could control. In the fall of 1935 PCE members infiltrated the PSOE, acquiring several leadership positions and urging the Socialists to unite with the Communists in a new Workers' and Peasants' Alliance. On October 23 the PCE's central committee proposed to the PSOE's executive that the two parties merge in a unified Marxist party based on "democratic centralism." The PCE's initiative to take over the Socialist Party was not successful, but the Communists' effort to take over the UGT was more fruitful. On November 20 the PCE proposed that the Communist-controlled trade union organization, known as the CGTU, merge with the UGT. Caballero naïvely supported the proposal, in the expectation that the Socialists would retain the upper hand. Finally, in December 1935 the trap was sprung: the UGT adopted the proposal and allowed the CGTU to enter its ranks, with results that steadily weakened the PSOE's influence on its trade union base and diminished Caballero's status on the Spanish Left.

The CNT-FAI, as an antiparliamentary organization, did not officially participate in the Popular Front coalition or the February 1936 election. But in January and February 1936 the anarchosyndicalists of the Confederación underwent a remarkable development. The "Don't vote" campaign of two years earlier was seen as a strategic failure and was not repeated. In fact, prominent *faístas* and *cenetistas* now openly opined that a Popular Front government, once elected, would indeed free the thousands of libertarian political prisoners. Durruti, Federica Montseny, Federico Montseny-Urales, and other "influential militants," as CNT-FAI leaders were called, either expressly urged *cenetistas* to vote for the Popular Front or at least voiced no opposition to those who did so.

In fact, the revolutionary adventures of the FAI had eliminated anarchosyndicalism's appetite for doomed insurrections. After 1934 the CNT leaders had tempered their radicalism. First they established cordial relations with the once-detested *sindicatos de oposición*, which the expelled *treintistas* had created in 1932–33. On May 1, 1936, at a CNT congress held in Saragossa, the delegates readmitted most of the *treintistas* to leading positions in the organization. CNT leaders also sent out friendly feelers to



Socialists and Communists. The CNT, while mouthing extravagant revolutionary ideals at the Saragossa congress, was in fact moving toward conventional, even social democratic, attitudes.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

In January and February 1936 two major blocs—the leftist Popular Front and the largely rightist National Front—confronted each other in bruising and portentous electoral campaigns. Each bloc portrayed the possible victory of the other as a looming social catastrophe. When Spain finally went to the polls on Sunday, February 16, about 79 percent of the electorate participated—an exceptionally high and politically expressive turnout.

The Spanish electoral system was immensely complex and allowed for considerable fraud and many procedural irregularities. In the final tally, however, the Popular Front was victorious, winning about 4.8 million votes over the National Front's 3.9 million. The Popular Front parties gained 271 deputies, as against 137 for the National Front parties. The leading Popular Front party, the PSOE, gained the largest single bloc of deputies, numbering 90. Azaña's Republican Left and Martínez Barrio's Republican Union together totaled 117. Lesser parties such as the Catalan Esquerra (Left) elected 38 deputies, while the Communists acquired 16. On the Right, the party that polled most votes for the National Front was CEDA with 86, followed by the Agrarians and the Catalan Lliga, each with 13. The remaining right-wing parties gained deputies in only single-digit numbers. The votes of the anarchosyndicalists (estimated at between 700,000 and a million) most likely accounted for the Popular Front's electoral triumph.

True to their earlier agreement, no Socialists participated in the government. The cabinet therefore consisted entirely of liberals, drawn from Azaña's tenuous Republican Left and Martínez Barrio's Republican Union. Azaña's close associate, Santiago Casares Quiroga, became prime minister (a political disaster in a period of revolutionary crisis). The Popular Front government, which owed its victory to the PSOE, needed its support in order to govern, but Caballero and his left Socialist comrades, eager to display the PSOE's newfound revolutionary zeal, tried to behave as they imagined Lenin would have done: the "Spanish Lenin" refused to enter the bourgeois government of the "Spanish Kerensky" (Azaña). The Socialists thus made the fatal mistake of ensuring that they

were in no position to influence the course of events governmentally, notably the mobilization and arming of the workers against a very likely military rebellion. Instead, they left the irresolute liberals with the chilling task of choosing between the generals and the workers who bitterly opposed them. This placed the masses in the hands of the treacherous liberals.

Meanwhile, workers, peasants, and the enlightened middle classes greeted the Popular Front's electoral victory with jubilation. The plazas of most Spanish city centers were filled with huge, exultant parades. Clashes with police, attacks on churches, and burning of barns erupted throughout Spain and continued for nearly a month. On February 17 *cenetistas* entered the prison in Valencia and freed the political prisoners who had been sequestered there since 1934; others boarded prison ships and freed the "Red October" captives. By February 22, when the Popular Front government granted political prisoners the promised official amnesty, it was merely validating an accomplished fact. A few days later the republic restored Catalan autonomy to its relatively free 1932 status. The mixed commissions—or labor arbitration panels—of the old Azaña government were restored, but this time with majorities sympathetic to the workers.

Strikes inundated the peninsula like an uncontrollable flood, coming together in whirlpools of near-insurrections. At first Spanish workers made specific political or economic demands of employers and the state, but they soon amplified their demands to include a proletarian regime and workers' control of industry. In Madrid parades marched through the streets every week, shouting revolutionary slogans. Starting in late February, as Pierre Broué and Emile Témime observe, "Madrid [was] affected by many strikes, which . . . spread even to the most conservative sectors, such as elevator-operators and waiters."<sup>9</sup> The youthful CNT militants David Antona, Cipriano Mera, and Teodoro Mora "emerged as the leaders of the vanguard of the Madrid working class . . . [the] moving spirits of the CNT builders' union,"<sup>10</sup> who pushed Spain toward a radically new social dispensation.

As time passed, workers took matters directly into their own hands, "apparently less concerned with satisfying one claim or another than with actually taking over their companies. The workers on the Madrid streetcars decided to seize the company and to run it on their own: they were immediately backed by huge offers of money."<sup>11</sup> In Barcelona, striking hotel workers led by CNT militants demanded that their employers surrender the hotel property to the workers. The employers offered to turn part of it over to the strikers, but the workers refused, and



the strike continued. In Valencia strikes forced the streetcar company and the Andalusian Railway Company to dissolve, and the government took over their operations. All told, June saw a total of 139 strikes, followed by 145 in the first seventeen days of July.

On June 1, in perhaps the most significant action of these months, a construction workers' strike in Madrid—organized jointly by the UGT and the CNT—brought 70,000 builders into the streets. Toward the end of June, a mixed commission reached a settlement that satisfied enough of the workers' basic economic demands that the UGT agreed to return to work. But the CNT refused to end the strike and in fact escalated its demands.

The building strike had now exceeded the scope of a simple struggle for an increase in wages and the reduction of working hours; the employers had conceded as much as they could, but the Madrid CNT, under the influence of the most aggressive workers, wanted to continue what was in fact a trial of strength with the bourgeoisie and the state, a veritable strike of insurrection.<sup>12</sup>

In the countryside, the mass uprising was no less sweeping and radical than in the cities. The peasantry, after waiting in vain for Azaña's republican government to redistribute the land more decisively and then watching CEDA reverse even the limited reforms of the Agrarian Law, was furious. On March 20, following the victory of the Popular Front, the Institute of Agrarian Reform decreed that land in all categories could be appropriated without compensation, especially in areas with many impoverished rural laborers. Much to the horror of the Popular Front's liberal leaders, the poor peasants, often with scythes in hand, proceeded directly to occupy land, especially the considerable acreage that was devoted to raising fighting bulls. The land magnates panicked and fled to the cities or abroad. In Badajoz on March 25, as Edward E. Malefakis describes it:

some sixty thousand peasants—more than half of the adult male rural population of Badajoz—marched upon some three thousand previously selected [large] farms, [crying] "*Viva la República!*" marked out the limits of the areas they were to cultivate, and began to plow. The precision and perfect order with which this gigantic mass of people acted were impressive.<sup>13</sup>

Although Azaña rushed troops to the province, he soon withdrew them—the jacquerie was too massive to stop. Although the spring plowing season

brought a brief decline in the land seizures, the peasant movement quickly revived thereafter, and Spain, observes Malefakis:

entered into the most severe strike wave in its history. In the two and one-half months between 1 May and the outbreak of the Civil War on 18 July, the Ministry of Labor recorded 192 agricultural strikes, as many as during the whole of 1932 and almost half as many as during that entire year of trouble, 1933. The scale of the strikes was considerably greater than it had been previously . . . The isolation of the countryside from the city also began to be overcome as urban and rural strikers lent each other support.<sup>14</sup>

Most of these "strikes," as Malefakis calls them, were carefully planned endeavors, orchestrated by left-wing militants.

Meanwhile the Communists were saturating Spain with propaganda and winning many new adherents. In April they claimed to have 50,000 members and in May an additional 10,000. Their drive to take over other parties and organizations was highly successful. In March the Madrid Socialists succumbed to Communist appeals and announced that at the next PSOE congress they would propose that the Spanish Socialist Party merge with the Spanish Communist Party. The Federation of Socialist Youth (JS), with its many enthusiastic but naïve members, was particularly eager to inherit the revolutionary mantle of the Russian Bolsheviks (even as Stalin was murdering those Bolshevik leaders in large numbers). The militant JS was one of Caballero's strongholds, with 200,000 members. On April 1 the Young Socialists joyously fused with the Communist Youth (JC), which had a mere 30,000 members, to form the Unified Socialist Youth (Juventudes Socialistas Unificados, or JSU).\*

The Socialists, for their part, continued their policy of attempting to build a revolutionary proletarian movement. On May 1 Caballero led a 10,000-strong march through Madrid's streets, with banners demanding a workers' government and extolling the Red Army. As for the anarchosyndicalists, the CNT's delegates at the Saragossa Congress that met on May 1 discussed the postrevolutionary society and passed resolutions on libertarian communism, but astonishingly, they failed to address the immediate and pressing problem of what concrete actions

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\* A few days after the Civil War broke out, the JSU would join the Communist Party and, thanks to the Communists' resources and their well-trained cadres, become a fanatical Stalinist organization.



the CNT-FAI would take during the days immediately following a successful insurrection. As Vernon Richards, a distinguished British anarchist, observed:

what was to be the attitude of the organisation *on the morrow of the defeat of the military putsch when it found itself suddenly at the head of the revolutionary movement*. Such a possibility could easily be envisaged in Catalonia, if not in the provinces under the Central Government. Perhaps for the rank and file the answer was a simple one: the social revolution. But in the light of subsequent actions, for the leadership of the C.N.T. it was not as simple as all that. *Yet these problems and doubts were not faced at the Congress*, and for those serious omissions of foresight, or perhaps of revolutionary democracy in the organisation, the revolutionary workers paid dearly in the months that followed.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, as Spain stood on the brink of social revolution, its largest and most militant workers' movement had no plan or policy for how it would deal with power, should it fall into its hands.

## THE GENERALS' CONSPIRACY

For the parties of the Right their defeat in the February election came as a profound shock. Some officers, including General Franco, called on the president to annul the election results—without success. Having been frustrated at the polls, the right-wing political and military leaders began to plan a military rebellion that would definitively overthrow the republic and replace it with a military dictatorship. The officers, land- and property-owning classes, and clergy were eager for authoritarian rule led by a military junta that would take stern and decisive measures to quell the Left once and for all.

The Popular Front government probably learned of the existence of the military conspiracy as early as February and might well have taken measures to abort it, but instead it took measures that essentially disarmed the workers. It did try to isolate the generals from one another by giving them new commands in disparate and remote areas, but distance could not prevent the conspirators from building a military network by using telephones, radios, railroads, and airplanes. Nor was the attempt to disperse the generals effective; in fact, it gave them unexpected advantages. General Franco, for example, was transferred from his

position as army chief of staff in Madrid to the military command of the Canary Islands—a post that actually put him in close proximity to the critically important Army of Africa and within easy reach of the Tercio and the Regulares who had previously been under his direct command. General José Goded, the army inspector general and a known reactionary, was dispatched to the Balearic Islands, offshore from Catalonia—which actually placed him within easy striking distance of Barcelona.

Other dangerous officers retained commands on the mainland. General Emilio Mola, a fervent monarchist who had even briefly accompanied Alfonso into exile, was transferred to Pamplona, in Navarre—which conveniently set him afloat in a sea of red-bereted Requetés, the paramilitary force of the fanatically Catholic Carlists. Historically, the Requetés had risen time and again, under the guidance of fanatical priests, to try to place reactionary claimants on the Spanish throne. So well positioned was Mola, in fact, that the military conspirators selected Pamplona as the executive center of the rebellion and made Mola himself their chief coordinator. Two other key military figures in the conspiracy were General Gonzalo Quiepo de Llano and General Miguel Cabanellas; the government wrongly believed they had republican sympathies and allowed them to freely wander around the country—which they did to tie up loose ends in the plot.

Still other conspirators drummed up support abroad. In March General José Sanjurjo visited the Third Reich, where he tried to obtain aid from the Nazis for the planned rebellion. In London the wealthy Juan March solicited support from international financial circles; he gained promises of aid from fascist Italy for military *matériel* and for airplanes to transport the Tercio and Regulares from their African posts to the Spanish mainland. The Church gave the planned rebellion its enthusiastic blessing, notwithstanding the generals' reliance on Muslim mercenaries to terrorize and slaughter Christians on Spain's "sacred soil."

As the plotting continued behind the scenes, the rightists did all they could to terrorize striking workers. Armed Falangist *señoritos*—well-to-do young men—drove through working-class neighborhoods and shot randomly into crowds or picket-lines with handguns and automatic weapons. They were patently emulating the Nazi street tactics of the early 1930s. Falangist gunmen exploded bombs in the Socialist *casas del pueblo* and anarchosyndicalist *centros obreros*, even making several attempts to assassinate Caballero. Cortes deputies, attempting to enter the parliament building, were searched for pistols, and police stood guard during their increasingly frenzied debates. Some party leaders had to be personally accompanied by armed guards during their everyday activities. So brazen



were the Falangist assassination squads that Azaña was obliged to make the organization illegal and round up its leaders, including its avowed head, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the former dictator. The five-month period between mid-February and mid-July witnessed, according to notoriously understated official statistics, the political murder of 215 people and the wounding of 537.

Inevitably, the Left tried to match the Right's violence in this burgeoning new street war. Armed anarchosyndicalists, commonly ordinary workers defending their picket-lines and their neighborhoods, engaged in running battles with the Falangists, while Socialists organized a proletarian militia. Many anarchosyndicalist militants routinely carried semiautomatic handguns of their own and engaged in unrelenting shoot-outs with their opponents. The Left as a whole repeatedly raised a cry for arms to fight fascism, while its various newspapers called for the formation of workers' militias. In the spring and early summer each of the Popular Front parties, as well as the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), formed its own paramilitary contingent and drilled openly in streets and plazas. PSOE demonstrations normally were escorted by contingents of armed and uniformed Socialist youth, partly to protect the demonstrators and partly as a show of strength.

Caballero personally confronted President Azaña with a demand that the government provide the workers with arms and create a proletarian militia. The president flatly refused. In retrospect, Azaña and his fellow liberal ministers seem to have feared the revolutionary militias even more than they feared the conspiring generals. At the beginning of the summer hundreds and perhaps thousands of army officers were preparing for an assault on the Popular Front government. But the liberal government, paralyzed by fear of social revolution, refused adamantly to arm the one force that could have decisively fended off the military assault. Had Socialists accepted ministries and held the keys to Spain's arms depots, they might well have armed the eager workers and deployed them in order to nip the army uprising in the bud. Specifically, had Caballero been present in the cabinet, he might well have opened the armories early enough to forestall the rebellion. But the Socialists had excluded themselves from the government—and thus reduced themselves to pleading with the impotent paralyzed liberals to act before it was too late.

## NOTES

1. See Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (1977; repr. San Francisco, CA, and Edinburgh: A.K. Press, 1998), p. 250.
2. José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red Books, n.d.), p. 91.
3. Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 121.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
5. See also Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 284.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
7. Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 157.
8. Quoted in Payne, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 172.
9. Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), pp. 93–4.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5.
13. Edward E. Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 370.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
15. Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936–39)*, 3rd edn. (London: Freedom Press, 1983), pp. 26–7 (emphasis added).



## CHAPTER 62 The Struggle for Power

### THE MILITARY RISING

Although rumors that a military uprising was in the offing filled the international press early in the summer of 1936, its actual outbreak on July 18 came like a clap of thunder. On that morning General Francisco Franco issued a *pronunciamiento* from Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. It called upon the Spanish mainland's 50 garrisons to rise and help his troops establish "the rule of order within the Republic"—through what the Right would call the *cruzada*.<sup>1</sup> The conspirators of Franco's Nationalist uprising expected to receive support from a substantial part of the Spanish population, especially in Navarre, León, the two Castiles, Aragon, and among conservative peasants throughout the country. The large landowners, most of whom were monarchists, did not hesitate to give money and other aid to the military counterrevolution, as did the Carlists, who wanted a devoutly Catholic and traditionalist king, and the Church, which made no secret of its hostility to liberalism and a republican government.

Even more than earlier military rebellions, the Nationalist rising of 1936 was overtly anti-Enlightenment and committed to the traditional "virtues" of premodern Catholic Spain. What ultimately distinguished this *cruzada*, however, was its conscious and extreme brutality. Its leaders were determined physically to annihilate all leftist movements in Spanish politics by exterminating their leaders and militants and as many of their followers as possible.

This must be taken literally. The rebels were eager to physically extirpate the human substance of anarchosyndicalism, socialism and even liberalism, and not only in battle but by means of firing squads. In a decade when ruthless dictators either held power or were coming into

power, reactionary Spanish generals yearned to see their own country governed by a fascistic reactionary such as José Calvo Sotelo, the parliamentary leader of the Monarchist Party and Spain's leading right-wing politician. Sotelo had been influenced by Engelbert Dollfuss in Austria and above all by Mussolini, who as *duce* or "leader" exercised complete control over fascist Italy. Calvo Sotelo had bluntly declared in the Cortes that if fascism meant order, then he would not hesitate to call himself a fascist.

In the morning hours of July 13, a truck filled with pro-republican Asaltos and several civilian radicals had entered a fashionable part of Madrid and, acting very much on their own initiative, stopped at Sotelo's home and told the Monarchist leader that they had orders to bring him to police headquarters for questioning. He got into the truck, and shortly after it drove off, he was shot twice in the neck. His body, divested of all identification, was dumped in Madrid's East Cemetery, where it lay unidentified until the next day. The murder produced an international sensation. It also provided the military with its excuse for a rising—Calvo Sotelo was the civilian whom the military conspirators had chosen as their political spokesman. The right-wing parties withdrew from the Cortes, bringing parliamentary government to an abrupt end, while many members of the land- and property-owning class hastily packed up their belongings and fled.

General Mola, whose headquarters at Pamplona was the nerve center of the Nationalist rebellion, ordered the military forces in Spanish Morocco to rise up at 5 p.m. on July 17. Within 24 hours local garrisons throughout Spain also rose, seizing the various municipalities in which they were billeted. The army expected to have the backing of the majority of Spain's military forces, notably the Civil Guard, most of the infantry and artillery officers, and several key regiments in the north, in addition to the Tercio, the Regulares, and the Carlist Requeté paramilitaries. Opposition to the rising, it was expected, would come principally from the republican Asaltos, Spain's small air force, and the navy. The Nationalists anticipated that the local garrisons would deliver most of the country into their hands in short order. The victorious generals, led by José Sanjurjo, would then constitute themselves as a ruling directory, abolish the constitution, and eliminate the old political parties. The Basque Country and Catalonia were to be reabsorbed into Castilian Spain. With all republican institutions abolished, Spain would be ruled by a monarchical state, whose power would rest on its officer stratum.

But the rebellion did not take so smooth a course. Anarchosyndicalists who had worked their way into the military's communications sections



were able to discover the exact date of the rising and make it known to the workers and the leftist parties. The date was then communicated to Casares Quiroga, who was both Minister of War and prime minister. Insisting on their right to defend the republic against the generals, the trade unions echoed Caballero in demanding arms for workers' militias, but Casares responded with imperious and even sarcastic refusals. At length, when told that the military rising had begun, he sarcastically responded, "So they're rising? Very well, I shall go to bed."<sup>2</sup>

As planned, the rebellion began in Morocco on July 17. The Tercio captured the public buildings, radio stations, and *casas del pueblo* in the town of Melilla and announced a state of war. Workers and soldiers loyal to the republic resisted fiercely there and elsewhere in Spanish Morocco. But the mercenaries followed a calculated policy of instilling terror in any real or potential opponents, shooting even the mildest republican leaders, as well as any worker who bore the tell-tale shoulder bruise left by a rifle's recoil. By July 18 the Nationalists had crushed the resistance and taken control of the African colony.

After Franco issued his *pronunciamiento* from the Canaries on the morning of July 18, he, his wife, and his daughter boarded a plane and flew to French Morocco, where he learned that the rebellion in Spanish Morocco had succeeded. The next day he arrived at Tetuán in Spanish Morocco, where he took command of the Tercio and Regulares—the Army of Africa. Meanwhile on July 20 General Sanjurjo boarded a plane in Lisbon, expecting to fly to Burgos in Spain, where he was to take personal command of the *cruzada*. Cheered on by his supporters, he loaded the small aircraft with heavy suitcases filled with flashy uniforms as would befit a head of state. The plane took off in an undersized air-lane and, owing to its heavy cargo, barely made it off the ground. It then became entangled in nearby trees and burst into flames. Spain's would-be *caudillo* was burned to death. Leadership of the rebellion passed to Franco, who commanded the most important rebel military force—the Army of Africa.

With Morocco securely in Nationalist hands, the Tercio and Regulares were ferried across the Strait of Gibraltar to the Spanish mainland in small contingents. (Later Italian planes and German Junker 52s took over the task, speeding up the process.) Meanwhile, General Mola, who now headed the Army of the North, took control of all the Navarrese cities. The Carlist Requetés, adorned in their red berets and shouting "Christ the King!" together with the Falangists in their blue shirts, filled the streets of Pamplona and Burgos, then began their march southward through the mountains toward Madrid.

In other parts of Spain, however, the outcomes of the risings were not what the generals had expected. On July 17, the day the rebellion began, great masses of workers swung into action, seizing weapons from gun shops and digging up rifles that had been secretly stored away since the 1934 revolt in Asturias. Workers, poor peasants, Basque and Catalan nationalists, and others mounted an unexpectedly resolute resistance. Except in Navarre and a few other areas, the insurgency's success or failure depended upon a number of unforeseeable factors such as: "the attitude of the police forces, the Civil Guards, and the *Asaltos*, whose adherence to one or the other camp often decided victory, the resolution or vacillation of the civil governors, the boldness or hesitancy of the military commanders, and the vigilance or naïveté of the working-class leaders."<sup>3</sup>

Some localities possessed sufficient arms to resist the garrison before it gained the upper hand; others did not. Of immense importance, too, was the question of timing: in places where the workers quickly became aware of the *cruzada*'s scope and rapidly moved into action, their resistance usually prevailed. In many cases, mere hours made the difference between a popular victory or the workers' systematic extermination. In places where the workers did not resist rapidly, the rebels usually carried the day.

In effect, each time that the workers' organizations allowed themselves to be paralyzed by their anxiety to respect Republican legality and each time that their leaders were satisfied with what was said by the officers, the latter prevailed. On the other hand, the [Nationalist] *Movimiento* was repulsed whenever the workers had time to arm and whenever they set about the destruction of the Army as such, independently of their leaders' positions or the attitude of "legitimate" public authorities.<sup>4</sup>

In Málaga, the commander of the garrison, General Paxtot, deliberated long enough to allow the workers to set fire to the houses around the garrison. Potential Nationalist troops were smoked out and surrendered, thus ending the half-hearted rebellion. In Valencia the workers surrounded the garrison's buildings, and the vacillating troops finally came over to their side.

If the workers' and peasants' militias had possessed even the modest light weapons of that period—such as those their leaders were imploring the liberal government to release to them—they could easily, in the opening days of the rebellion, have fended off the rebel troops. In Madrid and other cities, workers were clamoring for arms; and although Caballero repeatedly requested that the liberal government open its



armories, the answer was always no. At 4 p.m. on July 19, in the face of an impassioned popular clamor for arms, Casares Quiroga resigned the premiership. He was replaced by Martínez Barrio—incredibly, the most conservative member of the Popular Front—who quickly formed a government that included a member of the National Republican Party, a group that was not even part of the Popular Front. The infuriated Madrid workers responded to this scandalous news with huge demonstrations demanding that the new prime minister give them arms to fight the rebellion. But Martínez Barrio, like his predecessor, adamantly refused. At the same time, in an act of appalling treachery, Martínez Barrio telephoned General Mola and offered him the War Ministry if he would bring the rebellion to a halt. Mola declined: so strong was the *cruzada's* momentum, he declared, that if he made any compromises with the government, he would “deserve to be lynched.”<sup>5</sup> Martínez Barrio held office for a single day, after which he too was obliged to resign. On July 20 a Left Republican, Dr José Giral, a friend of President Azaña, formed a government that finally agreed to arm the workers’ militias.

So fearful were the liberals of arming the masses that they wasted precious days that could have been spent preventing the Nationalists from gaining a foothold on the Spanish mainland. Had the Popular Front acted quickly to arm the workers, the rebellion might well have been defeated. While the government played for time, seeking to come to a deal, however, the Nationalist generals acted resolutely. Once the hardened, well-trained, and well-equipped rebel troops crossed the strait, they took the offensive everywhere in Andalusia. City after city—Algeciras, Cádiz, Huelva, and Córdoba—fell to the well-armed Nationalist troops within days. By July 21, when a large force of Tercio and Regulares had assembled on the mainland, republican victories had become immensely difficult.

On July 18 General Gonzalo Quiapo de Llano, who commanded the Tercio forces in Andalusia, captured Seville’s central district. The Sevillian workers were unprepared to confront the Army of Africa; instead of defending the center of the city, where they might have maintained their cohesion, they retreated defensively to the suburbs (much as the Parisian Communards of 1871 withdrew from their city’s center to defend their familiar neighborhoods). The Nationalist forces defeated the Sevillians soundly. One working-class suburb held out for more than a week, but the battle ended in a terrifying massacre.

In Saragossa, the Aragonese capital, the rebels prevailed by means of guile. On July 17 the commanding general, Miguel Cabanellas, had assured the Saragossan anarchosyndicalists that he was loyal to the

republic and a zealous antifascist. The naïve CNT-FAI leaders believed him and canceled the general strike they had called, advising the workers to go home. On July 19 Cabanellas’s troops occupied the city and declared martial law. The workers learned of the declaration only after a combined force of Civil Guards and troops attacked them in the suburbs and arrested them *en masse*. Although taken by surprise, the CNT-FAI workers fought determinedly for a week with what few arms they had, but finally their defenses were demolished—and they were executed. The Saragossa *cenetistas* had been the flower of Spanish anarchosyndicalism, and their annihilation was a painful loss to the libertarian movement. A lack of political sophistication took a steep toll—the lives of thousands of Spain’s most militant workers. The capture of Saragossa was followed by the rapid conquest of a large part of Aragon. This created a rebel-held land-strip dividing the northeastern republican zone, and separated the steel plants of the Basque Country, so essential for the production of modern weapons, from the light industry of the Catalan port cities. As a result, the republican zone became highly vulnerable to shortages in machine tools and coal, which were desperately needed to produce weapons.

In Oviedo, in Asturias, news of the uprising arrived on July 18. The local miners pulled out the arms they had been saving since 1934 and demanded that the local governor distribute the remaining stocks of weapons to the workers. The governor, garrison commander Colonel Aranda, procrastinated. Suspecting that Aranda sympathized with the rebels, the workers formed a provincial committee to oversee and control him. As Cabanellas had done in Saragossa, Aranda assured the committee that he supported the republic. The anarchosyndicalists and Communists were deeply suspicious, but incredibly, the Socialists and liberals on the committee trusted him and acquiesced. When an urgent message arrived from Madrid requesting militiamen to help defend the capital, the Oviedo provincial committee sent three columns of the city’s ablest men—about 3,000 armed miners—off to the capital. *En route*, in Valladolid, the miners were ambushed by rebel troops, who succeeded in annihilating them.

This development was unknown to those who remained in Oviedo. With its most militant and experienced fighters absent, however, the city was vulnerable to treachery. Once the miners’ columns had departed for Madrid, Aranda ordered the Civil Guards that he had quietly assembled to march on the city, placing sentries around the garrison to keep the troops from fraternizing with the people. Just as the provincial committee arrived in the governor’s palace to ask him to distribute arms to the workers, the colonel himself was guiding his troops to nearby Mount Narranco, from which they aimed two field guns at the palace. The



committee took one look and fled. Aranda's forces then occupied Oviedo's strategic points with little effort. The capture of Oviedo was a heavy blow to the republic, as indeed was the loss of thousands of the city's Socialist and anarchosyndicalist militiamen.

By the end of July the military rebellion had seized about a third of Spain: a fairly large northern area that encompassed most of Galicia as well as León, Navarre, northern Old Castile, and half of Aragon. In the south, the rebel troops occupied a crescent-shaped sliver of territory extending from Cádiz and Huelva to Seville and Córdoba. The rebellion also occupied the Canary Islands, Morocco, and the Balearics (except for Minorca). But although Franco publicly hailed the rebellion as a triumph, these conquests fell far short of the generals' expectations. The *cruzada* had failed to achieve three of its main objectives: it had not taken Madrid, which would have given it political and diplomatic legitimacy; it had not taken the Basque Country, which would have given it an industrial base; and it had not taken Barcelona, which would have signaled the *de facto* triumph of the land- and property-owning classes over the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry.

Generals Franco in the south and Mola in the north believed it was vital to capture Madrid as quickly as possible, to gain legitimacy as well as diplomatic recognition for the Nationalist rebellion. The fall of Madrid, it was generally assumed, would mean the end of the conflict. Absorbed in current political maneuverings, the capital was unprepared to fight the Nationalists. On July 17, when news of the rising reached Madrid, crowds of workers of the CNT and UGT demanding arms, as we have seen, were rebuffed. As elsewhere, workers armed themselves with weapons they had hidden in 1934, and began to appear on the city's streets. But the quantity of guns and ammunition at their disposal was minuscule. Finally, on July 18, one Lieutenant Colonel Rodrigo Gil, a Socialist officer, acting against the government's orders, distributed 5,000 rifles from the artillery park that he commanded to the Socialists who were clamoring for weapons.

But the rebel garrison, as a precaution, had previously removed the bolts from the rifles and stored them in the huge Montaña barracks, located in the western part of the city. The barracks now became, not only the storehouse for the bolts, but the main stronghold of the rebels. On the evening of July 18 the CNT and UGT declared a general strike—and tens of thousands of *madrileños* surged to the barracks. The next day they prepared to storm the Montaña but delayed the attack in a vain hope for government-supplied arms. On July 20, news arrived that the Tercio and Regulares were slaughtering workers in Andalusian cities. At that point José Giral, the current liberal prime minister, finally ordered that trucks

filled with rifles and ammunition be sent to UGT and CNT headquarters for distribution to the workers.

On July 20 news that the workers of Barcelona had defeated the rebel uprising in the Catalan capital was broadcast over loudspeakers in Madrid's streets. Invigorated by this announcement, the workers and middle-class republicans surrounding the Montaña attacked the barracks, with just the few weapons that they had. General Joaquín Fanjul, who commanded the rebels in the barracks, hesitated to respond. Meanwhile, his besiegers brought up field artillery that they had somehow captured and began to shell the Montaña, opening a sizable hole through a wall. The troops inside that part of the barracks raised white flags, and the crowd surged forward—to be greeted by machine-gun fire from another part of the large complex. In total disregard of the many casualties that they had suffered, the incensed masses streamed across the Montaña's courtyard, broke into the barracks, and killed every officer they could find—except Fanjul, whom they took prisoner. The crowd carried off large quantities of arms, namely about 50,000 rifles and much ammunition—including the bolts for the previously distributed rifles—and gave them to the besiegers. Having finally acquired weapons, the Madrid trade unions—the CNT-FAI, the UGT, and others—quickly organized columns of workers and deployed many of them to march southward toward Toledo, with its valuable cartridge plant, while other columns moved northeastward toward the mountains, against rebel-held Guadalajara.

Due to the intransigence of the rebels and the wrath of the population, the Popular Front government all but collapsed. The prime ministry was a meaningless office. A few army officers remained loyal to the republic, but many deserted for the Nationalists. The Civil Guard disintegrated, its members either joining the rebels or going into hiding, while the Asaltos themselves suffered major defections to both sides of the emerging conflict. Without an army, a police force, or administrative machinery, the state lost its authority. Madrid was now *de facto* in the hands of the trade unions, the newly formed workers' militias, and a multitude of popular revolutionary committees that were elected or otherwise chosen to carry on the struggle against the Nationalists.

## INSURRECTION IN BARCELONA

By the time the generals rose in July 1936, the Barcelona working class was the most insurrectionary in Western Europe. Grossly underestimating



the energy of the masses, however, General Mola, in organizing the mainland rebellion, believed that the city would fall easily to its local garrison. On paper the military situation seemed highly favorable: Barcelona contained one of the largest concentrations of troops and Civil Guards in Spain—approximately 5,000 in all—and a backup invasion from the Balearics, led by General Goded, would almost certainly help the army take the city. Luis Companys (head of the Generalidad) and his aide, Police Commissioner Federico Escofet (who headed the Asaltos and the Civil Guard), had refused to arm the city's highly class-conscious proletariat. Indeed, a CNT-FAI regional plenary on July 16 had asked the government to provide a thousand rifles, but to no avail. Like the various ministers in Madrid, Companys and Escofet seemed to fear the workers for more than they feared the army rebels.

But Mola's preoccupation with military logistics seems to have impaired his political judgment. Precisely because of the élan and daring of the Barcelona working class, the rebels should have known they would not yield without a bitter fight. Unknown to them, CNT-FAI militants collected weapons and explosives wherever they could be found, breaking into gun shops and even raiding ships moored in the harbor. At one point the dockworkers bearing stolen weapons were surrounded by Companys' police, who demanded that they surrender all their weapons. Durruti and García Oliver wisely persuaded them to surrender a token portion of the arms to satisfy the police and so prevent a serious clash.

Elsewhere in Barcelona militants took the initiative in forming street patrols, defense committees, and neighborhood committees. A large network of workers' committees took over the working-class quarters and began to function as a proletarian police force, checking the identities of passersby, rounding up known Falange and monarchist sympathizers, and confiscating rebels' weapons wherever they could be found. Residents dragged furniture, paving-stones, carts, and even trams, to strategic points to build barricades. Cars and trucks, with "CNT-FAI" and "UHP" (*Unión, hermanos proletarios*) painted on their doors and even over their windows, careered wildly through the city, as evidence of the workers' vigilance and determination to resist.

The CNT-FAI placed spies in the army barracks and managed to capture a Civil Guard officer who was carrying the rebel battle-plan. On the eve of the rising the workers had this crucial document in their possession. From it they learned that in the early hours of Sunday, July 19, rebel troops planned to depart from their barracks in various parts of the city and converge in the city's center at the Plaza de Cataluña, the rebellion's main rallying point. Supported by troops from the Atarazanas

and Maestranza barracks, the rebels would concentrate large forces in strategic areas of the city capture key buildings, and await General Goded's arrival from Majorca. Once he had taken command of the rebel forces in Barcelona. They would fan out into the working-class quarters and emulate the behavior of Nationalist units in Seville.

At around 5 a.m. on Sunday, July 19, about 12,000 rebel troops left their barracks as planned. No sooner had they left, however, than sirens summoned the Barcelona proletariat from its tenements. The transport union immediately called a general strike, paralyzing the movement of all public vehicles. Nosotros, the city's foremost anarchist group, established a command post near the central boulevard known as the Ramblas to coordinate popular resistance. Along the other boulevards armed and unarmed workers stood at the ready, awaiting the appearance of the rebel troops.

When the troops came into sight, the people embarked on a wholesale resistance. Ordinary civilians, supported by groups of militants and Asaltos (most of whom, in Barcelona at least, had remained loyal to the republic), met the troops with gunfire. Others resisted nonviolently: entire working-class families shouted at and harassed the troops, while civilian workers raised their rifles in the air and walked calmly toward the soldiers, pleading with them not to fire on their brothers. Their persistence and courage eventually had the desired effect: many soldiers were unnerved and refused to fire on the people, while others surrendered their weapons or joined the crowds.

Some of the rebel troops were not deterred, however, and did reach their intended positions in the city center. There they took over the Plaza de España, the Plaza de la Universidad, and most notably the Plaza de Cataluña, where they occupied the Telefónica and the Ritz and Colón hotels. These buildings became the strategic centers of Barcelona's military revolt. CNT-FAI militants achieved their own victories, capturing the telegraph building and the Atarazanas barracks (where Ascaso, a leading member of the Nosotros group, was killed by a sniper). The seizure of barracks and munitions dumps placed about 60,000 rifles, hundreds of machine guns, and even artillery pieces in the hands of the *cenetistas*. The airport, which never rose with the rebels, even supplied Barcelona's workers with planes to bomb the plaza hotels.

Although battles raged in different parts of the Catalan capital, the fighting at the Plaza de Cataluña was the heaviest. Here well-armed Asaltos, as well as workers, fought to retake the Telefónica and the hotels, firing newly captured machine-gun bullets and artillery shells at the rebel troops holed up inside. The popular forces grew hourly in strength and



numbers, until white flags of surrender finally appeared in windows. Late in the afternoon of June 19 the workers and Asaltos slowly retook the entire plaza.

General Goded arrived from Majorca, but as soon as he took command of the rebels, he and his staff were obliged to surrender. The captured general went on the radio, told his supporters that the Barcelona uprising was lost, and released them from any allegiance to his command. The Nationalists, hearing Goded's statement, withdrew from Catalonia and retreated westward into the sectors of Aragon that Franco's forces had succeeded in taking.

After only two days of fighting, *de facto* political power in Barcelona and indeed in much of Catalonia passed into the hands of the workers of the CNT-FAI, who had mobilized and led the successful resistance to the military uprising. Workers' power seemed indistinguishable from the power of the labor organization that the Catalan workers trusted to represent their interests: the CNT-FAI. In the aftermath of their victory over the insurgents, the workers'—and the CNT-FAI's—political control extended over a large portion of northeastern Spain, including many Mediterranean ports.

Throughout Catalonia and northward to the French border, CNT-FAI militants established revolutionary committees in neighborhoods, streets, and factories, creating at long last the popular power for which their movement had struggled for decades. These committees saw to the provisioning of their communities, organized their defense, recruited fighters for the local militias, policed the streets, and managed the factories—in fact, they constituted a *de facto* working-class government. Barcelona's workers, having achieved victory, placed popular power most notably in the custody of the syndicalist CNT.

The face of Barcelona changed almost overnight. The large tourist hotels provided free meals for workers' families, militiamen, and the poor; hotel rooms were converted into infirmaries for the convalescing wounded. Anarchosyndicalist colors—black and red—appeared everywhere: banners and flags blazing those colors were hung from balconies, windows, and cornices all over the city, replacing the republican tricolor on nearly every flagpole. Posters bearing the acronyms "CNT-FAI" and "UHP" appeared on almost every wall, together with posters denouncing the "fascists" (as the Nationalists were uniformly labeled throughout republican Spain) and exhorting civilians to join the workers' militias and the revolutionary organizations.

The CNT now had at its disposal a major proletarian army, armed with thousands of rifles, pistols, machine guns, and grenades, together with

scores of artillery pieces and a number of airplanes and armored vehicles. At least 30,000 fully armed workers were equipped to defend and police the city. The old police forces—Civil Guards, Asaltos, and constabulary—had all but disappeared, some melting into the ranks of the popular movement and others fleeing Barcelona to join the Nationalists in the countryside.

To replace the local police, the factory, administrative, and union committees assigned squads of workers to patrol the streets, which they did in blue militia overalls (*monos*), with rifles slung over their shoulders and pistols jammed into their belts. Franz Borkenau, who visited Barcelona in August 1936, observed that armed workers stood guard over nearly every public building and union headquarters. In his estimate, no less than 30 percent of the men (and many women) in the Ramblas walkway carried weapons on their shoulders as part of their regular working gear.

## THE MOMENT OF CRISIS

During the Barcelona street-fighting of July 19–20 members of the former Catalan government, ensconced in the Generalidad building, were filled with uncertainty and dread. Federico Escofet, the nominal Catalan police chief, informed Luis Companys, Catalonia's president, that the CNT-FAI had become the region's only effective governing institution. Power resided in workers' committees, which were largely coordinated by the trade unions. His advisers urged Companys variously to quell the anarchosyndicalists (by what means was not specified), to flee the city, or—most plausibly—to strike a compromise with the CNT-FAI. But Companys was nothing if not resourceful. He had previously built his reputation as a lawyer by defending arrested *cenetistas*, and as the leader of the Esquerra, he had risked imprisonment by giving token support to the October 1934 uprising. Many of the CNT-FAI leaders knew him personally, and although on the eve of the military rebellion he had refused to give the workers arms and had subjected their press to severe censorship, he suspected that a number of them might be amenable to a symbiotic relationship with him.

Companys decided to work out an agreement with the CNT-FAI. On the afternoon of Monday, July 20, he telephoned the Confederación's regional headquarters in Barcelona and requested that a delegation of "*militantes influyentes*" be dispatched to consult with him. As he hoped,



five such "influential militants"—Buenaventura Durruti, Diego Abad de Santillán, Juan García Oliver, José Asens, and Aurelio Fernández—duly made their way to the Generalidad building, even as some fighting was still going on. Writing many years later, García Oliver gives a vivid account of the meeting that followed:

Companys received us standing up, visibly emotional. We shook hands, and he would have embraced us but for the fact that his personal dignity, deeply affected by what he had to say to us, prevented him from doing so. The introductions were brief. We sat down, each of us with his rifle between his knees.

Companys started the discussion by acknowledging that the CNT–FAI now controlled Catalonia:

"Until today, the CNT and FAI have never been accorded the treatment to which their real importance entitled them. You have always been harshly persecuted, and I, with much sorrow, but forced by political realities, I who was with you, afterward was obliged to oppose you and persecute you. Today you are the masters of the city and of Catalonia because you have defeated the fascist militarists, and I hope you will not take offense if at this moment I remind you that you did not lack the help of the few or many loyal members of my party and of the guards and *mozos* [a special defense force accountable to the Generalidad]."

He thought, for a moment, then made the CNT–FAI an extraordinary offer:

"But the truth is that, persecuted until the day before yesterday, today you have defeated the military and the fascists. I cannot then, knowing what and who you are, speak to you other than with sincerity. You have won, and everything is in your hands; if you do not need me nor wish me to remain as president of Catalonia, tell me now, and I will become one more soldier in the struggle against fascism."

Whether this offer of abdication was genuine will never be known. But Companys then gave the delegation a second option:

"If, on the contrary, you believe that in this position . . . I, with the men of my party, my name, and my prestige, can be of use in the struggle

that has ended so well today in the city . . . you can count on me and on my loyalty as a man and as a politician who is convinced that today a whole past of shame is dead and who desires sincerely that Catalonia should place herself at the head of the most progressive countries in all social matters."<sup>6</sup>

At this point Companys rose, opened the door, and summoned the *militantes influyentes* into an adjacent room that contained representatives of the Catalan parties that had opposed the military rebellion: Venturra Gassol of the Catalan Esquerra; Rafael Vidiella of the Catalan PSOE; Juan Comorera of the Unió Socialista de Catalunya; Pey Poche of Catalan Action; Andrés Nin of the POUM; and José Calvet of the Unió de Rabassaires, the tenant farmers' union. These antifascist representatives had earlier agreed among themselves upon the creation of a Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias (Comité de Milicias Antifascistas, or CCAFM), to govern Catalonia in the wake of the defeated uprising, while Companys remained head of the Generalidad. The list of groups that composed the CCAFM lacked only the CNT–FAI—the only organization in Catalonia that could speak for the proletariat. With consummate cynicism, Companys proposed to the "influential militants" that they accept the formation of the CCAFM and even participate in it. As García Oliver later acknowledged: "In those moments, Companys became the counterrevolution."<sup>7</sup>

The CNT–FAI delegation left the room to confer with Companys alone, and in a brief "exchange of views" (*cambio de impresiones*), they told him that they "had come solely to listen, without the power to make any decisions." They promised to transmit the offer to the CNT–FAI's regional committee for a decision.<sup>8</sup> The delegation departed the Generalidad building and informed the regional committee of Companys' proposal. The regional committee members held a "rapid deliberation," then advised Companys by telephone that it "accepted, in principle, the constitution of a Committee of Antifascist Militias of Catalonia"—but their acceptance had to be confirmed by the CNT–FAI Plenary of Local and Comarcal Syndicates.<sup>9</sup>

On July 23, as the barricades in Barcelona were still being dismantled, the CNT–FAI Plenary of Local and Comarcal Syndicates was hastily convened to decide on Companys' proposal. The hall where the plenary met was packed with delegates and visitors, "as many as could squeeze in," as García Oliver recalled, "for no one wanted to miss what was hoped would be the debate of greatest consequence ever heard in the vicinity of the Organization."<sup>10</sup> The chairman opened by urging that the plenary give the greatest care and consideration to Companys' proposal.



First to speak were delegates from the militant Bajo Llobregat Comarcal, who vehemently objected to the proposal, arguing that the CCAFM was not a revolutionary organization and that joining it would belie the Confederación's most revolutionary and libertarian claims. The plenary, the Bajo Llobregat delegates insisted, must reject the proposal and instead "move ahead with the revolution, and finish establishing libertarian communism, following the accords of the Organization, its principles, and its ideological goals."<sup>11</sup> To follow such a course, to be sure, would have meant creating an anarchosyndicalist economic and social administration—in effect, a revolutionary workers' government. Creditably, García Oliver (as he attests) publicly and unequivocally supported the position of the Bajo Llobregat delegation.

The "influential militants" of the CNT-FAI thereupon went into action and adamantly opposed this position. Declaring *comunismo libertario*, Federica Montseny argued, would mean establishing an "anarchist dictatorship." More pragmatically, Abad de Santillán argued that if the CNT-FAI put its energy into building *comunismo libertario* now, the revolution would be defeated, and foreign countries would intervene against the republic: "the powers governing the destinies of the world would not consent" to aiding the republic if it involved a revolution.<sup>12</sup> Durruti remained conspicuously silent during the debate.\* In the end, with the sole exceptions of the Bajo Llobregat delegation and García Oliver, the plenary agreed to allow the CNT-FAI to participate in the CCAFM. Instead of undertaking a social revolution in conditions so favorable that they might well never recur, the plenum decided in effect that the Confederación should commit itself singlemindedly to waging war against the Nationalists—and defer to the indefinite future the issue of making a revolution.

The historic importance of the decision can hardly be overstated. As García Oliver observed, it "threw all the fundamental principles of the CNT out the window, ignoring in one stroke the most basic aspects of its history as an organization strongly influenced by the radical tenets of anarchism."<sup>13</sup> In effect, it took the power that the proletariat had placed in the custody of the CNT-FAI and blandly handed it over to the

CCAFM—a committee that contained, in addition to the three delegates from the CNT and the two from the FAI, three from the Catalan UGT (a branch of the Stalinist-leaning trade union), three from the Catalan Esquerra (a middle-class party), two from the PSUC (an outright Stalinist party), and one each from the POUM, Catalan Action, the Socialists, and the Rabassaires (a union under the Esquerra's influence). The anarcho-syndicalists thus would have only five delegates (six, when they had the support of the POUM's delegate), while the remainder would have nine—a majority. By joining the CCAFM, the anarchosyndicalists were empowering parties less popular than themselves. Four of that remainder were Stalinists and would soon be working at cross-purposes with the CNT-FAI.

Whether knowingly or not, the plenary's decision turned the CNT-FAI into a conduit for transferring the Catalan proletariat's power over to a bourgeois state. At the outset of the long-awaited libertarian revolution, for which thousands of workers over decades had given their lives, the CNT-FAI let the power that the workers had entrusted to them slip into the hands of forces that were interested only in returning that power to the bourgeoisie. Precisely at a time when the Confederación had achieved control over most of northeastern Spain, its leaders abdicated their declared goal of establishing libertarian communism. But had a CNT-FAI government in Catalonia affirmed that goal and declared libertarian communism, Madrid, embroiled in defending itself against the Nationalist forces, would not have been able to mount a serious opposition to them.

Not only had the anarchosyndicalists (except García Oliver) who conferred with Companys paved the way for the dissolution of the popular committees but they had also permitted the CNT-FAI to join an organization—the CCAFM—that was dedicated (as we shall see) to demolishing the committee structure and replacing it with the Generalidad. Spanish revolutionaries were justified in believing that the CNT-FAI did not actually *want* the power it had been handed.

Their behavior must be attributed in great degree to the anarchist vision of social change. Anarchism holds that for a free society to be achieved, *power as such* must be dissolved—but power can no more be dissolved than can the air we breathe. The real issue that any revolution faces is not whether power will exist in the free society but *who* will have it and *how* will it be exercised, and in what institutions. Companys and Escofet seem to have understood this well enough, but the "influential militants" plainly did not. Escofet recalled that on July 20 in Barcelona, when the CNT-FAI was

\* After the plenary, at a meeting of the Nosotros group, García Oliver claims that he tried to induce Durruti to use the militia column that was forming under his command to seize Barcelona's public buildings and utilities and declare libertarian communism. In the course of demurring, Durruti argued that he could envision the creation of a libertarian society in Spain only after his militiamen had freed Saragossa and much of Aragon, which were already in Francoist hands.



virtually in control of the streets, the arms, and transportation, in other words, with power in its hands, its leaders, who were bold and energetic and experienced fighters, were disoriented. They had no plan, no clear doctrine, no idea what they should do or what they should allow others to do. The CNT concept of libertarian communism was devoid of realism and was silent as to the road it should follow in a revolutionary period.<sup>14</sup>

While the CNT-FAI indulged in stirring revolutionary rhetoric, Companys and Escofet realized that its leaders would flounder haplessly if faced with the crucial question of power. Indeed, they had only to wait, and soon they would be able to neutralize the anarchosyndicalists. Sure enough, as we will see, the CNT-FAI leadership, instead of helping the masses coordinate their revolutionary power structure, simply made excuses for *not* consolidating and exercising the power. As Victor Alba (a former POUM member) and Stephen Schwartz have observed:

[I]f the C.N.T. did not take power in Catalunya, no genuine revolution could take place. But the C.N.T. did not desire power. They believed power over the economy would suffice, and they presented their renunciation of state power as a gesture of generosity, when in reality it reflected a surrender to ideological prejudices.

But power remained, in disintegration in the Generalitat Palace, and in potency in the [Central] Committee for [Antifascist] Militias ... Two powers really did exist. One of them, that corresponding to the workers, had the strength but not the will to rule; the other, the petty-bourgeois republican force, lacked strength, but possessed a clear will to recover power.\*

Some 50 years later Federica Montseny tried to explain why the organization in which she had played a leading part had discarded the

\* Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the POUM* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), pp. 115, 118. Whether the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias was a potential alternative proletarian power in opposition to the Generalidad is arguable. The presence of the Esquerra and other bourgeois or petty bourgeois parties in the CCAFM made its working-class character dubious and certainly dissimilar to the Petrograd Soviet of 1917, which was composed exclusively of workers' and soldiers' deputies, most of whom supported Marxist and socialist revolutionary organizations. The real proletarian and peasant power that could have supplanted the Generalidad was the committees and the federations that coordinated them at district or *comarcal* levels.

power that rested in its hands in July 1936. "Had we taken power because we were the majority, it would have meant betraying a pact of common struggle we had in a way sealed with the blood of so many of our men from many different sides—socialists, syndicalists, and, above all, anarchists."<sup>15</sup> Montseny's explanation reflects a failure of nerve—the "pact of common struggle" between "socialists, syndicalists, and ... anarchists" was a fatal illusion. Many Socialist, Communist, and POUM militants fought actively alongside the anarchosyndicalists; most workers, irrespective of the union or party to which they belonged, had no love for the Generalidad. But it was the *cenetistas* who had actually won the conflict—they alone had had the strength of membership to achieve a victorious outcome in Catalonia. Montseny acknowledged as much when she declared that "we [the CNT-FAI] were the majority." She went on to give a second explanation for the CNT-FAI's renunciation of power: "It would have meant ... doing in Catalonia what Lenin and Trotsky had done in the Soviet Union with the takeover of power by the Bolsheviks. We didn't do so and we have been criticized many times for it. [In] hindsight, who knows, perhaps—perhaps—we should have done it."<sup>16</sup> But the networks of local committees that embodied workers' power in an egalitarian fashion bore no relation to a dictatorship, least of all the one that Lenin and his colleagues created in Russia. Helmut Rüdiger, a German syndicalist who also defended the CNT-FAI's actions, carried this view to the point of absurdity when he claimed:

Those who say that the CNT should have established its own dictatorship in 1936 do not know what they are demanding ... The CNT would have needed a *government program, a program for exercising power; [it would have needed] training in the exercise of power, an economic plan centrally directed, and experience in the use of the state apparatus* ... The CNT had none of these ... Furthermore, had it possessed such a program before 19 July, *the CNT would not have been the CNT; it would have been a bolshevik party*, and had it applied such methods to the Revolution, it would have dealt anarchism a mortal blow.<sup>17</sup>

Like Montseny, Rüdiger assumes that a socialistic government presupposes a "centrally directed" economic plan and can only be achieved by a dictatorial "bolshevik party"—that is, a Stalinist totalitarian state. Rüdiger's anarchist casuistry, however, confuses a government with a state. Anarchists have persistently used the words *state* and *government* interchangeably, to refer to the tyrannical entity they oppose. A state is a professionalized structure of legislators and executives who enjoy a



monopoly of violence in the form of police, soldiers, and courts. States exist in the service of the monied classes and emerge historically along with classes. Even in republican states, ruling classes retain their power and the authority to exercise it by force. That all states are governments is obvious, but not all governments are necessarily states. Every society must have a government—that is, a system of institutions that make decisions about the society's common affairs. But governments develop into states when the land- and property-owning classes engage in appropriating labor and exploiting it in their own interests.\*

Ironically, every one of the arguments advanced in defense of the CNT-FAI's decision on July 23 could have been raised against the CNT-FAI's own "cycle of insurrections" in 1933, when *cenetistas* staged revolutionary uprisings and strikes with the proclaimed intention of overthrowing the state. Although the "cycle of insurrections" had far less popular support than the massive revolutionary upheaval of July 1936, Montseny and her colleagues zealously supported and even defended them. If the CNT-FAI militants feared the creation of a revolutionary government, one cannot help but wonder why they supported the 1933 insurrections. Nor is it clear what would have happened if one of the insurrections had actually succeeded. Without a government to embody political power, the workers could not have hoped to defeat the Spanish army or placate the middle class.

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\* Historically states have taken significantly different forms. A representative state—such as Spain's Second Republic—allows a degree of public participation in the workings of its structure; a fascist state like that of Nazi Germany exercises brute force without any public consent; and a totalitarian state like Soviet Russia exercises arbitrary and autocratic rule. If the 1930s proved anything, it was that the kind of state under which the masses lived made all the difference for the prospects of a social movement. In Spain the Nationalist rebellion intended to create a state that would ruthlessly crush all liberal and leftist movements and obliterate all prospects of a new society.

Anarchists, however, have seldom distinguished among these states; ignoring the differences among democratic, republican, fascist, and totalitarian states, they condemned them all as authoritarian and equally tyrannical. It became canonical to anarchists that a free society must be bereft not only of a state and government but of all laws—indeed, all restrictions on personal behavior, apart from the impingements of one person's behavior upon another's autonomy. So fundamental was this view to anarchists that "anarchy" became, in the minds of its proponents, an ideal condition in which the individual is bereft of all restraints, a situation that would render any society dysfunctional. Yet in European and Middle Eastern history the masses were the first to demand government by law, indeed fundamental law as embodied in constitutions. The early lawmaker Hammurabi, for example, was revered because he created written, precise legal barriers to arbitrary and oppressive authority.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Richard A. H. Robinson, *The Origins of Franco's Spain* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1970), p. 291.
2. Quoted in Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 97.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.
5. Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 40.
6. Juan García Oliver quoted in Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, 3rd edn (London: Freedom Press, 1983), p. 34; translation slightly modified.
7. Juan García Oliver, *El Eco de los pasos* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), p. 178.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
14. Escofet is quoted in Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 372.
15. Federica Montseny, interviewed in the documentary "The Spanish Civil War," part 5 (London: Granada Television, 1983).
16. *Ibid.*
17. Quoted in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, pp. 372–3.



## CHAPTER 63 The Political and Social Revolution

### THE CIVIC DIMENSION

The revolution visibly and radically transformed villages, towns, and neighborhoods. Leftist organizations and unions commandeered headquarters buildings formerly occupied by business concerns, clerics, or government bureaucrats and made them into centers for use by local committees, schools, and public meetings. They seized the presses of reactionary periodicals and thereby created an explosion of left-wing and liberal newspapers and magazines, exposing the reading public to ideas and information that had been unavailable under the old social order.

New egalitarian forms of sociability emerged. Spaniards discarded symbols that formerly indicated privileged status, such as the attire of the upper classes and insignias of authority, and replaced them with proletarian attire and insignia. The Generalidad advised its functionaries not to wear ties or felt hats; the titles *señor* and *señorita* were to be replaced by *camarada* (Marxist) and *compañero* (anarchist), while *salud* took the place of the traditional *adiós*, with its reference to the deity, as a greeting and an expression of farewell.

In the cities the victorious workers restored public services—which had been suspended during the fighting—with extraordinary rapidity. Foreign commentators expressed astonishment at the speed with which Barcelona and other cities in the republican zone returned to normality. Within a few days the streets were cleared of debris; the paving-stones were back in place; all systems of communication functioned normally; and food was reasonably plentiful. Homes abandoned by the wealthy were transformed into hospitals or schools. Vagrancy disappeared from the streets; the destitute were sheltered in confiscated houses; prostitutes were hardly to

be seen. Marriage and divorce were secularized and became more like formalities than ceremonies. Abortion was made available on demand.

Since anarchist ideology saw money as morally corruptive and regarded material wealth as an expression of class arrogance, Barcelona at first functioned with a minimal use of currency. It was all but abolished for local use, although as a port city Barcelona required currency for external trade. Crowds of workers burned heaps of peseta notes in bonfires, and many retailers dispensed food and other necessities in return for chits that denoted the number of hours a customer had worked. These chits were certified by factory committees or by trade unions, which underwrote the compensation a retailer could expect to receive. In many cases, people obtained food in exchange for coupons and through barter systems underwritten by unions and local committees.

Churches were often closed in the republican zone (except in the Basque Country, where the lower clergy supported the republic), as were church-administered schools. Sacred relics and other religious objects were commonly destroyed. Priests and monks known to be reactionary either found themselves in prison or, when they aided the rebels, were shot outright. Hundreds of convents and monasteries were closed down or burned (especially in the Barcelona area), later to be restored for use as neighborhood centers and secular schools.

As in all conflicts, the victors—both Nationalist and republican, in their respective zones—committed terrible reprisals. On the day the uprising began in Morocco the rebels permitted Tercios and Regulares to murder their captives indiscriminately; thereafter Nationalist forces slaughtered real or suspected “Reds” without restraint, applying that term even to liberals. When the Foreign Legionnaires and Moorish mercenaries took Seville, General Queipo de Llano allowed and even encouraged them—as a matter of Nationalist policy—to torture and execute working-class men, women, and in some cases even children. The crazed general took to the airwaves and in regular broadcasts threatened all those loyal to the republic with extermination. Even families of suspected “Loyalists”—as the foreign press called adherents of the republic—were threatened with execution. Durruti’s elderly mother, for example, was executed when General Mola’s troops took over León. To ascertain the political affiliations of ordinary citizens in newly occupied towns, the rebels even scrutinized local lending library registers for evidence of individuals’ tastes in political reading matter—and imprisoned or executed readers for their political opinions.

Defenders of the republic, especially anarchosyndicalists, initially answered this terrorism almost in kind. Queipo de Llano’s bloodcurdling



radio broadcasts emanating from Seville, as well as reports of wanton executions by Nationalists in Seville, Saragossa, and Córdoba, inflamed popular feeling to the point that "Loyalists" rounded up hated priests, Falangists, Civil Guards, industrialists, large landowners, and other known supporters of the *crusada* and shot them without trial. The republican camp, however, soon began to handle justice more responsibly than the Nationalists. All the "Loyalist" leaders—from libertarians and Socialists to liberals—publicly denounced wanton killings by their adherents. Within a few months spontaneous acts of personal or crowd-incited vengeance trickled nearly to a halt in the republican zone, and the popular committees established a formal judicial process to deal with Nationalists; trials were held according to modern standards and sentences were handed down that were commensurate with the charges.

The Nationalists, by contrast, reduced justice to a formalized system of terror. Far from waning, the Nationalist terror actually accelerated as the months passed and became institutionalized. Under the Francoist government, the Nationalists continued systematically to execute suspect men and women in an ongoing purge, especially members of left and liberal political parties. Except in the most devout Catholic areas, the Nationalist state orchestrated these mass murders, often by organized Falangist death-squads or courts-martial, with the overt approval of the clergy and the old judiciary.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

In the republican zone, especially in the northeast, as we have seen, the revolution gave rise to an armed workers' and peasants' government based on a network of committees. This network coexisted with the all-but-lifeless bourgeois state and essentially replaced its authority with a popular, libertarian authority at every level of political power, from the smallest towns and neighborhoods to entire provinces. This new government constituted a spectacular feature of the Spanish revolution. For the most part the committees were composed of militants, especially a locality's most aggressive trade unionists, who often moved into positions of power in militia units, city districts, towns, and villages, either on their own initiative or in the course of *ad hoc* elections. In many parts of Catalonia, as Gaston Leval (a French anarchist who took up residence in Spain during the First World War) observed,

the local political parties, composed of Left Catalanists, socialists, federalist republicans, as well as, sometimes, republicans of the Centre ... and libertarians of the C.N.T., would meet as a single group within the municipality, and the new communal authorities, free from ties with the Catalan government, and more so with the Central government ... constituted a local management bloc. Life thus assumed an almost autonomous communal character.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, these communal committees controlled housing and rents, managed public utilities and transportation, and attended to education and sanitation. In addition, supply committees fed cities and towns in the considerably libertarian areas, while war and defense committees organized the militias' resistance to Nationalist troops, recruited and supplied militia units, and hunted down counterrevolutionaries.

The adjectives appended to the committees' names usually indicated their political composition. Libertarian and Poumist committee sponsors called them "revolutionary workers' committees" or "revolutionary workers' and peasants' committees," while Communists and moderate Socialists favored the name "antifascist committees." In the early days of the civil war the committees, notwithstanding many political irregularities, rested their power on the support of the people and reinforced their authority with *patrullas de control*, or armed workers' police, whose power, in turn, was guided by militants in local defense committees.

Writing in the opening days of the revolution, the French labor leader Robert Louzon provided a vivid description of the committees once he entered Spain:

As soon as you cross the frontier, you are halted by armed men. Who are these men? Workers. They are militiamen—that is, workers wearing their normal clothes—but armed with rifles or revolvers and with signs on their arms indicating their functions or the power they represent ... They are the ones who ... will decide ... not to let you in, or to refer it to the "Committee."

The Committee is the group of men who are in charge over in the next village and who exercise complete power there. It is the Committee who [sees] to the normal municipal functions, who formed the local militia, armed it, and supplied it with food and lodgings from funds raised by a levy imposed on all the inhabitants. They are the ones who give you permission to enter or leave the town, who closed down the Fascist shops and who carry out essential requisitions. They had the interiors of the churches demolished so that, according to the notices



displayed on all of them, the churches, now the "Generalidad's property," could be used for popular establishments.<sup>2</sup>

The power of municipal committees, Gaston Leval observed, reflected the highly civic nature of the revolution:

In the course of forms of social reconstruction the organizations that we shall call *municipalist*, which we can also call *communalist*, and which has its roots in Spanish traditions that have remained living, deserves a place to itself. It is characterized by the leading role of the town, the commune, the municipality, that is to the predominance of the local organization which embraces the city as a whole. The other institutions, even the most modern and which, because they are the most modern, are not as deeply rooted . . . Even when the Syndicate [union] exists and plays an important role it does not direct the whole of social life, contrary to the concepts of the theory of syndicalism.<sup>3</sup>

Since the CNT-FAI was most responsible for defeating the Nationalists in Catalonia, members of municipal and other committees were initially composed of CNT-FAI militants. This arrangement was roughly democratic, inasmuch as the majority of workers in their communities were CNT-FAI supporters or members. But such a system only approximated a democracy. The Spanish committees were actually less democratic than the Russian soviets of 1917 (before the Bolsheviks reshaped them along authoritarian lines): initially soviet deputies were democratically elected by the workers. Members of Spanish committees, however, were commonly appointed. Over time the CNT-FAI admitted representatives of all the parties that had belonged to the Popular Front government to function on the committees, together with delegates from labor unions (such as the UGT), new parties (such as the PSUC, of which more below), and even liberal parties. Each political party or labor organization would be allocated a certain number of seats on a committee, after which the organization chose an individual member to occupy each seat, usually behind closed doors. Nor did committee members necessarily go on to be ratified by their base. As Pierre Broué and Emile Témime observe: "It was rare for the Committees to have their composition endorsed by a broader vote once they had been appointed."<sup>4</sup>

Had the committees in revolutionary Catalonia reflected the wishes of the majority of workers and peasants, they would almost certainly have been composed predominantly of *cenetistas*, with much smaller delegations of Socialists and Communists. By allowing other parties to have

representation, the CNT-FAI leaders grossly minimized the Confederación's own power. Such "generosity" was in fact singularly undemocratic: it allocated a considerable portion of committee power to parties and unions that, in Catalonia, had relatively little public support—and disempowered its own huge libertarian membership in the process.

Nor did any single party or union advocate democratizing the committee system—not even the CNT-FAI. Had the committees been democratized, in fact, they could have become the foundation for a new form of government—one that was neither a passive administrative machine nor a domineering tyranny. Its undemocratic practices may have been unavoidable during wartime, when men and women were fighting desperately behind barricades and when able leaders were needed on the spot. But a well-organized revolutionary movement could have removed its undemocratic features after the war was over. Unfortunately the CNT-FAI leadership did nothing to democratize the committees—lest it antagonize the republican parties that were scheming against it.

The militias, which had emerged in the days before and during the uprising, were crucial not only to defeating the uprising but to consolidating the revolution. Each of the revolutionary parties and unions, through a war committee, created and controlled its own militia force, stamping it with a decidedly political character. One of the earliest militia columns was created on July 24 under the command of Durruti and was expressly controlled by the CNT-FAI. Most of its 3,000 recruits were militants whose revolutionary ardor could not compensate for their lack of knowledge about organized warfare and their lack of military training, let alone for their lack of mortars, machine guns, artillery, and tanks. Nor were they able to overcome disciplined, professional Nationalist troops in combat.

Fortunately in northeastern Spain the Nationalists lacked such forces to deploy; hence the Barcelona militias easily defeated them. After their defeat the Catalan Nationalists had retreated into Aragon, where they held the cities of Saragossa, Huesca, and Teruel. But most of the rural areas to the east of Saragossa fell into CNT-FAI hands with only desultory resistance from the Nationalists. The Confederación, as a result, sent militia columns from Barcelona into Aragon to try to retake more of the region's lands, especially the major CNT-FAI center Saragossa.

The *milicianos* tried to structure their force into a proletarian army. The basic militia unit consisted of ten men, of which ten units constituted a "century." Several centuries, in turn, made up a column. But it was an army with a distinctly libertarian ambience. Next to its commander and his staff, the central authority of a column was a Council of Workers and



Soldiers, composed of representatives elected by each century. Finally the war council chose senior officers and formulated battle plans. All junior officers were elected by the troops they were expected to command. No insignia distinguished "officers" from ordinary militiamen, and military protocol was dropped so that "officers" and militiamen addressed each other simply as "*compañero*." The salute was abolished. "Officers" received no privileges in pay or quarters; to be an "officer" in, say, the Durruti Column or the Tierra y Libertad Column was considered honor enough. Operational plans were often discussed in militia assemblies, and if "officers" and militiamen disagreed over "commands," persuasion rather than coercion was usually (albeit not always) employed to resolve their differences.

Anarchosyndicalists eschewed professionalism and military hierarchies, in the firm belief that zeal and egalitarian relations, not discipline, were the crucial factors in achieving military success. As we shall see, however, egalitarian features did not necessarily make for successful military outcomes in modern combat.

## INDUSTRIAL COLLECTIVES

Syndicalist theory held that if the proletariat were to take control of and collectivize factories (and peasants, the land), the state would lose its *raison d'être* and be replaced by a confederal system of workers' control. The fact that collectivization would necessarily involve the coercive expropriation of the capitalist class and large landowners was justified by the moral argument that those who worked in factories and on estates had the greater right to manage if not own the means of production. Fundamental to this collectivist ideal was the notion that, once the moral corruption that capitalism fostered was abolished, all who physically could work would want to do so harmoniously, without exploiting the labor of others. Hence collective associations and enterprises would be formed voluntarily, and all decisions involving production would be made by those who worked the enterprises.

The CNT-FAI was programmatically committed to the collectivization of the entire Spanish economy, but during the July 1936 revolution most of the Confederación's leaders began to modify this radical perspective. At the July 23 plenum in Barcelona, as we have seen, the regional CNT leadership overwhelmingly rejected the proposal to declare libertarian communism. But the Barcelona workers and anarchosyndicalist militants

who had defeated General Goded's troops ignored the preferences of their leaders and, as Burnett Bolloten observes, proceeded to "expropriate" the majority of the enterprises in which they were employed. "To the dismay of thousands of handcraftsmen, small manufacturers, and tradesmen," notes Bolloten, "their premises and their equipment were expropriated by the labor unions of the anarchosyndicalist CNT and often by the somewhat less radical labor unions of the Socialist UGT."<sup>5</sup> In fact, the "expropriations" were generally made less by the trade unions than by rank-and-file worker-leaders. The unions were subsequently obliged to acknowledge these takeovers in order to retain their control over the revolution. Workers took over Barcelona's vital transportation system and most of its industries, hotels, utilities, and even the foreign-owned Telefónica, the telephone system, whose headquarters had been so highly contested during the fighting. Joint CNT-UGT delegations assumed the management of all public services.

In most of the cities of the republican zone, particularly those dominated by the CNT-FAI, expropriations swept up ordinary furniture craft shops, shoemakers, food wholesalers, retailers, and even barbers—in short, the wide assortment of agents, intermediaries, and dealers whose offices and warehouses made up a modern commercial and industrial economy. The total number of workers in collectives in the republican zone is difficult to estimate, but Frank Mintz estimates that "an overall figure of 1.5 million [workers] seems acceptable."<sup>6</sup>

Once workers seized control of an enterprise, they did not necessarily collectivize it. As Ronald Fraser points out, an expropriation "might have gone no further than the workers controlling management's activities; the large-scale defection of owners, directors and managers in fear of their fate led in many factories to the next step."<sup>7</sup> In Asturias, during the first days of the revolution, CNT-FAI and UGT workers took over most of the area's mining and industrial installations, but rather than collectivize them, they allowed them to run much as they had before, hardly altering their administration. In the Basque Country, workers' control was limited only to a few enterprises at most.

In Catalonia's industrialized areas, however, workers were not satisfied with mere expropriation. Even in the heat of battle, they took every opportunity to seize and collectivize their workplaces as well as the enterprises they needed to continue their struggle. As soon as fighting erupted in one neighborhood, an *ad hoc* workers' committee would spring up and take over its factories, large stores, and warehouses. Signs appeared in the windows of retail shops and barbershops designating the building as collective property. Terrified factory owners, managers, and



employers facilitated the process by abandoning their enterprises for the safety of the Nationalist zone or for exile in France. Collectives were formed in the large textile plants and paper factories, in construction firms, in consumer goods enterprises, in the mining and metallurgical industries, in the local transportation system, indeed in nearly every branch of the economy. Nor was the process of collectivization limited to Barcelona. In the rest of Catalonia and nearby areas, workers took over most industrial enterprises. Early in September Andrés Nin, the POUM leader, declared rather extravagantly that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" had come into existence in Catalonia.\* In one form or another workers' control prevailed in most Catalan industries and in a large part of the Levant.

The workers carried out these collectivizations, not because their leaders had told them to—on the contrary, the leaders had tried to discourage them—but because they were highly committed to syndicalist ideals. As Ronald Fraser, in his excellent oral history of the revolution, observes:

With every day, [Barcelona] moved deeper into working-class control. Public transport was running, factories were working, shops were open, food supplies arriving, the telephone operating, gas and water supplies functioning—all to one extent or another organized and run by their respective workers. How had this happened? The leading CNT committees had put out no such order . . .

The revolutionary initiative had sprung not from the CNT's leading committees—how could it when the libertarian revolution had been officially "postponed"?—but from individual CNT unions impelled by the most advanced syndicalist militants.<sup>8</sup>

\* If so, it was hardly what Marx and Engels had envisioned under that name. The POUM, despite its expressly Marxist orientation, was the one organization in Catalonia with which the CNT-FAI could have made a lasting alliance on a revolutionary basis. A government composed of libertarians and independent Marxists could have been solid, especially as the POUM tilted in a libertarian direction and expressed growing support for collectivization instead of nationalization. Poumists tactfully addressed the CNT-FAI leaders as "comrades" and tried, albeit with great caution, to meet their avowed antipoliticism halfway—until the CNT-FAI leaders became voracious politicians in their own right. The Libertarian Youth (FIJL) and left-wing *faístas*, often worked on a comradely basis with Poumists on behalf of their shared revolutionary goals. Each organization needed the other desperately, but they never reached the level of outright collaboration.

On this score their level of consciousness was unparalleled in working-class history.

In socialist Madrid the revolution often led not to collectivization but to a form of workers' control in which workplaces were co-managed by workers and employers. In this system, known as workers' participation or *intervención*, the workplace was democratized, and workers gained a voice, alongside management and even governmental representatives, in making decisions about the production process. The focus, in effect, was on a cooperative relationship between workers and management. Broué and Témime observe that "in the Madrid region, where the UGT was most influential, 30 percent of the business firms were *intervenidas*, under dual government and union control: they were the most important."<sup>9</sup>

In Catalonia, however, where collectivizations were unprecedentedly numerous, a different form of workers' control—self-management, or *incautación*—was the dominant form. That is, workers expropriated the means of production, taking possession of the enterprise, and they alone—without employers or government officials—went on to manage production. They decided what goods would be produced, how raw materials would be acquired, which production methods would be used, and how the products would be distributed. Workers typically made these decisions either through delegated committees or through assemblies of an enterprise or its various departments. The profits of the enterprise—the *incautada*—were shared by all the workers either on the basis of skills or, more communistically, according to the needs of their families. About 70 percent of Catalonia's factories were collectivized as *incautadas*, as were 50 percent of those in the Levant. Certainly in most of Barcelona's anarchosyndicalist zones workers' self-management prevailed.

Each *incautada* was headed by a control committee, elected by factorywide assemblies. The size of a control committee depended on the number of workers it was expected to represent, but as Myrna M. Breitbart notes, "three to nine delegates were [the] average."<sup>10</sup> Committees handled workplace problems, distribution, workplace conditions, and financing. According to Breitbart, most of these committees

had access to company records which contained information on the market value of products, the cost of raw materials, and general finances. The degree of influence which former owners retained was determined by the militancy of the workforce, prior employer/employee relations, and the indigenous technical expertise of workers. Most "controlled" firms regulated the activities of management closely,



firing those who had abused workers in the past, and pressuring those who remained to change their attitudes and role in the work process.<sup>11</sup>

The structure of the *incautadas* varied from plant to plant. The Ford Iberia Motor Company plant, for example, which employed some 500 workers, was managed by a committee of twelve workers, half of whom were *cenetistas*, the other half *ugetistas*. The committee abolished piece-work and bonuses, relaxed the tempo of work, and increased wages given to workers who had suffered industrial accidents. It rejected, however, the communistic family wage system because it did not want to reduce the income of the more skilled workers.

In Barcelona's streetcar system, which employed 7,000 workers (6,500 of whom were CNT-FAI members), a general assembly of all workers elected a control committee. This committee was composed of seven *cenetistas*, who represented, according to Gaston Leval, "the different syndical sections: electric power stations, cables, repairs, traffic, conductors, stores, offices, administration, etc." Its task was to coordinate service on Barcelona's 60 criss-crossing routes and 600 streetcars—a formidable job that it nonetheless succeeded in fulfilling

because the men involved were themselves well organised ... Each section had at its head an engineer nominated by agreement with the Syndicates, and a representative of the workers and this was how the work and the workers were dealt with. At the top the assembled delegates constituted the local general *Comité*. The sections met separately when it was a question of their specific activities which could be considered independently; when it was a question of general problems, all the workers of all the trades held a general assembly ... No engineer could take an important decision without consulting the local *Comité*.<sup>12</sup>

This system, with its multiple levels of control and responsibility was structured along characteristically syndicalist lines that purist anarchists might well have condemned as authoritarian. But before a decision was made in a higher *comité*, the workers in that particular section were consulted. The CNT-FAI militants were very protective of their freedom in a complex structure. When general decisions were to be made, the workers met in assemblies. Their success in circumscribing authoritarian tendencies depended largely upon the regulatory agreements and stipulations they established. In short, the extent to which a collectivized enterprise practiced libertarian principles depended heavily upon the

consciousness of its workers, not simply upon emotionally charged slogans and individual "spontaneity."\*

CNT-FAI militants also seized Catalonia's regional railway system and established a system of self-management that was very similar to that of the Barcelona streetcars. The railway workers elected a control committee of six *cenetistas*, then later expanded it to include a UGT delegation of equal size. As Leval tells us:

From the beginning, the control of these [railway] divisions [or sections] did not operate from above downwards, as in a statist and centralised system. The revolutionary *Comité* had [no] such powers. The restructuring was carried out from the bottom to the top; in each section and subsection an organising *Comité*, entrusted with the responsibility of work, had been formed ... All the workers of each locality would meet twice a month to examine all that pertained to the work to be done. Parallel with it, the militant prime-movers met once a week. Then the local general assembly named a *Comité* which managed the general activity in each station and its annexes. At the periodic meetings, the management of this *Comité* ... after hearing reports and answering questions ... would be subjected to the approval or disapproval of the workers.<sup>13</sup>

Such confederal forms of administration, controlled from below, pervaded the landscape of the newly formed syndicalist society. FAI purists, to be sure, strongly objected to this mode of organization; they believed that each productive unit—preferably a craft shop—should be completely autonomous rather than integrated into a whole. This craft mentality would have made more sense a century earlier, but mass production was now rendering it irrelevant. The syndicalists won the dispute, and under their supervision many industries were integrated into large-scale unified systems, replacing less efficient units with more advanced ones. In the woodworking industry, for example, most of the workers (about 75 percent) who had labored in small shops were grouped into two large factories, each employing about 2,000 people. This workforce produced not only furniture but pontoon bridges and

\* CNT-FAI militants were deeply aware of the need to use labor and machines efficiently. They took the initiative in consolidating small enterprises—such as shoemakers, opticians, bakeries, and textile shops—into large industrialized plants. Here too the sectional system of delegation was established, and representatives from various crafts or industries were democratically integrated.



huts for the militias, and even hangars for the republicans' modest air force.

Many the CNT-FAI leaders, in fact, were troubled by the social revolution that the rank-and-file militants were creating. When Horacio Prieto, the CNT-FAI's national secretary, learned that workers were taking over factories, he was alarmed. As he later recalled:

Alfredo Martínez and one other militant later arrived from Barcelona and informed us about the situation in Catalonia. Their report appalled me ... [W]e were unable to conceive of the social collectivities, the mass expropriations, and so on. When they sketched for us the power of the [libertarian] movement in Catalonia, I could not help myself from saying to them, "That seems impossible, you have gone too far, and you will pay dearly for it. I am now absolutely convinced that you will lose the war because foreign intervention will take place."<sup>14</sup>

However, *pace* Prieto, the error for which the workers would pay dearly was that of not going far enough.

## AGRARIAN COLLECTIVES

Starting in late July and early August and continuing for several months, the rural areas of the republican zone saw the widespread formation of agrarian collectives. Although UGT militants played an important role in some areas, the CNT-FAI militants usually constituted the greatest force for creating collectives. In eastern Aragon the agrarian revolution advanced very far and resolutely. When CNT-FAI militia columns arrived there from Catalonia, they became a major factor in disseminating the revolution by seizing land held by large landowners and distributing it among the peasant majority of the population. In August, they helped the peasants establish agricultural collectives. So successful was this effort that within six months, the CNT-FAI claimed, that 70 percent of the peasants in eastern Aragon had been organized into some 450 collectives.

The latifundia region of the south, where impoverished *braceros* and land-poor peasants still cultivated the great estates, was potentially well suited for collectivization, but Andalusia was overrun by the Nationalists very early in the civil war. Still, two-thirds of the province of Guadalajara was collectivized, observes Gaston Leval, as well as

almost all of the provinces of Madrid, Toledo and Ciudad Real, and the entire province of Cuenca. In a year, there were 230 Collectives with about 100,000 members with their families. Six months later the number of Collectives had risen to 300 ... [T]he Federation of Land Workers which was after all affiliated to the U.G.T. itself joined Collectives.<sup>15</sup>

Three hundred rural collectives were established even in relatively conservative Castile. But the Spanish region with the most rural collectives was the Levant, which had as many as 900. In general, the extent of collectivization in Spain is difficult to assess because of the shifting military fronts; many collectives were overrun by Nationalists before they got under way. But Frank Mintz estimates that "at their height in July 1937, [there were] without doubt a minimum of 400,000 people in 802 [agricultural] collectives; toward the end of 1938, a minimum without doubt of 230,000 in 1,015 collectives."<sup>16</sup>

The presence of anarchosyndicalist militia columns makes it difficult to determine to what extent peasants formed collectives voluntarily and to what extent they were coerced. In Aragon some collectives clearly depended upon the presence of militia columns in order to function successfully. In the Levant, however, the militia columns were not numerous enough to account for the large number of collectives. Elsewhere, especially in areas to the west of Madrid, collectives were not significantly aided by proselytizing members of militia columns.

As the cities of the republican zone had done, the rural villages replaced their previous municipal governments with committees comprising members of each Popular Front party. These committees took over the management of the community's economic as well as political life—and determined how much land would be collectivized and how the collectivization would be handled. The agrarian collectives remained interlocked with the municipal committees rather than the syndicalist trade unions; nearly everywhere in the agrarian republican zone the committees destroyed property records, abolished rent, and fostered considerable social equality. The extent and nature of collectivization varied from one village to another: some villages collectivized all their farmlands, while others took only land that belonged to owners who had fled or been killed in the fighting.

In general the collectives shared a strong commitment to democratic decision-making. José Peirats, who was involved in the anarchosyndicalist movement during the revolution, observed that "decision-making in the [agrarian] collectives was fiercely democratic." The Hospitalet de



Llobregat collective in Catalonia, for example, which encompassed 1,500 families over 15,000 square kilometers and was dominated by the CNT, "held a general assembly every three months to examine the course of production and to attend to new needs. On ... occasion the Administrative Council displayed its account books. In Ademuz assemblies were held every Saturday. In Alcolea de Cinca they were held whenever necessary."<sup>17</sup>

The collectivized peasantry, more than their urban proletarian counterparts, compensated workers on the basis of need rather than on performance of work. Here communistic forms of work and distribution (in contrast to the labor-oriented syndicalist system that was generally applied to industry) had their greatest and most lasting success. Rural collectives, for longer periods than urban collectives, abolished money for local or internal use, especially in the villages of Aragon, the Levant, New Castile, Murcia, and Andalusia. Conventional money was still necessary to obtain supplies from outside the village and for other external uses; but for local trade collectivized villages devised a variety of substitutes. Some villages printed their own currencies, valid only within their precincts. Others paid workers in vouchers or coupons, which they could exchange for goods in various communal shops. Still others issued workers a "family card," allotting goods to a family communistically, on the basis of family size rather than individual productivity. Where bread, wine, or olive oil was abundant, villages simply distributed it freely. In addition, many collectives instituted social welfare programs, providing members with free health care and seeing that orphans, widows, and the infirm were well maintained. Others set up secular schools, even in places where none had previously existed, and attempted to overcome the illiteracy widespread in rural Spain.

Many collectives were relatively simple in structure. When Franz Borkenau visited an Andalusian collective in Castro del Rio, near Córdoba, he captured a sense of the moral fervor of the anarchistic peasants there. Castro, he noted (in a diary entry dated September 8, 1936),

is one of the oldest Anarchist centres in Andalusia. Its CNT groups look back upon an existence of twenty-six years, and, since the defeat of the guardia in Castro, the anarchists are the one existing organization ... The insurgents, whose main lines run a few miles from the village, had attacked it twice since, but without success. All entries were heavily barricaded and watched with unusual technical competence. And so the local anarchists had time to introduce their anarchist Eden, which,

in most points, resembled closely the one introduced by the Anabaptists in Münster in 1534.

The salient point in the anarchist régime in Castro is the abolition of money. Exchange is suppressed; production has changed very little ... The committee took over the estates, and runs them. They have not even been merged but are worked separately, each by the hands previously employed on its lands. Money wages, of course, have been abolished. It would be incorrect to say that they have been replaced by pay in kind. There is no pay whatever; the inhabitants are fed directly from the village stores ...

Their hatred of the upper class was far less economic than moral. They did not want to get the good living of those they had expropriated, but to get rid of their luxuries, which to them seemed to be so many vices. Their conception of the new order which was to be brought about was thoroughly ascetic.<sup>18</sup>

Castro was perhaps the most anarchistic rural collective to emerge during the revolution; Más de las Matas, a widely cited collective in northern Teruel, produced more complex enterprises. Its population comprised 2,300 peasants as well as enough craftsmen and service personnel to make it economically viable. Before the revolution its farms had been cultivated by prosperous smallholders who shared irrigation rights and produced highly diversified crops. The population was relatively egalitarian economically—it had neither very rich nor very poor peasants. After the Revolution Más de las Matas became one of the most successful of all the rural collectives in Spain.

In September 1936, after the Nationalists were driven from eastern Aragon, a CNT militia column under the command of Saturnia Carod arrived, and about 200 local CNT members formed the Más de las Matas collective. Moved by the general enthusiasm of the peasants and workers, the libertarians proposed that the collective function according to strictly communistic principles. Villagers pooled their lands, livestock, produce, tools, and money to get the collective under way. Sevilla Pastor, a member of the Libertarian Youth, conveys the enthusiasm that some of the collectivists apparently felt: "I was so enthusiastic, so fanatic," Pastor declared to Ronald Fraser, "that I took everything in my parents' house—all the grain stock, the dozen head of sheep, even the silver coins—and handed them into the collective." Pastor's family was among the prosperous families in the area: they owned two houses and a large tract of land. "So can you see, I wasn't in the CNT to defend my daily wage; I was in it for idealistic reasons. My parents weren't as convinced as I, that's



for sure."<sup>19</sup> Peasants joined the collective both individually and in groups, and by the time of Leval's visit (the date is uncertain), it had grown to 550 families out of a total of 600.

The new collective was divided into twenty sectors, each worked by about a dozen men, who were represented on the administrative committee by an elected delegate. The use of money was banned, and goods were dispensed freely from the common store, without any restrictions. Strictly speaking, the Más de las Matas collective was not an agricultural enterprise, as the collective's secretary, Ernesto Margeli, later told Fraser. "No, no!" he insisted:

It was a general village collective. We set up a collective carpenters' shop in a garage on the outskirts of the village where the seven or eight local carpenters made furniture for the collective, carried out repairs—all done free on a collectivist's house—and worked on building projects with the masons who were also collectivized. We build a barber's shop where all the village barbers worked, a collectivized butcher's, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

The people of Más de las Matas seem to have been fairly tolerant of minority political views: those peasants who remained outside the collective were usually UGT members and remained independent or "individualist" food-cultivators, but they were not subjected to harassment. A local doctor known for his right-wing opinions, according to Augustin Souchy, who visited the collective, was not molested but carried on his practice in peace. Perhaps he was spared the fate of many right-wingers in anarchosindicalist-controlled areas because of his vitally needed skills. Others were not entirely free of harassment. According to Ernesto Margeli, peasants in Más de las Matas who did not belong to any left-wing or republican organization were "coerced" to join the collective. A band from Carod's wandering *milicianos* came to the area to "cleanse" it politically and executed half-dozen men; thereafter "2,000 of the village's 2,300 inhabitants ... joined the collective," Margeli recalled to Fraser. Sometimes they were coerced "morally, not physically," he acknowledged, but in retrospect he regretted such coercion, calling it "a mistake—the biggest of all, I believe now."<sup>21</sup>

Poor and middle peasants, however, often found that joining the collective had practical advantages. By pooling their resources they shortened their workday, regularized their hours, and allowed more leisure for themselves. This easygoing system made for a highly equitable (according to some members, wasteful) distribution of goods, and the

collective's new machines greatly lightened labor burdens for those to whom they were accessible. Even peasants who had been forced to enter the collective later found that it provided them with a better way of life, according to some of Fraser's interviewees. One "individualist" allowed that life in the collective instilled in him more humane values and removed many demanding burdens that capitalism had placed on his shoulders. Another peasant, whose father and brother had been shot by a libertarian militia group, told Fraser he did not suffer any "hardship" while working in the collective.<sup>22</sup>

In all probability, then, the Más de las Matas collective was the result of both coercion and voluntarism; some peasants joined it with enthusiastic libertarian fervor, while others were nudged or stampeded into it by fear. The relative proportions between the coerced and the enthusiasts will probably never be known. One circumstantial basis for estimating the proportion of voluntary to coerced collectivists in a given area may be the economic status of the peasants before July 1936. The presence of a large number of well-to-do or even middling peasants before the revolution most likely meant that a large proportion of collective members were motivated by fear more than by conviction. Over time, however, some well-to-do peasants found membership in the collective to be advantageous. When they had the chance, at least half of the collectivized Aragonese peasants returned to proprietary or "individualistic" forms of food cultivation. By contrast, peasants who had been poor before the revolution entered collectives without regret and tended to remain in them when they could leave. In the Levant, after Franco's victory, a government agrarian agency complained of the difficulty of de-collectivizing peasants, who apparently preferred communal to private food cultivation.

## NOTES

1. Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1975), p. 72. Originally published in France in 1971 as *Espagne libertaire*.
2. Robert Louzon, "Notes sur Barcelone," *La Revolution proletarienne*, August 10, 1936; quoted in Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 127.
3. Leval, *Collectives*, p. 279 (emphasis added).
4. Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, pp. 127–8.
5. Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 62.



6. Frank Mintz, *L'Autogestion dans l'Espagne révolutionnaire* (Paris: Éditions Bélibaste, n.d.), p. 148.
7. Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), p. 139.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 139–40.
9. Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 152.
10. Myrna Margulies Breitbart, "The Theory and Practice of Anarchist Decentralism in Spain, 1936–39: The Integration of Community and Environment" (Ph.D. thesis, Clark University, Worcester, MA, 1978), p. 332.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 332–3.
12. Leval, *Collectives*, pp. 246–7.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
14. Prieto is quoted in César M. Lorenzo, *Les Anarchistes espagnols et le pouvoir, 1868–1969* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1959), p. 120, n.31. Lorenzo, who describes the Spanish revolution as "perhaps the most radical of all time" (p. 119), was Prieto's son.
15. Leval, *Collectives*, p. 182.
16. Mintz, *L'Autogestion*, p. 148.
17. José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 146.
18. Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eye-Witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 166–7.
19. Quoted in Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 352.
20. Quoted *ibid.*
21. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 353. Margeli's testimony does not accord with Leval's figures or his claim that membership in the collective grew only gradually.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

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## CHAPTER 64 The CNT–FAI Enters the State

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### FORMATION OF THE CABALLERO GOVERNMENT

In August 1936 as many as 20,000 crack mercenary troops from Morocco—Tercio and Regulares soldiers—were flown or ferried across the Straits of Gibraltar to fight on behalf of the Nationalists. The soldiers in this Army of Africa were thoroughly disciplined, personally devoted to their officers, and hardened by years of battles with rebellious Moroccan tribes. They were among the most ruthless soldiers in Europe.

After several weeks of stasis on the battlefronts, the Army of Africa, under Franco's leadership, began to march northward from Andalusia toward Madrid, passing through Extremadura, along the Portuguese border. Meanwhile, in the north General Mola's Requetés and Falangists were marching southward from Navarre and Castile. The two Nationalist armies planned to converge in central Spain and join forces there to take over the Spanish capital. The militias, possessed largely of First World War era weapons but exhibiting stunning courage, slowed up Franco's advance toward Madrid for over three months. But slowly and inevitably the militias were pushed back to the center. The retreat brought staggering losses to the *milicianos*, and soldiers died in executions as much as in battlefield combat.

By late August it became apparent that the Giral ministry—the liberal government in Madrid—had neither the confidence nor the support of the people in the republican zone. A new government clearly had to be formed: one that would bring the leftist parties, especially the Socialists, into the government. And by almost universal agreement, the only viable choice to head this "government of victory" was Francisco Largo Caballero, the Socialist leader who had the support of most leftists and



even liberals. But would Caballero be willing to form such a government? As we have seen, the "Spanish Lenin" had concluded that collaboration with any bourgeois republican government was a violation of Marxist principle and that only a thoroughgoing social revolution, resulting in a workers' state, could save Spain from "fascism". Given his old UGT bureaucratic impulses, however, Caballero could also be expected to pursue compromises with the liberal elements in the country. In the end, after extensive negotiations, he agreed on September 4 to form a new left-liberal government.

Meanwhile right-wing and moderate Socialists—as well as a growing number of Russian advisers—succeeded in persuading Caballero that in order to obtain weapons from abroad—which republican Spain desperately needed for fighting the Nationalists—he would have to moderate his revolutionary image. In August 1936 much of the world press had depicted the civil war as a valiant struggle of devout Catholic generals against atheistic "Reds." To counter this image, Caballero would have to present his government as a liberal parliamentary regime that was fighting fascism. It would also have to restrain the revolutionary impulses of the workers and peasants, particularly the *cenetistas* and left-wing Socialists, and it would have to suppress the vast committee dual power that had formed in the republican zone around the collectives that had taken control of much of the economy.

At the same time, in order to stay in power, Caballero had to placate the revolutionary workers, the real basis of his government. How could he achieve both goals? His solution was to create a government of five bourgeois members roughly counterbalanced by six Socialists, among whom were Indalecio Prieto as Minister of the Navy and Air Force, Juan Negrín as Minister of Finance, and Caballero himself as Minister of War as well as prime minister. Two Communists (who could be counted on to promote liberal bourgeois interests) rounded out the cabinet. Caballero's cabinet, in effect, was socialist only in its coloring; its real objectives were liberal, namely to preserve the republic, to safeguard private property, and to unify all the military forces fighting in the republic's defense.

The "Spanish Lenin" was only too aware, however, that without the participation of the CNT-FAI, his government would lack radical legitimacy in the eyes of militant workers and peasants, especially those who were needed to stop Franco in the northeast. In an effort to gain their support, he invited the libertarians to enter his cabinet, asking their leaders to accept a ministry without portfolio. Considering the size of the Confederación, this was grossly insulting. Surprisingly, the CNT-FAI's national committee tentatively accepted Caballero's tepid offer—on the

condition, to be sure, that the regional federations ratified the offer. On September 3 a national plenum of *cenetista* regional federations met to consider the invitation, then rejected it as inconsistent with antistatism. To enter the government of a republican nation-state, after all, would entail the wholesale surrender of the libertarian movement's most defining principle. "The masses would feel disappointed if we [had] a share in institutions with a bourgeois-type structure," opined *Solidaridad Obrera*.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding this view, many CNT-FAI leaders were not to be deterred. They maintained close supportive connections with Caballero, even sending libertarian commissars to various departments in Madrid and offering advice and opinions about government policy. Caballero had little if any interest in their advice; what he wanted was their support—especially that of their very large following.

## CATALONIA: THE GENERALIDAD REGAINS POWER

Had the CNT-FAI chosen to enter Caballero's government in September, however, the choice would not have been without precedent. During the July revolution, as we have seen, the Generalidad—the regional government of a quasi-autonomous Catalonia, which comprised a regional parliament and an executive council—had been reduced to a hollow shell both politically and militarily. It possessed very little power after the July revolution, and its administrative bureaucracy was essentially moribund. So too were the fighting forces at its disposal, consisting mainly of some Asaltos (created by the Second Republic), Civil Guards, and a few moderate militias.

The real power in the region, as in the rest of the republican zone, lay with the vast network of municipal, factory, defense, supply, transportation, and other committees—supported by the revolutionary militias and the *patrullas de control*, which were dominated by the libertarians. This network gave its support, not to the Generalidad, but to the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias, which now constituted the *de facto* executive power in Catalonia. The committee network and the militias supported the CCAFM primarily because the CNT-FAI had consented to join it. The CCAFM, in turn, used its power to contain the revolution and to direct the war on the Aragon front. It even acquired legislative and judicial functions, due primarily to powers given to it by the CNT-FAI.

Having joined the CCAFM, the CNT-FAI seems to have been quite



untroubled by the continued existence of the Generalidad. It made no attempt for the time being to eliminate it or even to strip it of its legal status, however vacuous. But the Generalidad—and particularly the Esquerra, its main party—had every intention of attempting to recover its power and restore itself as Catalonia's regional government. Step by step Luis Companys, its president, worked to diminish the authority of the CCAFM and the workers' committees and shift it to the Generalidad. The searing question that occupied Companys and his allies (as it had troubled Ebert in Germany) was how to accomplish this task without precipitating an insurrection by Barcelona's working class. "Companys was too shrewd a politician to oppose the CNT-FAI at a time when they were in the full tide of victory," observes Burnett Bolloten. "He knew that resistance would be perilous and that his party must choose between going under or being borne along by the storm until it might reassert its sway."<sup>2</sup>

The Generalidad thus worked to fulfill its goals gradually. Its first step, ironically, occurred without its conscious direction. Shortly after the July revolution, as we have seen, village collectivists abolished money, and anarchist enthusiasts in Barcelona made bonfires out of paper pesetas and for weeks exchanged goods through barter, supply committee coupons, and family cards. As a major port city, Barcelona was heavily engaged in international trade, for which a sound and conventional currency was absolutely necessary. Accordingly, it continued to use costly metals, while the city's internal economy functioned to a great extent without money—as long as its preexisting stocks of goods held out. Once its supplies were exhausted, however, bartering and family cards had to be replaced by currency. Thus the use of money was restored, and bourgeois commercial institutions had to be accepted.

The most important factor in restoring the Generalidad's power, however, was the fact that it never stopped acting like the civil government of Catalonia. Even if only as an empty shell, it continued to issue decrees, however toothless they were and however much they simply acknowledged the existing facts. As early as July 24, while the fighting still smoldered in Barcelona's streets, it suspended the Catalan municipal councilors who belonged to the Nationalist parties. Two days later it "officially" established the 40-hour week and raised wages by 15 percent. It gave "official" recognition to the councils and the revolutionary committees, and it "decreed" the formation of militias. On July 31 the Generalidad suspended eviction proceedings against militia members, and on August 6 it cannily claimed the right to name a delegate to each factory control committee and participate in the management of collectivized factories.

The day after this sweeping invasion of the control committees, the Generalidad "officially" confiscated the property of the Church and of the Nationalists. It also "created" a War Industries Commission, composed of representatives of its various industries involved in munitions production. On August 11 it "reinstated" to their jobs workers who had been fired for political reasons, and on the 21st it gave itself the authority to supervise elections to factory control committees.

Most of the decrees were redundant. The changes they prescribed had been effected by workers' committees, militia units, and local unions before the Generalidad "legitimated" them on paper. But by issuing this torrent of decrees, the Generalidad bit by bit gained legitimacy in the eyes of the people and gradually accumulated *de facto* power. Achievements of the revolution soon appeared to be the legal enactments of an amiable and generous bourgeois state, not the fruits of a revolutionary workers' government. Much as Ebert had done in 1918–19, the Spanish state was re-creating itself and accumulating real authority at the expense of the revolution.

Luis Companys, his close Esquerra colleague José Tarradellas, and their associates exercised their modicum of authority cautiously but unerringly and decisively. Tarradellas, a bourgeois politician who managed to become the Esquerra representative on the CCAFM, was able in one well-aimed stroke to bring the collectivized Catalan economy under the Generalidad's financial control. He achieved this feat because of a simple but unavoidable fact: the collectivized factories needed credit in order to operate. They had to pay wages to the workers, buy raw materials, and obtain parts for their machinery. Initially some collectives were able to pay for these expenses by using economic assets that they had seized during the revolution or by expropriating personal fortunes of Nationalists; other enterprises had existing financial reserves upon which they could draw. But many collectives had no assets or reserves and, bereft of countless pesetas as a result of the anarchists' cash bonfires, they had to obtain credit, in some cases immediately, in order to operate at all.

The needy collectives first turned to the revolutionary committees for assistance, especially the CCAFM's control and supply sections, but while these bodies were in legal control of the Catalan economy, they lacked the resources to issue loans. The collectives then turned to the Madrid government, requesting credit in the amount of 30 million pesetas, but Negrín, the right-wing Socialist who was then Finance Minister, turned them down. The Generalidad, to be sure, possessed the means to finance the economy: it controlled the resources of the Bank of Spain in Catalonia. Some anarcho-syndicalists, such as Diego Abad de Santillán,



proposed that the revolutionaries expropriate the bank,\* but the CNT-FAI leadership opposed so drastic an expression of its power. The collectives then demanded the creation of a new bank for industry and credit, but the Generalidad refused to create one. The collectives had no alternative but to turn to the existing Catalan banks.

Owing to the unwillingness of the CNT-FAI to act, Tarradellas had the collectives in the palm of his hand. He instructed the banks not to extend any credit to the collectives without his consent, and he issued that consent only conditionally. Whenever a collective's representative showed up at his office requesting credit, he amiably agreed to provide it—provided the collective accepted a supervisory government *interventor*, or controller, as a member of its control committee.† This charade was not without historical precedent: by failing to expropriate the banks, the anarchosyndicalists repeated the error of the Paris Commune in 1871. By October 1936 as many as 435 factories in Catalonia (360 of them in Barcelona) had had to accept *interventors* in order to obtain credit, which thereby placed them under the control of the Generalidad. This number grew steadily with the passing months. Even those collectives that had had the resources to remain free of state control for a while eventually reached the point where they too had to seek credit. As early as January 1937 the government had received requests for *interventors* from 11,000 enterprises in the republican zone.

Step by step the *interventors* limited and reduced the control committees' authority, in favor of the Generalidad, until the control committees were left with only a nominal role in managing their collectivized factories. Workers' self-management gave way to workers' participation, and *incautadas* became *intervenidas*. In some cases the Catalan state nationalized these enterprises or returned them to their former owners.

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\* Spain's gold reserves, which lay in the bank, were regarded as the third largest in the world at the time and could have resolved the collectives' problems. The Giral and Caballero governments, after all, had used the reserves to obtain currency from France. In mid-October the Caballero government asked the Soviet ambassador, Marcel Rosenberg, if Stalin would agree to hold Spain's gold reserves for safekeeping and in payment for arms. Rosenberg immediately affirmed that he would. On October 22–25 the reserves were loaded onto ships and taken to Odessa, where they were duly plundered by the Soviet government.

† Some historians claim that control committees requested the Generalidad's *interventor*; others say Tarradellas forced the *interventors* on them. In an interview that appears in part 5 ("The Revolution") of Granada Television's 1983 documentary *The Spanish Civil War*, however, Tarradellas states quite explicitly that he compelled the control committees to accept an *interventor* if they wanted his permission to acquire credit.

The CCAFM, far from contesting the Generalidad's steady subversion of workers' control, was busy divesting itself of even its own power, while Companys incessantly appealed for unity among the "antifascist" forces. Finally, in the closing days of August, the CCAFM acknowledged the authority of the Generalidad's Defense Council and agreed to synchronize its economic activities with the Generalidad's various corresponding departments. The CCAFM thus formalized the sovereignty of the Generalidad as the official government of Catalonia. Far from functioning as the leader of a counterpower against the state, the CCAFM functioned as a vehicle of collaboration, rechanneling the workers' power into the authority of the Generalidad and ratifying the Generalidad's growing power at the workers' expense.

## THE RISE OF THE PCE AND THE PSUC

As it worked to subvert the power of the revolutionary committees and organizations and regain its own lost power, the Generalidad had one ally that assisted it with fanatical eagerness: the Communists, or Stalinists as they were appropriately called by their opponents on the Left. During the first weeks of the revolution the Stalinists emerged as the republican government's most energetic supporters, appealing for unity—usually on their own terms—in the fight against Franco and vehemently opposing all aspects of the libertarian revolution, including collectivization. On August 8 Jesús Hernández, a member of the PCE's politburo, stated this position unequivocally: "We cannot talk today of the proletarian revolution in Spain, because the historical circumstances do not permit it."<sup>3</sup> And José Díaz, secretary-general of the PCE, declared: "We wish to fight only for a democratic republic with a broad social content. There can be no question at present of a dictatorship of the proletariat or of Socialism, but only of the struggle of democracy against fascism."<sup>4</sup> The Stalinists proved in fact to be the most zealous supporters of the Giral and Caballero governments.

The support they provided was both substantial and effective. Starting in October 1936 Russia provided the PCE with a small army of advisers, military officers, and police agents, as well as arms and food supplies, for which the republic paid amply from its gold reserves. By November Soviet airplanes and tanks had appeared in Spain in sufficient quantities to prevent the Nationalists from seizing Madrid—and military aid continued to appear in sufficient quantities to preserve the city for the next two years. But the republican cause was not the sole beneficiary of Russian



war *matériel*: the Spanish Communists themselves were the greatest beneficiaries of all. The PCE, as we have seen, was exogenous to Spain and acted solely in the interests of Soviet foreign policy. The Stalinists labored tirelessly to expand the party's power and influence within the republican zone. Their Russian comrades' aid in the defense of Madrid enhanced their prestige enormously among the Spanish masses; while their access to the international Communist propaganda apparatus gave them the ability ideologically to diminish a profound social revolution to the dimensions of a mere civil war. In the months that followed the revolution, the PCE, abetted by Russian funds and advisers, became the dominant political party in the anti-Nationalist camp. From 30,000 members in July, it claimed to have recruited one million by June 1937. Inflated though this figure may have been, the Stalinist growth was nonetheless spectacular, and remarkably rapid.

In late 1936 the Stalinists were also the most powerful antirevolutionary force in the republican zone and were equal in many respects to Franco's own military campaign. By November 1936 Comintern agents—most notably the NKVD chief Alexander Orlov—had established an effective police network operating throughout the zone; this network conducted a campaign of arrests, kidnappings, and assassinations against the independent Spanish Left, claiming the lives of thousands of Poumist, left Socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist critics of Communist activities.

On April 1, 1936, as we have seen, the Communists successfully induced the Socialist Youth (JS, with its 200,000 members) to merge with the Communist Youth (JC, 30,000 members) to form the Unified Socialist Youth (JSU), which soon became a vigorous Stalinist organization. More important, however, was the rise of a Communist-Socialist fusion party in the Catalan heart of revolutionary Spain.

The Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, or PSUC) was formed as late as July 23, 1936, when the minuscule Catalan Communist Party fused with the United Socialists of Catalonia and two other small parties. The Stalinists had no difficulty in gaining the upper hand over the Socialists, including their apparatus, press, and labor leaders. Almost immediately the PSUC—the first unified Socialist-Communist party in Europe—affiliated with the Communist International, thereby bringing the Catalan UGT directly under Stalinist control. Juan Comorera became the PSUC's first secretary, working with—or more properly, under—one of the Comintern's most ruthless agents, the Hungarian Ernő Gerö (known in Spain by the alias "Pedro"). As Burnett Bolloten observes, "Pedro" actually directed the PSUC "behind the scenes with extraordinary energy, tact, and

efficiency,"<sup>5</sup> dominating the party's executive and supervising every aspect of its life.

Just as in the republican zone the PCE supported the republican government and the moderate Socialists against the revolutionary Left, so in Catalonia the PSUC supported the Generalidad against the power of the committees. The PSUC became the Generalidad's most energetic agent in its struggle to regain power in Catalonia. The Esquerra, normally the Generalidad's most reliable defender, had been losing support among its traditional political base—the middle class—because Companys, in the hope of gaining a modicum of support from, or at least the tolerance of, the workers of Catalonia, refrained from criticizing their revolutionary institutions too harshly. These disaffected middle-class supporters lost faith in Companys' ability to contain the revolution and looked elsewhere for an advocate, which they found in the PSUC, whose resoluteness in opposing the militant workers they increasingly admired. The PSUC staunchly opposed the committees, insisting that they be dissolved and that power be restored to the Generalidad.

Like the PCE in the republican zone as a whole, the PSUC soon became less a proletarian organization than a shelter for conservative and middle-class elements. By December 1936 its ample membership consisted largely of white-collar workers, civil servants, magistrates, army officers, police, small manufacturers, and shopkeepers who feared anarchist terror and expropriations. They flocked into the PSUC for support and protection. They were joined by large numbers of individualistic peasants as well as *rabassaires* (sharecroppers), who had once solidly supported the Esquerra. The PSUC soon surpassed the Esquerra as the leader of the opposition to the revolution in Catalonia. Having achieved a mass membership, it was in a position to challenge the power of Catalonia's formidable revolutionary parties. Where the Esquerra wanted merely to tame the CNT-FAI and prevent the Stalinists from gaining control over the province, the PSUC wanted to destroy the Confederación outright.

## CATALONIA: THE CNT-FAI ENTERS THE GENERALIDAD

In late September the CNT-FAI leadership, fearful of losing members and influence, decided to jettison the Confederación's libertarian heritage. On September 24 a congress of 500 delegates to the Catalan regional federation voted that the CCAFM should participate directly in the



Generalidad. At that point the two institutions merged, and the CCAFM became a subordinate agency of the Generalidad.

For the Generalidad leaders the next step was to bring the CNT-FAI itself into the Generalidad. The main obstacle to this move was the CNT-FAI's antistatism. To the libertarians the Generalidad was a state—a regional state, to be sure, but a state nevertheless. Still, the “influential militants” offered to overlook this fact if the Generalidad would agree to rename itself a “Council.” That way, they seem to have thought, their worker-militant base could not accuse them of entering a state. Companys, a practical politician, found no difficulties with this charade and accepted the CNT-FAI's request. Accordingly, the Generalidad was renamed the “Council of the Generalidad,” and on September 26, as president of the new “council,” he appointed José Tarradellas as prime minister, who in turn formed a new cabinet, comprising representatives of all the workers' parties and unions.

To ensure that no one mistook the “Council of the Generalidad” for a state, the new cabinet and its subordinate bodies were likewise renamed. Thus all ministries and ministers became “councils” and “councilors.” But power was apportioned among the parties in such a way as to diminish the CNT-FAI's real authority: the Esquerra gained control of the strategic Finance and Interior Councils; the Rabassaires obtained the Agriculture Council; the PSUC was given the Labor and Public Services Councils; and the POUM took over the Justice Council.\* The CNT-FAI received the Economy, Supply, and Health Councils. Significantly, the strategic Finance, Interior (i.e., Police), Agriculture, and Labor Councils were awarded to leaders of the Esquerra, Rabassaires, and PSUC.

The sacred anarchosyndicalist principle of refusing to participate in a state—*any* state—had now become seriously profaned. Officially, the CNT press announced that the Council of the Generalidad was not really a state but a “defense council.” As Broué and Témime observe:

The Anarchists justified their “participation in bourgeois-type institutions” by means of various arguments. They laid stress on the term “Council,” applied to the new government at their insistence. In their

view, the presence of CNT representatives was a guarantee, a legalization of the revolutionary gains.<sup>6</sup>

Although the CNT-FAI gained less power than it might have from jettisoning its principles, the Generalidad benefited enormously from the very presence of the largest proletarian organization in Catalonia—the CNT-FAI—in its corridors. Where hitherto its political power had been hollow, an exercise in wishful thinking, it now acquired real power when joined and hence legitimated by the Confederación.

The logical outcome of the CNT-FAI's surrender was not long in coming. On October 1, after only about two months of existence, the CCAFM dissolved itself and, with the approval of the CNT-FAI and the POUM, yielded its remaining official powers to the Generalidad Council. Meanwhile, the Generalidad Council continued to issue decrees that “officially” legitimated the workers' gains. Most notably, a decree of October 24 “legalized” the collectivization of industry in Catalonia. According to this decree, all industrial enterprises that employed 200 workers or more could be collectivized if three-quarters of the labor force requested it; workers were now “granted” the right to form a council to run each collectivized plant.

The CNT-FAI's propaganda machine actually hailed this collectivization decree as a great revolutionary achievement. “It was necessary,” opined *Solidaridad Obrera* on September 27, “in some simple way, for the organization controlling the vast majority of the working population to be promoted to the level of administrative and executive decisions”<sup>7</sup>—that is, to be approved by a state! To the many revolutionary workers of Catalonia, however, the decree “legalizing” collectivization was far more a retreat than a victory. Hitherto workers had had only to declare the creation of a council rather than receive permission for it, and only a simple majority of a plant's labor force, rather than three-quarters, had had to request the collectivization. Catalan factories employing fewer than 50 workers—a large proportion of them—could now be collectivized only with the owners' permission. Finally the Generalidad Council would be permitted to assign a representative to each plant council, and in the larger collectives this representative could veto the appointment of the council chairman. The decree thus took control of the collectives away from the unions and workers' assemblies and placed it in the hands of the Catalan state. For a time the workers in the collectivized shops simply ignored the decree, but soon they were compelled by the Generalidad to obey its provisions. Collectivization was being nullified by the reduction of revolutionary reality to mere changes in the definitions of words.

\* That the ideologically sophisticated POUM participated in the anarchosyndicalist charade is troubling. It claimed that the new Generalidad Council contained attributes—presumably, the presence of the CNT-FAI—that made it a “proletarian power.” But such an excuse could have justified the party's participation in any Labor or social democratic cabinet.



## THE CNT-FAI JOINS THE CABALLERO GOVERNMENT

Although the CNT-FAI leadership had rejected Caballero's initial overture to join the Madrid government, events soon persuaded it to change its mind. On September 15 a plenary assembly of regional committees met to reconsider the "Spanish Lenin's" offer. It rejected the idea of entering the state, but it proposed that Caballero change both the name and the structure of the Madrid government. The "National Defense Council"—as they proposed to call it—would consist entirely of CNT-FAI and UGT representatives (called "delegates") and would be the apogee of a pyramid of councils arising from the local level. In this government regions and localities would have a relatively high degree of autonomy, functioning through councils coordinated by the National Defense Council. "Popular tribunals" would take the place of the old judicial system, and the Bank of Spain and the Church, as well as major industries and large landowners, would be expropriated. Federated industrial councils would control the economy, again under the guidance of the CNT-FAI and the UGT. The government would be syndicalist in nature, but to avoid frightening potential foreign arms suppliers, the bourgeois Azaña would remain president. For its defense, a "war militia," organized by the CNT-FAI and UGT, would replace the existing military forces. Participation would be obligatory, and "military technicians" would replace commanders.

The CNT assembly's proposal for a genuinely revolutionary regime received support only from the POUM. Caballero rejected it wholesale—its patently syndicalist structure would unquestionably alienate Britain and France and eliminate the possibility of obtaining arms from them. At this time, moreover, the military situation was worsening: the republican militias were experiencing a series of grave military reverses, and the Nationalists were approaching Madrid. On October 30 the prime minister declared, "First let us win the war, and then we can talk about revolution."<sup>8</sup>

The CNT-FAI's insistence on a "National Defense Council," however, turned out to be less than ironclad as a condition for its participation. On September 28 (shortly after the Confederación's Catalan branch entered the "Generalidad Council") the national committee appeared at a plenary of regional CNT-FAI federations to explain that the formation of a National Defense Council was impossible; if the CNT-FAI wished to participate in making decisions about the economy and the conduct of the war, the leaders told the delegates, it had to enter the Caballero government. On October 18 Horacio Prieto, secretary of the national

committee, advised a plenary of regionals that the CNT-FAI should "put an end to so many scruples, moral and political prejudices, so many denials of reality, and so much semantic fuss," and simply enter the government.<sup>9</sup> His arguments carried the day, and the plenary gave him full authority to negotiate with the "Spanish Lenin."

The negotiations got under way and, to all appearances, focused mainly on the number of ministries the CNT-FAI would receive. The "influential militants" initially asked for five posts, including War and Finance, but ultimately Caballero agreed to only four—Justice, Industry, Commerce, and Health—all of which were less consequential to the military and political issues with which the CNT-FAI was most concerned. The Ministry of Commerce was broken down into two ministries—Commerce and Industry—so that the anarchosyndicalists could have four posts instead of three. On November 3 the CNT-FAI agreed to these demeaning terms. The next day the Confederación entered the republican government. Federica Montseny became Minister of Health; Juan García Oliver, Minister of Justice; Juan López, an old *treintista*, Minister of Commerce; and Juan Pieró, an anarchist in name only, Minister of Industry.

This development had a profound impact upon the Spanish libertarian movement. Some "influential militants" resolutely defended the move as realistic and practical, a much-needed alteration in libertarian ideology dictated by circumstances of civil war and the need for foreign assistance. Diego Abad de Santillán rhapsodized over the new government as embodying a quasi-libertarian outlook toward social affairs. Many rank-and-file CNT-FAI militants, especially FAI members, however, regarded it as a major breach of principle, nullifying the basic common principle of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. Doubtless the CNT-FAI leaders believed that by entering the Catalan and republican governments they could ensure that the gains of the revolution were preserved. But in fact the very opposite of their intention occurred: by participating in each government, they legitimated it and all the actions it took to abort the revolution and reinstate a bourgeois regime. At the same time, having made this most important of capitulations, they would find the lesser capitulations that followed easier to make.

## THE BATTLE FOR MADRID

On October 23, as Franco's troops were reaching the outskirts of Madrid and preparing to attack the city, Junker planes from Nazi Germany



appeared in the sky and began to bombard the capital. The fall of Madrid seemed imminent, despite the air victory of Soviet fighter planes over the German Junkers on November 2. Concluding that the capital could not be defended, the Caballero government on November 6—two days after the CNT-FAI had entered its ranks—made haste to abandon Madrid for the coastal safety of Valencia. It would never return to Madrid.

The new CNT-FAI ministers joined their colleagues in the flight, leaving Madrid in the control of republican officers and civilian administrative committees. Cipriano Mera, a noted anarchosyndicalist leader, had tried to persuade the government not to leave: "its presence in Madrid," he declared, "can be of great moral value to the people and can help to change the situation in our favor ... The departure of the government ... is a shameful flight."<sup>10</sup> Disgusted, Mera remained behind and joined other army officers in defending the city, which now became the focal point of the civil war and its legendary battleground.

The *madrileños* themselves proved to be as courageous as Mera. In the months following the Nationalist rebellion, thousands of refugees from Andalusia and Extremadura had poured into the capital and described the brutal repression that the Army of Africa had inflicted on the communities it vanquished. That Franco was using Moorish troops to fight Spaniards was repugnant to most ordinary people in a country whose identity was grounded in the Reconquista. As his troops drew near Madrid, Franco broadcast a declaration that *madrileños* who remained indoors during the attack would not be harmed—from which many inferred that his ruthless Moorish troops would massacre all resisters, civilian and military alike, as they had done ever since the capture of Seville.

Most *madrileños* resolved to resist. The various Popular Front parties formed a Madrid Defense Council to defend the city. Men, women, and even children, erected barricades from paving stones and installed machine guns in windows. Women prepared boiling water to pour from their windows onto the Nationalist troops below. Metalworkers produced armaments, albeit primitive ones. As the Nationalists approached the capital, the people of Madrid in huge numbers steelled themselves to prevent the invaders from taking a single street, let alone a neighborhood. The "people in arms" became a visible reality as *madrileños* of all sorts took up weapons to defend their city against the Nationalists.

The Nationalist attack began on November 7. *Madrileños* flocked by the tens of thousands to their positions and fought with extraordinary heroism. The next day the Communist-controlled Eleventh International Brigade arrived in the city with the most modern Soviet arms and trained

military advisers, which they deployed on Madrid's behalf. The International Brigade and the Communists' Fifth Regiment unquestionably played a major role in the defense of the city, but during the first ten days of fighting it was the *madrileños* and the militias who performed what had seemed impossible: they halted the advance of the ruthless Army of Africa.

A very traditional general, Franco—when confronted with intransigent resistance—fought with a strategy that dated back to the First World War: he had his forces dig in at their most forward positions with trenches and barbed wire. The *madrileños*, emulating their opponents, did the same, and over the next few months the two sides exchanged machine-gun fire, grenades, mortars, and epithets, but the location of the front remained basically static. Indeed, at the end of the civil war, the lines remained very much where they had been in November 1936. In the meantime, the Nationalists shifted their attention to the conquest of the Basque Country.

## CATALONIA: THE EXCLUSION OF THE POUM

But some of the ugliest fighting took place behind the lines, between the Stalinists and their radical opponents. After the republican government arrived in Valencia, the PCE initiated a campaign to crack down on the independent Left. Its first target was the POUM—whose loyalty to Marxist principles, revolutionary commitment, theoretical stature, and dedication to the working class far exceeded that of the Communists. Denouncing Stalinism as a "Thermidorian" repudiation of Bolshevism, the POUM sharply criticized Stalin's regime in Moscow—which was then in the process of purging and murdering the Russian revolutionaries of 1917 through the ongoing Moscow trials. This stance was immensely courageous in 1935 and 1936, when Stalin was engaged in wooing liberal opinion with appeals to the "unity" of all antifascist forces.

On November 18 *La Batalla*, the POUM organ, openly accused the PCE and the PSUC of trying to suppress the POUM and blamed the Russians for attempting to stifle the proletarian revolution in Spain and elsewhere. Such criticism was intolerable to the Stalinists; in Catalonia the PSUC portrayed *poumistas* as Trotskyists and paid "agents of fascism"—both demonstrable falsehoods. That Trotsky himself had denounced the POUM for entering the Caballero government—and thereby deviating from his tactical regimen—counted for nothing; the POUM, the Stalinists declared, was a criminal organization that had to be extirpated not only politically



but physically. Like their compatriots throughout the world, Spanish Stalinists were making political dissent into a criminal activity.

Their first move was to oppose the inclusion of the POUM in the Madrid Defense Council. Then on November 24 in Catalonia the PSUC demanded that the POUM be excluded from the Generalidad Council and that a new government be formed that had "plenary powers" to issue decrees without accountability. The PSUC, in effect, was demanding a Stalinist dictatorship. Companys and the Esquerra rallied to the proposal as a means for taming the revolution, but the CNT-FAI councilors objected strenuously. For three weeks they bitterly opposed the PSUC's provocative proposal; indeed, the political warfare between the two brought the Council's activities to a standstill.

Finally, on December 12 Prime Minister Tarradellas declared that the cabinet was in a "state of crisis" and suspended its deliberations. That same day, however, PSUC secretary Juan Comorera not only repeated his party's demand but unabashedly added another—namely, that the CNT-dominated Defense Secretariat (which controlled the militias) and the Security Junta (which controlled the *patrullas de control*) be dissolved. That is, in addition to the elimination of the POUM, he called for the elimination of the armed forces that defended the revolution behind the lines.

In the end, on December 14, the CNT-FAI ministers struck a compromise with the Stalinists. They dropped their objection to the POUM's exclusion, in return for which the PSUC dropped its demand for the dissolution of the Defense Secretariat and the Security Junta. It would also allow the CNT-FAI to control the Defense Council (or Ministry), while the PSUC took over the Justice Council (or Ministry), which had hitherto been the domain of the POUM representative.

The CNT-FAI's compromise was anything but honorable. To make the changes—including the betrayal of the POUM—easier for the Confederación's rank-and-file to swallow, all the PSUC members of the Generalidad Council proceeded to change their party affiliation from PSUC to UGT, which made the new body appear to be a trade union or "syndicalist" government. *Solidaridad Obrera* heralded the change as a step toward "syndicalism," but the gesture deceived only the most naïve *cenetistas*. As *La Batalla*, the POUM's organ, warned on December 18, "Now that the [PSUC] has obtained its immediate goal [of removing the POUM], does anyone believe it will renounce its [counterrevolutionary] aims?"<sup>11</sup>

Far from renouncing its aims to undermine the revolution, the PSUC pursued them relentlessly and with respect to all revolutionary political

tendencies. It tried to persuade and seduce the four CNT-FAI ministers to help it put an end to the seemingly "uncontrollable" and "Trotskyist" elements who were promoting the authority of the revolutionary institutions. Relations between the four CNT-FAI ministers and the Soviet ambassador, Marcel Rosenberg, became astonishingly cozy, so much so that in December 1936 Federica Montseny moved into the Hotel Metropol in Valencia (where the Soviet embassy was housed) and, together with her colleagues, regularly joined Rosenberg for nightly refreshments and discussions. The Soviet ambassador apparently held forth on the policies that he thought the CNT-FAI should follow in Spain.\*

## THE COUNCIL OF ARAGON

Amid the plethora of collectives both industrial and rural in the republican zone, the revolution and the war produced an array of major economic problems that the new order was ill equipped to solve. The industrial collectives suffered from shortages of raw materials, a lack of technical skills, and above all, as we have seen, the impossibility of obtaining credit except by compromise with the republican government. Production underwent a steady decline. The agricultural collectives suffered from uncertain finances, a lack of machinery, and dependence upon nearby militias to obtain consistent peasant support. At the same time far too many new recruits to the CNT had only dim ideas about the nature of a libertarian economic order. Having spoken of syndicalism primarily in moral and ideological terms, the CNT-FAI had failed to educate its members about the realities that underlay any economy.

Some well-off and industrially advanced collectivized factories behaved cooperatively, aiding others with fewer resources and less advanced

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\* Montseny's nightly visits to the Soviet embassy and her friendship with Rosenberg are discussed in Agustín Guillaumón, *Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*, trans. Paul Sharkey (San Francisco, CA, and Edinburgh: A.K. Press, 1996), p. 113. Nor was she alone in consorting with Rosenberg. As she recalled for Burnett Bolloten in 1950 in a breathtaking admission, she had seen ministers "García Oliver and López coming and going from Rosenberg's quarters. Occasionally, Mariano R. Vázquez [the secretary of the CNT's national committee] was invited along with me, passing many a long hour in lazy conversation, drinking cup after cup of coffee or tea." How well known this was to CNT-FAI militants, who would soon be murdered by Russian NKVD agents, is not clear.



machinery. Because of the prevailing wartime scarcity, however, many of the collectivized factories found themselves competing with one another for raw materials, technology, labor, and even customers. The existence of some form of workers' control and the red and black banners flying atop their premises did not prevent many industrial collectives from competing in a capitalistic manner. As Gaston Leval observed:

Too often in Barcelona and Valencia, workers in each undertaking took over the factory, the works, or the workshop, the machines, raw materials, and taking advantage of the continuation of the money system and normal capitalist commercial relations, organised production on their own account, selling for their own benefit the produce of their labor ... There was not, therefore, true socialisation, but a workers' neo-capitalism, a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our Syndicates.<sup>12</sup>

Diego Abad de Santillán was even more critical of this privatistic tendency:

We are an anti-capitalist, anti-proprietor movement. We have seen in the private ownership of the instruments of labour, of factories, of the means of transport, in the capitalist apparatus of distribution, the primary cause of misery and injustice ... We have done something, although we have not done it well. In the place of the old proprietor we have put half a dozen proprietors who consider the factory the means of transport, the control of which they exercise as belonging to them, with the disadvantage that they do not always know how to organize an administration and establish a management superior to the old. No, we have not made the Revolution in Catalonia yet; and there is no need to create in Spain a new category of proprietors, but to socialize the private ownerships which characterized capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

On May 17, 1937, nearly a year after the uprising, a Barcelona CNT commission issued a report that discussed the same problem:

The immediate concern to collectivize everything, especially firms with monetary reserves, has revealed a utilitarian and petty bourgeois spirit among the masses ... By regarding each collective as private property, and not merely as its usufruct, the interests of the rest of the collective

have been disregarded [by the collectivists] ... The collectivized firms are solely concerned with their own liabilities, leading to an imbalance in the finances of other firms.<sup>14</sup>

Many collectives, the report stated, appeared to be influenced less by communism than by a "utilitarian and petty bourgeois spirit among the masses."<sup>15</sup>

To address the recurring problems in an egalitarian manner, the collectives—both industrial and agricultural—had to be solidly integrated into a political system that would place them under constraints. To this end, regional defense councils were formed in response to the CNT-FAI's September 15 proposal for a National Defense Council. Regional councils were established in Málaga, Valencia, and Asturias, and went on to function as coordinating bodies, knitting the collectives together, providing support for the local militia columns, providing services for the general population, and narrowing the gaps in wealth and amount of work required that existed among the collectives. The defense councils were governments, but they had the infrastructure of a freer society than any that the peasants had hitherto known.

By far the most important of these regional councils was the Council of Aragon. As we have seen, rural Aragon had been intensively collectivized by CNT militia columns in August 1936. The first step toward federating the Aragonese collectives was taken in October, when the CNT-FAI, under the aegis of its militias, took the initiative in establishing a regional federation of collectives for the province. The federation contained approximately 140,000 individual members in 275 collectives. Its statutes originally provided for the creation of an executive (or council) of eight members (some accounts say six), which was later increased to about fifteen. Although initially—and appropriately—it lacked "legal" recognition from the Madrid government, this Council of Aragon had responsibility for handling Aragon's political, social, and economic affairs.

The CNT-FAI proposed that all left political groups sit on the council in the following proportions: seven libertarians, two UGT members, and one republican. But the *ugetistas* and republicans declined the invitation, with the result that initially only anarcho-syndicalists held seats. Joaquín Ascaso (a cousin of the late anarcho-syndicalist and Durruti's old compatriot Francisco) became president. The council tried to standardize the distribution of food among collective members, replace money with ration booklets, and promote agriculture through experimental farms and agricultural schools. To re-establish order, it relied on the libertarian militias in the area and requisitioned food for the *milicianos*, which many



collectives apparently gave willingly when they could. In many important respects, then, the council was the government in liberated Aragon—a peasants' and workers' government.

Almost from the moment the council was formed, the Stalinists heaped intense vituperation upon it, condemning it as an illegal body and accusing it of a host of abuses ranging from forced collectivization to outright theft and assassinations. The council's all-anarchosyndicalist composition soon gave way to Communist and republican members as well. Nonetheless the Stalinists attacked Joaquín Ascaso so furiously that on October 31 the council's president was obliged to petition the Caballero government to legitimate its existence. Citing the "non-existence of civil government" in Aragon, Ascaso's petition pointedly warned of the presence of "columns, some of which are not subject to any real discipline"—that is, the PSUC columns in the area. The council was necessary, the petition stated, to avert economic chaos and create order—in short, to take on all "public tasks." The petition concluded by calling for the "endorsement of the government of the Republic in order to operate with maximum authority."<sup>16</sup>

Caballero's government, which by this time was aware of the growing menace of the Stalinists, responded sympathetically to Ascaso's petition, but did not acknowledge the Council of Aragon's legality and authority until late December, and even then, notes Peirats, "only after long and laborious negotiations."<sup>17</sup> The body was granted a mandate to exist as a legitimate arm of the national government.

Anarchist accounts of the revolution to this day celebrate the CNT-controlled Council of Aragon as one of the great achievements of libertarian collectivism. But it had many limitations. It was not a democratically elected body; it was notoriously high-handed in its treatment of the collectives and flawed by corruption. How well it provided anarchism with a successful fulfillment of its libertarian promise, especially after becoming an arm of the republican government, is arguable. The council, in all fairness, faced enormous difficulties as a result of the bloody civil war, but it fell far short of possessing all the libertarian features that have been attributed to it.

## THE STRUGGLE TO SUPPRESS THE COMMITTEES

Having successfully expelled the POUM from the Generalidad Council, and with its campaign against the Council of Aragon well under way, the

PSUC next resolved to eliminate the power of the committees' system—the neighborhood, police, militia, food, supply, and factory committees that still exercised considerable power in much of the republican zone and especially in Catalonia. The committees, which were dominated by the revolutionary and militant wings of the CNT-FAI, and to some extent the UGT, had more or less complete authority within their various jurisdictions. To the anarchosyndicalist militants, these committees were the basic units of the new society they were trying to create.

The Stalinists, however, saw the committees as obstacles to a bourgeois regime they were eager to establish. They demanded that the committees give way to old-style municipal councils, whose powers would be limited by the state; each locality would have a mayor chosen by the civil governor and hence a government appointee, accountable to Barcelona, not to the people. Membership in these top-down municipal councils would be shared by all the Popular Front parties and the trade unions in their pre-civil war proportions. Socialists and republicans eagerly supported the proposal, since this structure would give them more representation in the many areas where anarchosyndicalism was extremely popular.

After the CNT-FAI leaders entered the Generalidad Council in September, the Popular Front parties pressured the new ministers to institute this proposal. Finally, on October 9, the Generalidad Council officially ordered that the committees be replaced with municipal councils, made up of the Popular Front parties and trade unions in proportion to their representation in the Generalidad Council. When news of the decree reached the committees themselves, however, they simply disregarded it; nor could the Barcelona government enforce it, since the *patrullas de control* (workers' police squads) retained their armed power. A popular executive committee in the Levant, for example, simply refused to hand over its power to a municipal council appointed by the central government.

Enraged, the PSUC and the Esquerra joined forces to mount a bitter campaign in the fall and winter of 1936–37 to eliminate the Catalan committees and shift their power to municipal councils. On November 16 Companys eliminated 3,000 positions in local government and abolished the revolutionary tribunals run by the most militant revolutionary leftists. On December 22 Juan Comorera, the supply councilor, publicly blamed the supply committees for rising prices, and four days later he issued a decree suppressing all controls on highways and at village entrances. A December 31 decree reaffirmed the creation of the municipal councils. On January 7, 1937, Comorera decreed the outright dissolution of the



workers' supply committees, which had administered the purchasing of food for the cities from the peasants. The result was a distribution vacuum between the towns and the countryside. Wholesalers now began to raise the cost of basic staples, causing inflation to soar in Barcelona and other Catalan cities.

Despite all these efforts, however, the Catalan government was unable to liquidate the power of the committees. When the Caballero government tried to institute similar measures throughout the republican zone, it met with similar resistance; the revolutionary vitality that had been created in the street-fights of mid-July still ran high. The counterrevolution's next step could only be the use of force. The Catalan and republican governments would have to mobilize the various police forces under their control to eliminate the *patrullas de control* and the militias.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 201.
2. Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 390.
3. Quoted in Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 195.
4. Quoted *ibid.*
5. Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power during the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 378.
6. Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 203.
7. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 203.
8. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 207. Caballero's position here corresponded to that of the Stalinists.
9. Prieto quoted in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 188.
10. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 193.
11. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 386.
12. Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1975), pp. 227–8. Leval does not describe the problem of competition in detail—he mentions only one or two cases and suggests that other cases occurred. Thus he writes of “competition between the [collectivized] factories” (p. 291); mentions that “some industries were more prosperous while others were working at a loss” (p. 292); and complains of an “excessive laxity” shown by workers in some factories after the revolution (p. 303).
13. Diego Abad de Santillán, *After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain Today*, trans. Louis Frank (New York: Greenberg, 1937), p. 121.
14. Quoted in Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 163.
15. *Ibid.*

16. Quoted in José Peirats Valls, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham (East Sussex: Meltzer Press, 2001), Vol. 1, p. 174.
17. José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Mary Ann Slocombe and Paul Hollow (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 250.



## CHAPTER 65 The Third Revolution—and Defeat

### THE STRUGGLE OVER THE POLICE FORCES

During the revolution, as we have seen, militias and *patrullas de control* (workers' police squads) had been formed to defend the revolutionary power in the republican zone—and their revolutionary fervor and magnitude made them formidable. By contrast, the forces that defended the republican state—the Assault Guards (formed under the Second Republic) and the Civil Guards—were relatively weak. Many of the Guards had gone over to the Nationalists, while others simply deserted.

Both the republican government and the Generalidad Council attempted to create police forces of their own that could defeat the *patrullas* and any future revolutionary challengers. As early as August 31, 1936—barely a week after the workers had defeated the Nationalists in Barcelona—the liberal Giral government reorganized the old Civil Guard into a so-called National Republican Guard (NRG). After Giral's government gave way to Caballero's, Stalinist agents were particularly eager that it build up the regular police forces. On September 20 the Caballero government issued a decree authorizing the interior ministry to unite the vigilance organs of all parties and trade unions into a temporary unified corps, to be called the Militia for Rearguard Vigilance. With this decree Madrid banned all extragovernmental police forces, notably the *patrullas*, which were warned that "those who attempt to carry out the functions of the militia created by this decree without belonging to it will be considered rebels."<sup>1</sup> Communists, Socialists, republicans, and others eagerly joined the new police force, but the anarchosyndicalist militants remained wedded to their old *patrullas*.

Several months later, on December 15, the government established a

new National Security Council, which two weeks later dissolved the Militia for Rearguard Vigilance and created a new Security Corps. This corps had exclusive jurisdiction over public order. Members of the Vigilance Militia were then asked to apply for membership in the Security Corps within fifteen days. Meanwhile Caballero's Finance Minister, Juan Negrín, was engaged in building up the *carabineros*, which had traditionally been Spain's customs officials, into a police army, the Carabinero Corps, which by April 1937 had 40,000 well-armed members stationed along the French border. By the beginning of 1937 the old Assault Guards had been expanded to an equivalent strength. These government forces soon began to operate in many parts of the republican zone. Under orders from the government, they would enter a locality controlled by anarchosyndicalists, oust the libertarians, and take power themselves, eradicating the local *patrulla*. Once they had taken over several localities in a region, they would set up a regional council and install a government-appointed civil governor as council chairman.

While these measures met with success in some parts of the republican zone, in Catalonia the *patrullas* were extremely difficult to eradicate—despite the zeal of the Stalinists. In March the Generalidad's Council for Internal Security decreed that all *patrullas*—as well as Assault Guards—were to disband and their members were to enter a united internal security force. The CNT-FAI councilors in the Generalidad Council rejected the decree, but the UGT/PSUC and Esquerra were able to override their objections and on March 4, 1937, passed the decree. The once-combative CNT-FAI had been transformed into a loyal opposition within a bourgeois parliamentary state. While the libertarians tried to put a good face on its collaboration with the government, the anarchosyndicalist press, especially the FAI's *Tierra y Libertad*, ran banner-sized headlines denouncing the decree. So intense was their opposition that a government crisis ensued and the decree could not be implemented. For the time being the *patrullas* would continue in their existing form.

### THE STRUGGLE OVER MILITARIZATION

In the late summer of 1936 the republican militias fighting the Nationalists in central Spain suffered a series of major military defeats. Franco had thrown the Army of Africa against raw *milicianos*, many of whom scarcely knew how to handle a rifle. Although the *milicianos* fought with great personal bravado, defeat followed defeat, until it became



obvious that no amount of enthusiasm could compensate for lack of military training and experience.

As we have seen, the *milicianos* saw themselves as a revolutionary army and scorned the conventions of professional armies. They regarded any submission to military discipline as a surrender of libertarian principles. They refused to carry out commands whose rationale was not sufficiently explained to them or with which they disagreed. Disobedience commonly went unpunished.\* Early in the war *milicianos* would return home to rest for a day or two, then return to the front—resulting in disarray in the units. Militia units commonly quarreled over orders or improvised their own tactics, resulting in considerable disarray in various sectors of the front. The *milicianos* lacked military training, and their arms were obsolete and scarce; indeed, what few weapons they did have were unfamiliar to them, and they had little understanding of how to handle or maintain them.

Central coordination was lacking: each unit did what it thought was needed, whether in Aragon, on the central front, or in the Basque Country. Since each militia was the creation of a particular political party or trade union, militias did not necessarily cooperate with one another and indeed often competed with one another, at the cost of effective military action. Sometimes units of different political views were not averse to seeing each other fail in a military enterprise. Bravado that was not tactically coordinated with a larger strategy could lead to loss of life and defeat. As Durruti put it: "Until now we have had a very large number of different units, each with its leader, its men—they vary incredibly from day to day—its arsenal, its baggage train, its provisions, its own particular policy toward the inhabitants; and very often its own special way of interpreting the war too."<sup>2</sup>

By its very nature and function, however, no army can be fully libertarian. Obedience to orders is essential to military operations, and some degree of centralized command and coordination are necessary for winning battles. Clearly the Spanish militias had to be overhauled—but how? During the July revolution Caballero had strongly supported the militia system, but the defeats of August changed his view, as it did those

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\* In 1967, when I interviewed libertarian veterans of the Spanish militias, they scorned any suggestion that anarchist commitment had compensated for indiscipline. Admittedly, without the fervor that workers brought to the conflict, especially in urban warfare, Barcelona and Madrid would have been overrun by the Nationalists very quickly. But in field warfare the *milicianos* had very little chance to win out against professional soldiers.

of anarchosyndicalists like Durruti and Cipriano Mera. The Communists, in turn, condemned the amateurism of the militias and demanded that they be "militarized," by which they meant that all party and union militias should be merged into a single unified, conventional force. Columns should be converted into army units, they argued, all of which should be placed under a unified general staff. Rank and privilege should be restored; the war ministry should appoint officers, reintroduce differential pay rates, and coordinate supplies and equipment; soldiers should be subjected to severe punishment for disobedience. The Communists proposed calling this force the Popular Army—a euphemism intended to make such "militarization" less unpalatable to the libertarians. However, militarization was to have the effect of liquidating the armed forces of the revolution.

A few weeks after he became prime minister, Caballero, and even Cipriano Mera, accepted the Stalinist view: the "Spanish Lenin" officially announced that the militias were to be militarized and the Popular Army created. On October 29 he issued decrees that made all able-bodied men liable for conscription; subjected all militias to regular military discipline; created politically mixed units organized conventionally; and established a general staff. The CNT-FAI ministers had little difficulty agreeing that militarization was necessary—a shift in position that produced an uproar among rank-and-file libertarian *milicianos*. *Cenetistas* passionately opposed militarization, not to speak of the conscription that Caballero had ordered, interpreting both moves as an endeavor to disarm the revolution. Most anarchosyndicalist units initially refused to militarize. The CNT-FAI's National Committee sent delegations to the fronts and to Barcelona to try to persuade the militias to accept militarization, but *milicianos* at column assemblies angrily shouted them down.

One Communist unit, however, stood out above all the others as the model for a militarized unit: the Fifth Regiment, which had been formed in August 1936 by foreign Communists. Its professional officers were subordinated to a centralized command. Its soldiers were well trained, disciplined, and equipped with the best weapons the Russians could provide. Inasmuch as this nonrevolutionary unit was highly efficient and capable of winning difficult conflicts, it attracted professional officers and recruits of middle-class backgrounds. By the end of September the Fifth Regiment had 30,000 troops; by December it had 60,000. The regiment became a school for military education in Spain, giving rise to similarly disciplined units, and its military successes did much to persuade other units to accept militarization.

Meanwhile, the republican forces were becoming heavily dependent



on Soviet arms, and ominously, the Communists were gaining important posts in the Caballero government's War Ministry. Stalinists soon came to dominate the ministry: a situation that gave them control over the distribution of arms, ammunition, and provisions. Favoritism became rampant: the best weapons and supplies were given to Communist and other militarized units, while anarchosyndicalist and other nonmilitarized units were starved for functional weapons and adequate provisions.

In January 1937 the Fifth Regiment set the standard for "militarized" behavior by disbanding and merging its battalions into the new Popular Army. Its troops were dispersed into "mixed brigades," made up of troops from non-Communist and Communist units alike. Awed by the Popular Army's discipline and efficiency, many recruits—especially in central Spain—began to accept conventional discipline, trained officers, and military etiquette. Once-egalitarian comrades became privileged superiors, and intraunit democracy was replaced with hierarchy, command, and obedience. In February 1937, when Málaga—an anarchosyndicalist bastion—fell to the Nationalists, as a result of internal political divisions, the *CNT* periodical editorialized that *milicianos* should obey their commanders' orders or else face execution.

In the anarchosyndicalist sectors like the Aragon front, however, the militarization campaign was less successful. Here *CNT*-*FAI* units acquiesced in form more than in fact. They allowed their old militia names, which had expressed their political coloration, to be changed and be replaced by divisional numbers. The erstwhile Durruti Column was renamed the 26th Division, the Francisco Ascaso Column became the 28th, and so forth. But beyond this superficial alteration, the Aragonese units refused to disband and merge into the Popular Army, or to form so-called "mixed brigades," let alone bow to nonanarchist officers appointed by the War Ministry. On the contrary, most *CNT*-*FAI* *milicianos* were determined to maintain their units' autonomy and political identity. The Caballero government, which by now mistrusted the Stalinists, quietly accepted this double game and did not push further compliance. Accordingly, even when anarchosyndicalist units ostensibly merged into the Popular Army, they did not fully militarize but remained under the control of the *CNT*-*FAI*—whose perplexed leaders had no idea what to do with them.

By the winter of 1937 the Popular Army was dominated by Communists, and the interference of Russian "advisers" in Spanish military affairs was pervasive. Communist officials in the War Ministry either persuaded or coerced other officials into becoming PCE members. Marcel Rosenberg, the Soviet ambassador, unabashedly "advised"

Caballero which officers to promote or replace, usually on the basis of party affiliation. As Luis Araquistáin, a close associate of Caballero, later recalled:

More than an ambassador, [Rosenberg] acted like a Russian viceroy in Spain. He paid daily visits to Largo Caballero, sometimes accompanied by Russians of high rank, military or civilian. During the visits, which lasted hours on end, Rosenberg tried to give the head of the Spanish government instructions as to what he should do in order to direct the war successfully. His suggestions, which were practically orders, related mainly to army officers. Such and such generals and colonels should be dismissed and others appointed in their place; their recommendations were based, not on the competence of the officer, but on their political affiliations and on the degree of their amenability to the Communists.<sup>3</sup>

A Communist political commissar was attached to each army unit, while a central commissariat scrutinized army units and ferreted out "unreliable" elements who failed to toe the party line. These political commissars seemed ubiquitous and created a chilling atmosphere of suspicion and fear even among the combatants at the front. The Stalinists and the worker-militants of the militias were headed ineluctably toward their final confrontation.

## THE FRIENDS OF DURRUTI

In Catalonia the anarchosyndicalist militias wholeheartedly rejected militarization, resisting not only Caballero's October 29 decrees but a subsequent decree in November that would have allowed the government to seize the tens of thousands of weapons possessed by the *CNT*-*FAI* and the *POUM*. They deeply resented the steps that the Caballero government and the Generalidad Council had taken to liquidate the militias, impose conscription, and foist strict discipline on the republican forces.

The Generalidad Council was especially disconcerted by the Aragonese militias, an independent revolutionary force that clearly seemed willing to place itself at the disposal of the Barcelona proletariat in the event of another uprising. As long as these militias—and the *patrullas de control*—were answerable to the *CNT*-*FAI*, any counterrevolutionary decrees that the Generalidad Council issued would be worthless. Comorera and his *PSUC* associates called insistently for the militarization of the anarcho-



syndicalist militias, pressuring Francisco Isgleas, the CNT-FAI head of the Generalidad's Defense Council, to compel the militias to accept the discipline of the Popular Army.

At the end of February 1937 the PSUC established a pressure group, the Committee for the Popular Army, to promote militarization in Catalonia. On its first day of existence this Stalinist committee decided, as a show of strength, to stage a full-scale military parade. The CNT-FAI viewed both the new committee and its parade as brazen challenges to the authority of the Defense Council, which it controlled. Isgleas threatened to resign as that council's head, but the crisis was averted when the CNT-FAI leaders accepted a shrewd PSUC proposal to make the Committee for the Popular Army into a legal institution auxiliary to the Defense Council. This was a victory for the PSUC because it gave official recognition and structural power to a previously ex-officio committee, which could then become a power base from which the Stalinists could exert real pressure on the CNT-FAI leadership of the Defense Council.

The CNT-FAI militias continued to refuse to accept militarization, but soon encountered a major problem: like all the republican militias, they needed arms, ammunition, and provisions. At the beginning of March, seeing no alternative, the Generalidad Council consented to submit to the Caballero government's decrees, and officially subordinated the Catalan militias to the War Ministry. Isgleas set March 18 as the call-up date when Catalan *milicianos* were expected to report for duty in the Popular Army. On hearing the news, about a thousand enraged *milicianos* at Gelsa, on the Aragon front, walked away from their positions on the front, weapons in hand, and returned to Barcelona, where they formed a group they called the Friends of Durruti (Los Amigos de Durruti). Their leaders were an assortment of worker-intellectuals and FAI militants, including the theorist and journalist Jaime Balius, a perceptive student of the French Revolution who saw close similarities between the Paris of 1789 and Barcelona in 1936.

During the preceding months the Friends had been ever more outraged by the behavior of the CNT-FAI ministers in the Caballero government, denouncing them as "circumstantialists" who had betrayed their basic libertarian and antistatist principles to collaborate with the government (invoking "circumstances" to justify their behavior). The basic reason for their behavior, Balius insisted, was that they disregarded the importance of theory.

The CNT was utterly devoid of revolutionary theory. We did not have a concrete program. We had no idea of where we were going. We had

lyricism aplenty: but when all is said and done, we did not know what to do with our masses of workers or how to give substance to the popular effusion which erupted inside our organizations. By not knowing what to do, we handed the revolution on a platter to the bourgeoisie and the marxists who support the farce of yesteryear. What is worse, we allowed the bourgeoisie a breathing space: to return, to reform and to behave as would a conqueror.<sup>4</sup>

Balius, Pablo Ruiz, and their comrades understood that the CNT-FAI must seize political as well as economic power; hence the Friends' program demanded that power be shifted from the state to the CNT-FAI itself. A reempowered Confederación, they believed, must overthrow the Generalidad Council and replace it with the network of committees that had originally guided the revolution. The committees, they insisted, must be coordinated by a council that would restructure the economy and polity along syndicalist lines. Their manifesto of April 14 declared:

The CNT and the FAI, being the organizations that reflect the people's concerns, must come up with a revolutionary way out of the dead-end street . . . We have the organs that must supplant a State in ruins. The Trade Unions and Municipalities must take charge of economic and social life.<sup>5</sup>

This municipalist emphasis was far ahead of its time. Revolutionary socialism's emphasis on the proletariat had long blinded it to the need for a broader, more communalist program in which a democratic municipality would be the arena for the creation of a more expansive society.

Support for the Friends was passionate but limited in scope. Although its membership has been reported at 40,000, Ruiz maintained in 1967 that the group seldom exceeded 300 to 500 committed members. Moreover, its influence was minimal outside Barcelona and the Aragon front.\* *El Amigo del Pueblo* (The Friend of the People) was published in print-runs no

\* Pablo Ruiz, interview with the author, Paris, August 1967. In his memoir *El Eco de los Pasos*, García Oliver maligned Ruiz as someone who was "always . . . looked upon with suspicion" by comrades and did not "belong to any group, neither of action nor of affinity." I believe that this characterization is far from the truth. Ruiz, who fought on the Aragon front, was dedicated to his principles as a leading figure in the Friends of Durruti. Unfortunately García Oliver's aspersion is quoted approvingly in Robert Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Janus, 1999), Vol. 2, p. 928. A more sympathetic—and accurate—portrayal of Ruiz appears in Guillamón's *Friends of Durruti*.



higher than 20,000, and only twelve issues seem to have appeared. Still, the Friends were not alone in constituting a "revolutionary opposition" that called for a continuation of the revolution. They had an ally in the POUM, which after its exclusion from the Generalidad Council became an explicit revolutionary opposition and sought alliances with CNT-FAI militants (as opposed to their compromised leaders). In early April the POUM called for a revolutionary reorganization of the government: the legislature had to be dissolved, declared one of its statements, and replaced by a constituent assembly based on factory committees and peasants' and soldiers' assemblies. A third component of the revolutionary opposition was the revolutionary youth movement: the POUM youth group Juventud Comunista Ibérica (JCI), the left wing of the anarchosyndicalist youth group Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertaria (FIJL, or Libertarian Youth), and some left militants of the Communist youth group (JSU). On February 14 as many as 14,000 members of these groups met in Barcelona and established what they called a Revolutionary Youth Front.

What this revolutionary opposition significantly lacked, however, was solid organization, discipline, and above all an accountable leadership. To undertake a libertarian third revolution, the Barcelona proletariat needed a coherent theory (as Balius insisted), a revolutionary strategy (such as the POUM demanded), and a revolutionary leadership (which libertarian outlooks often deprecated). These shortcomings would cost the revolutionary movement dearly and lead in the end to tragedy.

## THE MAY DAYS

In the late winter and early spring of 1937 Catalonia was experiencing an ever-worsening economic crisis. Between the July 1936 revolution and March 1937 the cost of living doubled, while wages rose a mere 15 percent. The distribution system by which the countryside fed the cities had broken down. The minimum allotments promised by the ration cards were often not forthcoming, and as lines at bakeries lengthened, the black market was thriving. On April 14 the women of Barcelona marched to protest against the high price of food. Many workers throughout Catalonia believed that their revolutionary gains were significantly endangered, especially by the Communists. Accordingly, even as the republican and Catalan governments tried to rein in the revolution, Barcelona's working class was filled with a growing anxiety and even anger.

That spring the struggle over the power of the committees, the *patrullas de control*, and the militias—and ultimately the armed populace—came to a head. On March 3 the Generalidad Council dissolved the Security Junta, which held responsibility for the *patrullas* and was dominated by the CNT-FAI. On March 12 the Caballero government again ordered all parties and trade unions to disarm and turn their weapons over to the government. *Cenetistas* and *poumistas* in Catalonia flatly refused to do so or to submit to the ongoing conscription for the Popular Army.

On April 7 the PSUC issued a "victory plan" for Catalonia that consisted of five points: the creation of a Popular Army of Catalonia, which would be part of the Popular Army; the reorganization of the military into politically "mixed brigades"; the nationalization (rather than collectivization) of all war industries; the establishment of an internal police force; and the handover of all weapons to the government. Once again the anarchosyndicalist press expressed the strong objections of the CNT-FAI rank-and-file. On April 10 *Tierra y Libertad*, the last bastion of pure anarchism in Catalonia, called on workers to "crush the counter-revolution," while on April 17 *Solidaridad Obrera* warned, "Let no one . . . think that the Spanish anarchists will allow themselves to be trampled underfoot by their so-called comrades." *Tierra y Libertad* predicted, "They will find us on a war footing." On the same day, the 17th, the Libertarian Youth appealed to young men to "forge the military organization of the Revolution . . . form the cadres of the revolutionary youth battalions."<sup>6</sup>

As the libertarians prepared for armed struggle, the Spanish Stalinists, guided by the Comintern, Russia's NKVD agents, and Ambassador Rosenberg, engaged in a massive campaign against all libertarians. The Stalinist press anathematized libertarians as "*incontrolados*" if they were anarchosyndicalists or as "Trotskyists" if they were Poumists; the word *incontrolado* became a generic designation for anyone who demanded a continuation and extension of the July revolution.

Finally, in mid-April Juan Negrín, the Minister of Finance in the Caballero government (a right-wing Socialist with strong Stalinist sympathies), sent a *carabinero* force northward to reclaim the border towns that CNT-FAI-led workers' committees had been holding since the revolution. On April 17 the *carabineros* arrived at the border town of Puigcerdá and reclaimed control of the Franco-Spanish frontier. This provocation was too much for the libertarian militants. A week later they went into action and tried to kill the Communist police chief, Rodríguez Salas, whom they regarded as their nemesis. Their *atentado* failed, but on the next day in Molins de Llobregat (a town near Barcelona) the head of the Municipal Workers' Federation, Roldán Cortada, a pro-Communist



UGT member, was killed by persons unknown. The PSUC instantly blamed Cortada's murder on the anarchosyndicalists, and both the Stalinist and the republican press made Cortada into a martyr, bellowing with indignation against CNT-FAI "*incontrolados*." For its part the CNT-FAI condemned the murder and vociferously denied any role in the assassination, calling for a full inquiry and suggesting that Communists themselves had committed the crime because Cortada had disagreed with some of their policies. In fact, the judge who heard the case found no evidence that anarchosyndicalists had murdered Cortada.

Cortada, however, became more of an asset to the Stalinists in death than he had been in life. A few days after his assassination, on April 27, his remains were borne reverentially to his grave in a massive funeral procession composed of middle-class PSUC supporters, republicans, and workers mobilized by the UGT. Provocatively, PSUC-controlled armed police units and troops marched to the cemetery in fully regaled military detachments. Along the way the PSUC transformed the procession from a funeral into a demonstration against the CNT-FAI and the POUM, continuing for three and a half hours. *Treball*, the PSUC organ, hailed the procession as a "plebiscite" and insisted that the "antifascist masses must unite ... against the enemy within, against those we call uncontrollables."<sup>7</sup>

The PSUC was not alone in displaying its strength at Cortada's funeral—the Generalidad Council did its part by decreeing that the CNT-FAI and POUM must give up their arms within 48 hours. The next day, April 28, Generalidad police raided Molins de Llobregat, where Cortada had been killed, and arrested eight anarchosyndicalists on suspicion, bringing them back to Barcelona in handcuffs. Meanwhile in Puigcerdà, where the *carabineros* were trying to retake control of the French border towns from the committees, fighting broke out, and Antonio Martín, an anarchist militant who had headed the town's revolutionary committee and led the local collectivization drive, was killed, along with several of his comrades. During the fighting the *carabineros* seized Puigcerdà and other frontier towns—thereby preventing the CNT-FAI from importing weapons direly needed by Barcelona's defense committees and by the *milicianos* on the Aragon front.

The Assault Guards and the Civil Guards zealously endeavored to carry out the Generalidad Council's latest decree disarming workers in Barcelona. They stopped workers on the slightest suspicion, searched them, and deprived them of any weapons they were carrying. The city's defense committees saw these searches as a direct attack on the revolution, and on April 29 sent out groups of armed workers to occupy

the streets in their own show of proletarian strength. At six that evening the Generalidad Council met and, as if it mattered to anyone, decided to suspend all its meetings until all armed groups were removed from the streets. On April 30 there were skirmishes between Barcelona workers and police.

On May 1 the POUM executive hailed the action of the defense committees and boldly called for a Revolutionary Workers' Front composed of all working-class organizations to complete the revolution and at the same time continue the war against Franco. That same day the Friends of Durruti were plastering the city with posters calling for all power to the working class, an appeal publicly supported by the POUM. The next day, *Solidaridad Obrera*, reflecting the workers' refusal to surrender their weapons to a counterrevolutionary government, urged, "Let no one permit himself to be disarmed!"<sup>8</sup> That evening, May 2, gunshots could be heard in Barcelona's outskirts and workers' quarters. So high were the tensions running in the Catalan capital that only a minor provocation was needed to bring the Barcelona proletariat into the streets *en masse*.

The provocation came on Monday, May 3, 1937. At 3 p.m. three truckloads of heavily armed Assault Guards—led by Rodríguez Salas, the hated Communist police chief—pulled up before the ten-storey Telefónica building on the Plaza de Catalunya. The Telefónica, the communications center of Barcelona, had been captured by anarchosyndicalist workers during the July 19 uprising, and they had held it ever since, collectivizing the company (a situation legitimated by the collectivization decree of October 24, 1936) and controlling the city's telephone operations. The CNT-FAI's occupation of the Telefónica had enormous symbolic importance as a demonstration of the proletariat's military prowess. For the anarchosyndicalists the Telefónica also had a military use—it allowed them to eavesdrop on the telephone calls of the revolution's opponents.

The Assault Guards, aiming to seize the building for the government, rushed through the entrance doors and disarmed the CNT-FAI guards dozing on the first few floors. But as they ascended the stairs, they were met with rifle and machine-gun fire. Workers in the upper storeys spread word of the assault by telephone, and the news quickly circulated throughout the city. Unprompted by any cues or signals from their leadership, CNT-FAI worker-militants quickly staged a general strike, which ignited into a rebellion against the government. Assault Guards either surrendered to CNT-FAI forces or else remained in their barracks. Within a few hours of the attack on the Telefónica, the workers controlled about 80 percent of Barcelona, especially its residential areas, leaving only



the police barracks, party headquarters, and government buildings in the city center in the Generalidad's control.

By evening hundreds of barricades had appeared in the streets surrounding the city center, and well-armed militants established search centers at strategic points. George Orwell was dazzled by the building of barricades along the Ramblas, and his eyewitness description resembles Alexander Herzen's account of the Parisian insurrection of June 1848:

The Barcelona streets are paved with square cobbles, easily built up into a wall, and under the cobbles is a kind of shingle that is good for filling sand-bags. The building of those barricades was a strange and wonderful sight ... With the kind of passionate energy Spaniards display when they have definitely decided to begin upon any job of work, long lines of men, women, and quite small children were tearing up the cobblestones, hauling them along in a hand-cart that had been found somewhere, and staggering to and fro under heavy stacks of sand ... In a couple of hours the barricades were head-high, with riflemen posted at the loopholes.<sup>9</sup>

As *La Batalla*, the POUM paper, described it the following morning (Tuesday, May 4): "The barricades of freedom have returned throughout the city. The spirit of July 19 has taken Barcelona anew. The majority of towns in Catalunya have echoed the events in the capital. The working class is strong and will know how to smash any attempts at counter-revolution."<sup>10</sup>

News of the uprising mobilized the Friends of Durruti, the POUM, and the Libertarian Youth. At 7 p.m. on Monday, May 3, the POUM's regional committee (consisting of Andrés Nin, Juan Andrade, and Julián Gorkín) and leaders of the Libertarian Youth made their way to the Casa CNT, the local Confederación headquarters, to meet with the CNT-FAI's regional committees. Everyone present concurred that the uprising had been a true proletarian initiative. The *poumistas* appealed to the *cenetistas* to join them in providing the masses with revolutionary leadership: "Either we place ourselves at the head of the movement in order to destroy the internal enemy," Gorkín said, "or else the movement will collapse and the enemy will destroy it. We must make our choice: revolution or counterrevolution."<sup>11</sup> The Libertarian Youth agreed wholeheartedly. But the local CNT-FAI leaders demurred—so accustomed to collaboration with the Generalidad Council were they by now that they were willing to call at most only for the removal of Rodríguez Salas as police chief. According to one account of this meeting, as paraphrased by Agustín Guillamón:

After lengthy and detailed analysis of the prospects for action on the part of the POUMists, Valerio Mas, on behalf of the CNT Regional Committee, thanked Nin, Andrade and Solano for a pleasant evening, reiterating several times that the debate and discussion had been highly interesting, and that they should do it again some time.

But no agreement was reached or made. The shortsightedness and political ineptitude of the CNT personnel defied belief: they thought that it was enough that they should have bared their teeth, that the barricades had to come down now, because the Stalinists and Republicans, having tested the strength of the CNT, would not dare go beyond that. On making his way back to the Ramblas, and dodging the barricades, Andrade could not help repeating over and over to himself: "A pleasant evening! A pleasant evening!"<sup>12</sup>

As Gorkín later recalled, "We [the POUM] placed ourselves on the side of the movement ... [but] we did not feel ourselves physically or spiritually strong enough to take the lead in organizing the masses for resistance."<sup>13</sup> The CNT-FAI would have been strong enough—it had a tradition and considerable prestige among the Catalan workers—but its leaders were frightened by the militancy of their own followers and tried to quell it. Indeed, the Confederación became the government's most effective agent in ending the insurrection.

Institutionally the uprising was based not on the trade unions but on the neighborhood defense committees, which had remained in existence since the July revolution and seem to have coordinated the street fighting. On May 4 the fighting was fierce, with machine guns, hand-grenades, dynamite, and mortars. Tens of thousands of workers stood behind fixed barricades, awaiting a signal from the CNT-FAI leadership to launch a concerted attack on the administrative heart of Barcelona. Aware of their overwhelming superiority in men and arms, they must have realized that they could reasonably hope to capture the city center, including the Generalidad Palace: as Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz have pointed out, the CNT could have "taken power ... had it wanted to, in less than twenty-four hours."<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, at 11 a.m. in Valencia, the Stalinists pressed Caballero to order troops into Catalonia to seize military control of the region. Reluctant to comply immediately, Caballero asserted that he would do so only if hostilities were still going on that evening. In Barcelona Companys took to the airwaves and appealed to the workers for calm: "Lay down your arms. It is fascism that we must destroy."<sup>15</sup> Behind the scenes, however, Companys made an urgent request to Caballero to



send troops to Barcelona, even to use war planes to bomb the Casa CNT.

Ignoring the Catalan president's request, Caballero instead asked the representatives of the CNT-FAI's National Committee (and of the UGT executive committee) to board a plane immediately and fly from Valencia to Barcelona in an effort to end the hostilities. Juan García Oliver and Mariano Vázquez (the CNT national secretary) promptly did so, and that afternoon took turns at the microphone of the Generalidad's radio station, energetically imploring the workers—who were mainly *cenetistas*—to desist from advancing on the city center. "Put down your arms and embrace as brothers! . . . Let there be peace among us! War to the death against fascism!"<sup>16</sup> The signal that the workers were awaiting from their leaders thus never came. What they heard instead were pious CNT pleas for a ceasefire. Frozen into a defensive stance, they were left to exchange furious but sporadic and fruitless gunfire with the PSUC and the police.

In Valencia the Communist ministers were still insisting that Caballero send troops to occupy Catalonia. That evening at a cabinet meeting they threatened to leave the government if the prime minister failed to issue such an order immediately. The CNT-FAI ministers, who had returned to Valencia for the evening, together with the republican ministers argued for hours with the PCE leaders. When the vote was taken, the Communists prevailed: the government would order the occupation of Catalonia the next day.

At noon on Wednesday, May 5, the Valencia government suspended Catalan autonomy under the emergency provisions of the republican constitution and appointed a government minister for Catalan affairs, as well as a new military commander and a new delegate of public order. All military and security forces were placed under the authority of these officials, thereby nullifying the Defense Council and the Security Junta, through which the CNT-FAI had controlled the militias and the *patrullas*, respectively.

Meanwhile, the workers remained at the barricades, appalled by their leaders' appeals for a ceasefire yet still hoping for a signal to rise. The CNT-FAI leaders—this time including Montseny—returned to Barcelona that morning and intensified their appeals to their followers to put down their arms and return to their jobs. As they moved among the barricades, beseeching the workers to end the insurrection, the revolutionary groups were appealing to the workers to rise. The Friends of Durruti issued a leaflet calling for "a revolutionary junta. Shooting of those responsible. No surrender of the streets. The revolution before everything"; the POUM, for its part, distributed a pamphlet insisting, "No compromise . . . This is the decisive moment. Next time it will be too late . . . Long live the

unity of action of the CNT-FAI-POUM."<sup>17</sup> But no CNT-FAI-POUM coalition could exist, as of the May 3 meeting, thanks to the timidity of the local *cenetista* leadership.

On May 5 the Friends of Durruti leadership apparently decided to circumvent the CNT-FAI and secretly met with the POUM executive committee to discuss the prospects of a joint seizure of power.\* But the meeting disappointed the Poumists, who were dismayed that the Friends were "unwilling to work directly upon CNT ranks and unseat the leadership, wishing only to influence the movement, with no more responsibility than that."<sup>18</sup> Here the limitations of the Friends as a revolutionary group became all too apparent. Rather than provide leadership to workers who were ready to seize power, they relied on working-class spontaneity to create an uprising, as if workers were somehow possessed of a revolutionary "intuition" that would impel them to establish a new society. In reality the workers waiting behind the Barcelona barricades desperately required leadership, and in their eyes only one organization had the prestige, resources, influence, and capability to lead them toward a definitive victory: the CNT-FAI.

The CNT-FAI's leaders appealed instead for a ceasefire, and the militants considered their actions nothing short of treachery. Here they were, being attacked by machine-gun fire, and García Oliver and Montseny were telling them not to shoot back. Instead of complying with this plea to abandon their own self-defense, they stood fast behind the barricades. Among those killed during the fighting on the night of May 5–6 was the venerable Camillo Berneri, an Italian anarcho-syndicalist who had been a harsh critic of the CNT-FAI's "influential militants" for their collaborationist policies.†

On May 6 the fighting continued mainly in the Plaza de Catalunya and the areas around the Generalidad Palace. Remarkably, the CNT-FAI masses had resisted the pleas of the "influential militants" for two days. But workers can hardly man barricades indefinitely—especially in the face of opposition from the very leaders whom they have idealized for

\* Ruiz, who was present at the meeting, informed me in 1967 that the POUM asked the Friends to take power, declaring that it would support the group. The Friends replied that the POUM had far more resources than the Friends did and that they would support the POUM if it took power. The POUM leaders, Ruiz declared, refused to take the initiative, and the meeting ended in an impasse.

† García Oliver and other "influential militants" later absurdly attributed Berneri's murder to fascist agents, thereby attempting to absolve the Stalinists of their role in this ugly affair. The various accounts of Berneri's murder are examined in Bolloten's *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 875–6.



years. At length the insurgent Barcelona proletariat, weary, disillusioned, and demoralized, with great reluctance forsook the barricades. To many workers, the CNT-FAI had been virtually sacred—as one militant had declared, it was “his womb and his tomb.” An inestimable number of insurgents simply tore up their CNT cards and returned to their homes in disgust. Even the POUM ceased its revolutionary appeals and urged the insurgents to return to work to avoid further loss of life. Finally on May 7 about 5,000 Assault Guards, sent from Valencia, entered Barcelona unopposed. They were reinforced by land and sea until, within a few days, 12,000 government troops were stationed in the region. The naval ministry dispatched warships, as did France and England, whose vessels appeared in Barcelona’s harbor.

An estimated 500 people were killed in the May events, and a further 1,500 wounded. The governments of the republican zone and of Catalonia, together with the Stalinists and the CNT-FAI ministers, had ended the May insurrection and all prospects for a successful third revolution. In the aftermath of the May events, the Stalinists carried out a counterrevolution with ruthless efficiency. In the process they destroyed the Spanish revolution itself—as well as the power of anarchosyndicalism in Catalonia, the bastion of Spain’s libertarian movement. Throughout this process the Stalinists’ work was made easier by the CNT-FAI leaders—who in 1933 and 1934 had supported a “cycle of insurrections” that had had far less chance of succeeding than the May insurrection.

## THE REPRESSION OF THE REVOLUTION

The government, controlled by the Communists, now unleashed all its power upon Catalonia’s revolutionary institutions. On May 13 the interior minister proclaimed that individuals and civilian organizations—such as trade unions, political parties, town councils, and defense committees—could no longer legally possess weapons. All firearms had to be turned into the official police authorities, or their owners would be considered subversive and punished. Licenses for pistols that had not been issued by the government were declared void. Anyone found with an illegal weapon would be prosecuted. Police immediately resumed their search of anarchosyndicalists’ homes and offices for weapons.

This time government forces not only confiscated arms but arrested hundreds of Poumists and anarchosyndicalists and shot them in uncounted numbers. It instituted a strict press censorship, shutting down

the independent left-wing periodicals and radio transmitters. On May 15 the government declared the revolutionary committees illegal and abolished them outright. The workers had hitherto ignored the Generalidad Council’s decree of October 9, which had legally dissolved the committees and replaced them with Popular Front municipal councils, but now they could no longer ignore the decree. Assault Guards and *carabineros* dispersed some committees by physical force, and on June 4 the Esquerra councilor of the interior, Carlos Martí Freed (who had been appointed by Valencia), effectively dissolved the *patrullas de control*. The committees were replaced by undemocratic municipal councils.

While it was stripping the Catalan workers of their leaders, their arms, their press freedom, their committees, and their patrols, the government went after the POUM in earnest. In early May the Communists pressured the Caballero government to suppress the POUM as a legal organization, blaming it for the May uprising. On May 9 José Díaz, the PCE secretary, declared that the “Trotskyists” and “fascists” of the POUM had inspired the “criminal putsch in Catalonia”<sup>19</sup> and demanded their punishment. Less than a week later, on May 15, Rosenberg asked Caballero to ban the POUM.

Caballero, however, firmly refused to suppress the POUM—or any other authentic workers’ organization—as a matter of principle. The CNT-FAI ministers were obliged to agree. In the preceding months Caballero had repeatedly displeased the Communists by rejecting their various proposals to merge the Socialist Party with the PCE, to give up his hold on the War Ministry, to allow the Russians to make military decisions, and to institute a Stalinist police terror. Now his objection to suppressing the POUM induced the Communists to decide that Caballero had to be removed from his offices once and for all.

In a cabinet meeting on May 15 Jesús Hernández and Vicente Uribe, two Communist ministers, demanded the outlawing of the POUM and the arrest of its leaders as “fascists”; should the cabinet fail to act, they would resign. Caballero again refused. Denouncing Caballero as incompetent, the two Communist ministers rose from their seats and left the room and the government; three moderate Socialists joined them, producing a governmental crisis. Subsequent machinations of the Communists and moderate Socialists made it impossible for Caballero to form a new government. He refused to accept Communists into his new government, whereupon the Socialist Party and the Republican Left declared that they would not participate in any government in which the Communists were absent.

Ultimately the Communists’ maneuver succeeded in its principal aim:



that of removing Caballero as prime minister. On May 17 President Azaña replaced the old man with a moderate Socialist, Juan Negrín. Negrín had been chosen by the Communists as being suitably pliable, and the government he formed comprised sycophants who could be expected to comply with the Communists' wishes. The CNT-FAI was not included in the new government.

On May 28 the new government suppressed the POUM organ *La Batalla*, and on June 16 Barcelona's Communist police chief closed the POUM headquarters and arrested the party's executive committee, charging its members with spying for Franco. Among the arrested leaders was Andrés Nin, the POUM's principal leader, whom the Stalinists hoped to use for a "show trial," not unlike the ones occurring in Moscow. Under torture, they expected, Nin would confess to treason and espionage, just as Stalin was compelling the longtime Bolsheviks to do. But Nin, a man of extraordinary fortitude, apparently resisted Stalinist torture. In the end, unable to break him, and certainly unwilling to release him—his mangled body would have testified that he had been tortured—the Stalinists most likely killed him. His body was never recovered. The POUM leader had been a high-profile figure, widely known even outside Spain, and by August 1937 his disappearance had sparked an international outcry, demanding to know his whereabouts. The Stalinists absurdly replied that Nin (whom they nonsensically labeled a "fascist") had been abducted to safety by Gestapo agents.

The other POUM leaders proved equally unwilling to cooperate with Communist plans to use them for show trials. "The truth is," Alba and Schwartz observe, "that nobody confessed to anything, because there was simply nothing to confess. Not a single arrested P.O.U.M. member surrendered to the threats, the tortures, the offers—running the full gamut—that were intended to elicit confessions of things that had never happened."<sup>20</sup> In October 1938 the POUM leaders were tried in court on charges of treason, for attempting to overthrow the Caballero government during the May uprising, and for being "counterrevolutionary hirelings of the Hitlerites"—a patent fabrication. The CNT-FAI leaders gave the POUM leaders their support; Montseny testified on their behalf; and Caballero, who had been exiled, returned to Spain to testify on their behalf as well. The judges found the Poumists guilty of rebellion—although not as "fascists" or "spies"—and sentenced them to prison terms.

In the summer of 1937, as a result of the Stalinist counterrevolution, Franco's further advances, and the enfeeblement of the libertarian movement, the revolutionary advance that had begun so hopefully in

July 1936 was waning rapidly. Guided by the Stalinists, the Negrín government made it all but impossible for any independent revolutionary organization to exist within the republican zone. In early August, at a Popular Front assembly in Aragon, the Stalinists proposed that the Council of Aragon—the last anarchosindicalist stronghold outside of Barcelona—be dissolved. Speciously accusing its president, Joaquín Ascaso, of having encouraged some of the rebellious elements in the May uprising, and eager to demonstrate its adherence to law, order, and property, the Valencia government on August 11 issued a decree abolishing the council. It appointed a new civil governor, the republican—and Communist sympathizer—José Ignacio Mantecón, to assume the authority formerly exercised by the council.

On August 12 the Moscow-trained Communist general Enrique Lister brought his Eleventh Division into Aragon, installed Mantecón, and used brutal measures to suppress the council. Large numbers of anarchosindicalists were arrested, including Ascaso, and Mantecón ordered that the collective farms be dissolved. Lister's well-equipped troops carried out his orders, with violence where necessary, restoring expropriated land, equipment, and animals to their former owners. (Ironically, in September, after this decollectivization was completed, many collectives had to be restored in order to provide the army and towns with sufficient food.) Lister's troops disbanded the remaining municipal committees and duly replaced them with municipal councils.

Finally, the troops attacked local CNT-FAI offices and shut them down. According to José Peirats, more than 600 militants were arrested, wounded, or murdered; another thousand fled. Equipped with artillery and tanks, units of the Eleventh Division on September 21 attacked Los Escolapios, the headquarters of the CNT-FAI's Barcelona Defense Committee. In this full-scale assault, as Peirats observes, "those inside the building defended it bravely for several hours while arms were being taken out and compromising documents destroyed."<sup>21</sup> But for the most part the CNT-FAI, despite its reputation for militancy, did not offer significant resistance to its suppression. Many *cenetista* leaders by now cherished hopes that one day they would be able to return to the cabinet. Accordingly, when members of the 25th, 26th, and 28th anarchosindicalist divisions wanted to go to the aid of their comrades in Aragon, the CNT-FAI higher committees ordered them to remain where they were.



## FROM REVOLUTION TO WAR

The republican war against the Nationalists continued for approximately two years after the revolution was suppressed in May 1937. While many factors led to the ultimate victory of the Nationalists, the CNT-FAI's abject surrender to parliamentarism and conventional trade unionism—and the demoralization that this capitulation produced among its militants—greatly facilitated the process. For about a year and a half the Stalinists exercised near-absolute power over the Valencia government, distorting it into what, in later years in Eastern Europe, would be called a "people's republic." The NKVD and its native variant, the SIM, carried out endless purges against all remaining revolutionary critics of the Stalinists.

But none of the Stalinists' efforts to form a regular army, annihilate the independent Left, and establish "order" succeeded in stopping Franco's advances. In March 1937 the Nationalists initiated a major offensive in the north, attacking the Basque Country, the center of Spain's steel industry. On March 31 German planes bombed the city of Durango, and on April 26 the Nationalists carpet-bombed Guernica, the traditional center of Basque national autonomy. The Basques resisted passionately, but they were no match for the Nationalist military machine, which the Germans and Italians had greatly sophisticated. The city of Bilbao fell into Franco's hands on June 19, followed by Santander—the Cantabrian city to which the Basque government had fled—on August 25. On October 19–20 Gijón became the last northern city to fall to the Nationalists.

Having overrun the north, the Nationalists then trained their sights on the east. Before they started, the republicans tried to go on the offensive. They concentrated their best troops (without air or artillery) near Teruel in Aragon and attacked the city on December 15. With great loss of life they took Teruel, but fourteen days later the Nationalists, supported by the German Condor Legion, counterattacked, forcing the republicans to abandon Teruel on February 21, 1938. The supply of Russian tanks and planes had fallen off sharply in mid-1937, giving the Nationalists immense material superiority; the Anglo-French blockade of republican Spain meant that the government had to acquire supplies for its troops increasingly on the international black market.

Republican defeats now recurred with sickening and demoralizing regularity. On March 9 Franco opened an offensive against the northern front in Aragon. His forces rapidly advanced eastward down the Ebro, leading to the collapse of northern Catalonia. The republican forces, exhausted after Teruel and lacking weapons, offered surprisingly little resistance. At this point Mussolini, on his own initiative, decided to bomb

Barcelona, and throughout March 16–19 Italian bombs rained down steadily on the city.

Given the gravity of the situation, the CNT and the UGT declared a political truce and signed a unity pact on March 18, pledging to work in common for what amounted to modest UGT goals. The CNT redefined itself as a conventional union. The unity pact, however, did nothing to hinder the Nationalist advance to the sea. On April 2 the FAI, as part of a Spanish liberation movement that it had merged with the CNT, vowed to "give everything" to prosecuting the war against Franco. After much soul-searching—and bitter factional wrangling—the FAI even decided to become a conventional political party and enter the electoral arena. Its affinity groups were abolished, to be replaced by regular party branches. But not even the FAI's repudiation of its radical past could stop the Nationalist advance along the Ebro River valley. On April 8 the Nationalists finally reached the Mediterranean south of Barcelona and cut off the Catalan capital (which by now was also the republican capital) from the rest of the republic.

In July the republicans mounted their last major counteroffensive. Within a few days their forces retook villages along the Ebro that had recently been lost to Franco's troops and established a bridgehead there. But on August 15–19 the Nationalists counterattacked. The summer heat was intense, and the troops on both sides were exhausted. The republicans suffered heavy attrition, but neither side gained much ground for several weeks. Then in September Stalin and Hitler began the secret flirtation that would lead the following year to their nonaggression pact. The flow of Russian arms to the republican forces in Spain ceased, and for them weapons of every kind became scarce. In October the Nationalists, who still received German and Italian arms, counterattacked and regained their lost ground in the Ebro region. Under very heavy artillery barrages the republican defenses collapsed. The republicans lost in all 70,000 men, while the Nationalists lost less than half as many. The republicans' northern army no longer existed.

In the meantime the Nationalists, having just received an infusion of supplies from Germany, began a new offensive on December 23 against Catalonia. They gained ground almost as quickly as they could march across the region. The heroic anarcho-syndicalist resistance of July 1936 was now merely a memory. Tarragona fell on January 15, and on January 26 Barcelona—the heart of the Spanish revolution—all but opened its streets to the Nationalist forces, barely firing a shot.

Roughly half a million Catalans abandoned their treasured homeland for the French frontier between January 27 and February 10. Azaña, Negrín,



and Companys joined the tide of refugees, as did many trade union and political leaders, including Communists. The POUM leaders, still in prison in Barcelona, were able to escape and flee northward as well. On February 12 the border was sealed, and on the 27th France and England recognized the Nationalist government. On March 27, 1939, Nationalist forces took Madrid without encountering resistance, and on April 1 the civil war was officially declared to be at an end. Estimates vary widely, but between 500,000 and 1 million people died in the Spanish Civil War. About 200,000 were executed by the Franco government up until 1943, when Hitler's failure to take Stalingrad made it clear that Germany would lose the war. Only then did Franco and his generals cease the mass slaughter of their own people and try to modify their fascistic coloration.

France made little effort to help the half-million refugees who came over its Spanish border. The government dumped them in camps where they had virtually no shelter and little food, water, or sanitation. Some of the refugees enlisted in the French Army; others disappeared into the countryside; but most remained in the camps. The Allied powers cared little for these displaced radicals, republicans, and liberals, and many either perished from disease or were transported to Nazi concentration camps.

Spain's nightmare of authoritarian rule was to last almost four decades. Generalissimo Francisco Franco ruled the country with an iron hand until 1975. On his death, Juan Carlos, grandson of Alfonso XIII, became king, bringing the Bourbons back to the Spanish throne. A surprisingly sensible monarch, he managed to abort a later army rebellion and preside over Spain's transition to a constitutional monarchy.

At the time of writing, most of those who were involved in the civil war and Spain are dead, but the memory of the conflict persists well beyond Spain's borders. Michael Seidman notes, "There are, it is said, twenty thousand books on the Spanish civil war—which may be as many as on the French Revolution or the Second World War, undoubtedly more significant events than the Spanish conflict."<sup>22</sup> The reason, he observes, is that the war brought into play every important political ideology in modern times. The Spanish Civil War put liberalism, socialism, and anarchism to the test of harsh reality and found all of them wanting to fulfill their social goals or to fight fascism. The liberals, fearing an armed people, failed to arm the workers at a time when they might have prevented Franco from gaining a foothold on the mainland. The Socialists compromised repeatedly with the liberals. The anarchists failed to carry through their revolution, which might have mobilized the oppressed majority of the country, or were betrayed by their leaders. It must also be

said that minimally armed human beings, no matter how zealous, cannot triumph over rifles, machine guns, artillery, and warplanes. Insofar as the revolution tried to make ideals prevail over weapons, it failed on that score as well. The Spanish Revolution was the last time history posed the possibility of a third revolution. For that reason alone it became the zenith of the revolutionary process and thereby revealed both the limits and the possibilities of three centuries of revolutionary history.

Finally, what cannot be ignored is that the Spanish revolution was betrayed by history itself. By the time the Spanish labor movement reached its peak as the last great expression of two centuries of proletarian unrest, in 1936–37, socialism in the rest of Europe had long since declined into reformism. To be sure, the international economic crisis of the 1930s brought about a brief revival of proletarian militancy, but such movements were soon either crushed violently by fascist governmental takeovers, or else ebbed away due to a decline in morale. In 1937 insurrectionary Spain stood alone in the world—an anachronism, so it seemed, remaining from an era that was soon to be effaced altogether by the Second World War that soon passed into memory, not only in Spain but in the rest of Europe as well. The revolution has since stood as a tribute to a remarkable people and as a human tragedy whose significance has yet to be assimilated.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 197.
2. Quoted in Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 174.
3. Quoted in Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 319.
4. Jaime Balius, *Toward a Fresh Revolution*, quoted in Agustín Guillamón, *The Friends of the Durruti Group: 1937–1939*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh and San Francisco, CA: A.K. Press, 1996), p. 78.
5. Quoted in Guillamón, *Friends of Durruti*, p. 38. Significantly, the writer Mingo (pseudonym of Ponciano Alongo) focused on the central role of the municipality in building a new libertarian society.
6. Quotes from Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power During the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 396, 398–9.
7. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 400.
8. Quoted in Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 296.



9. George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1958; repr. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1952), p. 127.
10. Quoted in Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M.* (New Brunswick, NJ, and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), p. 191.
11. Quoted in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 406.
12. Wilebaldo Solano's account is paraphrased in Guillamón, *Friends of Durruti*, pp. 57–8.
13. Quoted in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 409.
14. Alba and Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism*, p. 190.
15. Broué and Témime, *Revolution and the Civil War*, p. 284.
16. Quoted in Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 214. Vázquez had opposed the formation of the collectives in 1936 and may have been an anti-Semite, which was by no means uncommon in the CNT and FAI. See Michael Seidman, *Workers against Work* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p. 336.
17. Both quotes appear in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 415.
18. Quoted in Guillamón, *Friends of Durruti*, p. 150.
19. Quoted in Bolloten, *Spanish Revolution*, p. 418.
20. Alba and Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism*, p. 230.
21. Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 221.
22. Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 3.

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## Conclusion

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Is it likely that the cycle of insurrectionary revolutions that began in seventeenth-century England will continue into the future? Could a revolution of the kind we have been discussing still conceivably take place in the Euro-American world?

A conclusive answer is difficult to provide. Whether the revolutionary era is over can only be determined by time. But the important role of the idiosyncratic, the accidental, and the individual in shaping the course of historical events makes it difficult to provide a "handbook" for achieving a successful revolution. No schematic formulas or laws can apply to all revolutionary developments, although parallel events are strikingly present. Attempts to produce them are invariably misleading, as witness attempts by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s to impose the events peculiar to their own October Revolution (or coup) upon attempted revolutions elsewhere in the world.

One lesson that history teaches, however, is that a revolutionary movement must not permit its principles to degenerate into a hardened dogma that enmeshes action in a skein of restrictions. In Russia in 1917–18 the Left SRs were unmatched ideologically by any other revolutionary party in Europe. More than any other Russian socialist group's program, theirs expressed what a majority of the Russian workers and peasants desired and would have enthusiastically supported. But they also held an unswerving belief in the spontaneous élan of the workers. A mere gesture from a revolutionary party, they hoped, would inspire the proletariat and peasantry to rise spontaneously and create a seemingly new social order. When they staged their quasi-insurrection—even holding hostage Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka—they refused to take power in the Kremlin when it was all but lying in their hands. Instead, they naïvely waited for the masses to rise up on their own. That is, at a historically



crucial moment they were shackled by dogma. They thus allowed their own movement to be destroyed at a time when it had reached the very height of its power.

Lenin, by contrast, exhibited great tactical flexibility throughout his career. A shrewd revolutionary, he knew when to yield and when to stand firm as circumstances required. When the Left SRs made their revolutionary gesture, he decisively parried their every half-hearted thrust and quickly removed them from the political scene. He handled other opponents just as expeditiously. Far from being paralyzed by dogma, the Bolshevik leader pragmatically placed his chessmen in all the key positions that made it possible for his party to prevail in October 1917 and afterwards.

The Spanish anarchosindicalists shared with the Left SRs a basic belief that a true revolution must be organic and spontaneous—its success must be “natural” rather than based on a meticulously planned strategy. Hence in their “revolutionary gymnastics” they tried to turn every early-1930s strike into an uprising, every uprising into an insurrection, and every insurrection into a revolution. These ultrarevolutionary principles hardened into dogma. “Running the streets!” as this reckless practice was called, became so commonplace that even the ultrarevolutionary Asturian miners refused to provide arms to CNT-FAI members during their October 1934 insurrection for fear that the *cenetistas* would carry the revolt beyond tolerable limits and doom it to failure.

Another lesson that history teaches is that militancy is not the same thing as revolutionism and should not be confused with it. The German workers in 1918–23 were among the most militant in central Europe and to all appearances wanted a council republic. In reality, however, the Social Democratic leaders had little difficulty in misleading them, by representing conventional democratic reforms as socialistic or at least as steps toward the achievement of a socialist society. Ebert and his collaborators on the Council of People's Commissars easily steered the German workers toward acceptance of a basic democratic republic clothed in socialist rhetoric with red posters and leaflets.

Still another lesson that this history teaches is that contenders for power are normally not generous to each other, let alone comradely. In the revolutionary era organized military units had an extraordinary ability to quell massive popular insurgencies. Some 3,000 Freikorps troops were all that was needed to disperse about ten times as many fairly well-armed workers in Bremen in 1919, once word got around that the paramilitary forces were marching against the German city. General Yudenich, the White Russian commander, might well have taken Petrograd with a small

number of troops had Trotsky not rallied the fleeing Red troops in the outskirts of the city in an act of remarkable personal courage.

Counterrevolution, in turn, has usually had at its disposal well-trained, well-equipped, and relatively disciplined armies. In the past revolutionary success often depended not only upon the formation of a similarly organized and trained insurgent force but also upon the willingness of the rank-and-file military forces to shift their loyalties and support to the revolutionaries. The most striking instance occurred in February 1917, when the Cossacks refused to fire on rebellious crowds, leading to a citywide mutiny and the fall of the tsar. Trotsky knew the importance of winning over the loyalty of soldiers when, at Brest-Litovsk, he openly mounted a major campaign calling upon the German workers to rebel against their military and political leadership.

Today, however, armies are increasingly spearheaded by volunteer and even elite troops in contrast to the conscripted forces that once linked soldiers to the people. It is immensely difficult to believe that highly disciplined, let alone elite, troops will cross over the nearly mystical line that separates them from the insurgents. Ironically, today's antimilitarist radicals, by opposing conscription, have made such a shift in loyalties almost impossible. Moreover, modern weapons have rendered military-style insurrections ever more irrelevant. The ruling classes have all the advantages of a technically sophisticated and politically disinterested military force, supported by an incredibly effective war machine. Laser- and satellite-guided weapons systems have an accuracy and killing power that would have been unimaginable only a generation or two ago. Mortal flesh cannot stand up against cold steel and powerful explosives, despite the powerful psychological effects of moral persuasion and political ideology. Against such forces a poorly trained, decentralized, and egalitarian force will most likely succumb to defeat.

Thus the most crucial task for a revolutionary movement today is to win over to its views the great majority of the population. The great uprisings of the revolutionary era that we have examined in *The Third Revolution* tried to make just such appeals, albeit in different ways. The leaders of the English, American, and French revolutions—the democratic revolutions, which defined their goals in terms of changes in governmental institutions—believed themselves to be acting on behalf of a broad social base: white male owners of small amounts of property. Social theorists like the eighteenth-century Encyclopedists addressed their writings to this population as “the People,” advocating the restoration of freedoms usurped by the nobility.

To Marxist historians, however, these democratic revolutions were



"bourgeois," since the "inalienable natural rights" they touted for the people as a whole were really meant to be enjoyed by only a fraction of the population: the bourgeoisie.\* The Marxists, however, advanced revolutionary ideas on behalf of what they considered to be a much larger portion of the population: the working class. Even if the proletariat was not yet the majority of the population, in their view the workers would eventually become the vast majority. Destined to acquire demographically the principal role in society, the proletariat would be historically hegemonic and the authentic agent for achieving sweeping economic as well as political change.

In the decade preceding the outbreak of the First World War, it seemed highly plausible that the steady growth of modern industry and of civil rights would make the proletariat the absolute majority and the most decisive political element in the population as a whole. But however large the proletariat was in England, Germany, and the United States, *it nowhere became the absolute majority of the population*. Every self-styled socialist revolution in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century was, in fact, a *minority* revolution. In 1914 the Russian industrial proletariat numbered less than 8 percent of the population, while the peasantry encompassed most of what remained. Had Lenin not adopted the Left SR agrarian policy of redistributing the land through the village commune, the Bolsheviks would have had no significant base in the countryside. Duplicitous in their dealings with the Russian peasants, the Bolsheviks professed to adhere to an agrarian program that among themselves they regarded as "petty-bourgeois" and that they probably had no intention of implementing. They also claimed to support workers' control of industry, a position Lenin discarded only a few weeks after the October insurrection in favor of one-man management and nationalized industry. Once the Communists abandoned these essentially Left SR policies, they had no popular base at all, and their regime had to rely on brute coercion in order to exist. Thus they established a party dictatorship, not even a minority dictatorship, imposed a domestic terror, and fought a civil war within the civil war to effect policies that the great majority of the Russian workers and

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\* To denote the English, American, and French revolutions "bourgeois" is absurd, since with the possible exception of the American Civil War, no bourgeoisie has ever tried to "lead" a popular uprising. On the contrary, the bourgeoisie has good reason to fear revolution. Revolutionary "disorder" has a way of threatening not only specific possessing classes but the fact of possession itself. The so-called "revolutionary" bourgeoisie has always feared mass action of any kind or for any cause.

peasants opposed. This soon left them isolated within the country at large and degenerated into a crass one-man despotism.

The Social Democrats in Western and central Europe believed that a revolution made by a demographic minority must inevitably result in civil war, as proved to be the case in Russia, and that if their coup succeeded, it could maintain itself only by establishing the dictatorship of a civil (not even a class) minority over a demographic majority. This prospect induced Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the German Social Democratic Party, to declare in 1918 that he detested revolution like "sin." Nor was the majority of the German working class revolutionary. Nothing testifies to the isolation of revolutionary Marxism more decisively than the fact that between 1914 and 1939 not a single socialist or Communist party ever achieved even an electoral majority in any major European country. Within the working class, revolutionaries were always a minority, except perhaps in Russia and if so only in the years 1917 and 1918.

In fact, the proletariat as a whole has generally feared insurrections—and has acted in an insurrectionary manner only under the most exceptional circumstances. The three-day armed demonstration of the Berlin workers in early January 1919 does not invalidate this conclusion. As Luxemburg and Lenin both predicted, delay in carrying out an insurrection—at times even for hours—could lead to abysmal failure. The German proletariat was perhaps the working class most socially integrated into the existing capitalist system of any in Western Europe, and in caution and moderation it differed from other European working classes in degree, not in kind. Perhaps the two great exceptions were Spain and Russia. Although armed workers were usually not eager to use weapons and create a violent upheaval, in these two countries many worker-peasants were inspired by traditions of direct action, nurtured by their rural background. In Spain and Russia, direct action pure and simple, not social revolution, was a routine response to overt abuses.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, for a variety of reasons, industrial workers remain a small and dwindling portion of the population. But any revolution that hopes for success must be based on the support of a great majority of the population; hence the kinds of programs that "workers' parties" advance will have to be changed radically. Their program will have to be a civilized statement in every sense of the word: humanistic, ecological, and moral as well as economic. They will need to sort out carefully the complexities of different forms of governmental institutions and find ways to use them to approximate an expansively free society and count not simply on a blow of the sword but on step-by-step advances.

Revolutions are unlikely to occur unless a powerful imperative drives



people to undertake personally dangerous and socially destabilizing measures: that is, to vastly expand democratic institutions that the people themselves have built up over centuries. For Marxists, the classical imperatives (described by Marx in the third volume of *Capital*) were entirely economic in nature, intended to round out the political imperatives that emerged out of the French Revolution. A "decline in the rate of profit" would produce a "general crisis in capitalist accumulation," so the Marxists held, which would cause the working class such misery ("immiseration") that the proletariat as a majority of the population would rise up against all bourgeois institutions and replace them with a socialist society. Thus would capitalism "necessarily" or "inevitably" be replaced by socialism—to many Marxists, even without human agency.

The past half-century has shown that the old Marxist economic imperatives are no longer tenable. No "general crisis" has emerged since the 1930s, and capitalism is more robust today than any revolutionary socialist could have foretold. Socialist theory has yet to decide whether capitalism has even reached its full development. Exactly at what "stage" we may be in capitalism's "life cycle"—youth, adolescence, or maturity—we frankly do not know. Moreover, the proletariat has steadily lost its identity and its traditions of struggle against the bourgeoisie as a class. It has even developed a great attitudinal affinity with the middle class. Capitalism is still a robust social order whose demise lies somewhere in the future. Certainly it is not moribund, declining, or an impediment to technological development, as Marx personally and many Marxists of the interwar period maintained.

A new imperative has emerged, however, that may well call capitalism's future into question. This imperative is not strictly economic but ecological. Capitalism's economic law of life consists of growing competition in the marketplace and indefinite capital expansion. The capitalist social order is based on the technological imperative of "grow or die." Given this imperative, capitalist society must eventually come into conflict with the natural world and lead to its simplification by reducing soil to sand and the organic to the inorganic. It is inexorably driven to replace the rich flora and fauna of the biosphere with glass, steel, cement, and brick, turning oceans into uninhabitable sewers and forested land into deserts of sand and mortar. So too must it foul the atmosphere with toxic substances and pollute waterways with chemical agents that are incompatible with the maintenance of complex life-forms. This problem is no abstract theory but can be measured quite objectively by the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; by the degree of soil erosion that is

destroying arable land; by the industrialization of agriculture that is producing crops of dubious nutritional value; by rising cancer rates; and the like.

Ecological breakdown does not confront a single class alone. Rather, as it involves a market mechanism that inheres in society itself, it menaces all classes of society. In short, revolution may no longer be a class-limited concept; it affects humanity as a whole. The "constituency" of ecological movements consists of the vast majority of the population. Ecological breakdown can be avoided only by abolishing the competitive market system and fostering the fecundity of the natural world.

Such a revolution need not be conceived as a violent transformation of society. With the support of the great majority of the population, institutions can become the primary means for changing society. The convocation of humanly scaled town meetings and the expansion of existing democratic institutions, given a free press and new communications technology, can go very far to transform consciousness and revive a civic ethics that will replace bourgeois self-interest with a new conception of the public good. In a rational ecological society traditional political institutions can be sophisticated to maximize democracy among large populations notwithstanding the diversity of vocational activities and interests.

Nor need a rational ecological society abandon all the valuable technological features that earlier societies have produced over thousands of years; on the contrary, given the expansion of automated production, a new society could provide the leisure time for self-development and political involvement. Indeed, an increasing sufficiency of goods should make it possible to replace scarcity and toil with usufruct and leisure, developing human potentialities aesthetically, psychologically, and politically to replace the one-dimensional worker with the multidimensional citizen as the agent for social administration and change.

Only time can tell whether achieving the great social ideals that have been formulated during the revolutionary era demand too much of humanity's potentialities. In my view, the great social project opened by socialism two centuries ago may seem fragile today, but by no means is it dead. As authentically democratic institutions are transformed and become more expansive over time, the very notion of revolution too should be open to modification. But that prospect must await the judgment of time: the task of creating a new social reality remains a problem for future generations to resolve.



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## Bibliographical Essay

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The following English-language books were of particular interest to me in writing Vol. 4 of *The Third Revolution*.

### PART X: REVOLUTIONS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Arthur Rosenberg's *The Birth of the German Republic, 1871–1918*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), published in Germany in 1928, recounts the political and social developments in Germany that led to the creation of a republic, starting with the Bismarck period and continuing through the First World War, Ludendorff's dictatorship, and the collapse of the German empire; the book's span ends at November 10, 1918. Rosenberg's *A History of the German Republic*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow and L. Marie Sieveking (London: Methuen, 1936), is the sequel, covering the Weimar period to 1930, with chapters on the government of the People's Commissars, the conflict between Spartacus, Ebert, and Noske, and the Kapp Putsch.

On the historical background of German social democracy, see the Bibliographical Essay in Vol. 2 of Murray Bookchin, *The Third Revolution* (New York and London: Continuum 1998). To these books I would like to add Peter Gay's *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), which grapples intensively with the conflict within socialism between adherence to revolutionary principle and the achievement of power by reformist means. These differences were easier to see in the German party than other parties in the Second International. A. J. Ryder's *The German Revolution of 1918: A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) traces both wings of

German socialism—revolutionary socialism and reformist social democracy—and recounts their long and complex conflict before, during, and after the war. November 1918, January 1919, and the Kapp Putsch are well covered, as is the genesis and impact of the USPD.

Abraham Joseph Berlau, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1914–1921* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975) examines the SPD's role during the First World War, its relations with the USPD, its role in curbing the incipient revolution of November 1918, and its campaigns against revolutionary socialists. On the Independent Socialist Party (USPD), David W. Morgan's *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917–1922* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1973) is an excellent and intensively researched history of this potentially revolutionary party, covering it from its inception during the First World War, through its role in November 1918 and January 1919, up to its demise in the late 1920s. It gives particularly close attention to the conflicting programs, ideologies, and factions that both created the party and formed its milieu.

On the revolts of November 1918 and January 1919, Rudolf Coper's masterly *Failure of a Revolution: Germany in 1918–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) is the best theoretical analysis I have found. Coper shows how astutely Ebert manipulated the German soldiers and workers, thereby producing a "revolution" that was more theatrical than real. Significantly, he shows how a group of adventurist anarchists—the impatient youth who formed much of the Spartacus membership—saw every demonstration or even every strike as an occasion for an uprising. I cannot recommend his book too highly for its many insights. Richard M. Watt's *The Kings Depart: The Tragedy of Germany: Versailles and the German Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) is an excellent narrative history, intended for a general readership, of the Kiel Mutiny, the councils, the revolts of November 1918, and the Bavarian revolution, as well as the negotiations at Versailles. Written in a lively style, it vividly dramatizes the role of Noske as the "bloodhound of the Revolution."

For primary source material on the German events, Charles B. Burdick and Ralph H. Lutz (eds), *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution, 1918–1919* (New York: Praeger, 1966), is an excellent and thorough collection of documents relating to the various revolutionary institutions: the Vollzugsrat, the Council of People's Commissars, the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, and the Zentralrat. John Riddell (ed.), *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power: Documents, 1918–1919: Preparing the Founding Congress* (New York: Pathfinder, 1986), is an



excellent collection of documents written by Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Lenin, Kautsky, Radek, Levi, Fröhlich, the Spartacus Group, the USPD, and other groups and individuals. This indispensable collection is divided into sections on the events of November 1918, the conflicts between the SPD and the various revolutionary parties, the councils, the creation of the KPD, the uprising of January 1919, and the creation of the Third International.

On the Spartacus group, Eric Waldman's *The Spartacist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement: A Study of the Relation of Political Theory and Party Practice* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1958) is an excellent history, tracing the group's emergence, growth, and its influence on the events of November 1918, followed by its role in the uprising of January 1919 that, however inaccurately, still bears its name. For biographies of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, see the Bibliographical Essay in Vol. 2 of *The Third Revolution*. John Plamenatz's *German Marxism and Russian Communism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) examines the different interpretations of Marxism advanced by the Bolsheviks and the Luxemburgists.

On the Communists' attempted revolts of the early 1920s, see Werner T. Angress's *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921–1923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), which provides a detailed critical analysis of the revolutionary phase of German Communism, focusing on the March uprising of 1921 and "German October" 1923. Ruth Fischer's *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948) was written by a leading member of the KPD in the 1920s. While it provides some valid information on the revolutionary period between 1919 and 1923, it lacks objectivity and is not wholly reliable.

On the rise of the German Right, Eric J. Leed's *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) shows how the combat experience in the First World War contributed to the ferocity of the German counterrevolution by transforming the personalities of the soldiers in the trenches. Robert G. L. Waite's *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952) traces the development of the Freikorps movement, which contributed significantly to National Socialism, examining its origins, structure, and battles with the Left and with the Weimar Republic.

On the Bavarian soviet republic, Allan Mitchell's *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965) is an excellent, concise history of the

improbable Bavarian Council (or "soviet") republic of 1919. Richard Grunberger's *Red Rising in Bavaria* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1973) is a lively narrative oriented toward a more general readership.

On Hungary's liberal Frostflower revolution and the subsequent Hungarian soviet republic, Rudolf L. Tökés's *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic: The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918–1919* (New York: Praeger, 1967), gives excellent background on the revolution's intellectual roots, the rise of the soviet republic and its accomplishments, and its significance in the international Communist movement. Peter Pastor's *Hungary between Wilson and Lenin: The Hungarian Revolution of 1918–1919 and the Big Three* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), covers similar material, with an emphasis on the international response to the shortlived revolution and its ultimate defeat. Oscar Jászi's *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (London: P. S. King, 1924) was written in 1923 by a prominent participant in the two Hungarian revolutions of 1918–19. The author's goal is to dispel the misinformation spread by the Horthy regime to the West and provide a truthful account of the Frostflower revolution, the Károlyi government, the soviet republic, in a work highly critical of the Bolshevik dictatorship.

On the Communist International, Franz Borkenau's *World Communism: A History of the Communist International* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1963) is immensely useful as a concise account of the International's misadventures and debunks the hegemonic role imputed to the proletariat.

On Austrian socialism, Helmut Gruber's *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working-Class Culture, 1914–1934* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) attempts to look beyond the myths of the Viennese experiment yet maintains that "'red Vienna' remains a model of cultural experimentation in the socialist movement." The chapters on municipal socialism, socialist party culture, mass culture, and the family are fascinating. Anson Rabinbach (ed.), *The Austrian Socialist Experiment: Social Democracy and Austromarxism, 1918–1934* (Boulder, CO, and London: Westview Press, 1985), is a fine collection of essays on Austromarxism in the Viennese milieu, and on municipal socialism and cultural politics in "Red Vienna." Rabinbach's *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War, 1927–1934* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983) focuses on the decline of the Austrian experiment, the competing political tendencies within Austrian socialism, and the destruction of Austrian social democracy in the insurrection of February 1934.



## PART XI: THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

Understanding the Spanish revolution is impossible without a background in Spanish history. Jaime Vicens Vives's *Approaches to the History of Spain*, trans. Joan Connelly Ullman, 2nd edn (1952; repr. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972) is a good brief introduction, covering Spain from its prehistory to the twentieth century by a Spanish historian. An excellent account of this period is Eléna de la Souchère's *An Explanation of Spain*, trans. Eleanor Ross Levieux (New York: Random House, 1964). Deeply appreciative and empathetic, this evocative book (originally published in French) helps explain how the diverse cultures of the Iberian peninsula made Spain so politically creative. Raymond Carr's *Spain: 1808–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), part of the Oxford History of Modern Europe series, covers Spanish history from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. It is decidedly liberal in viewpoint, often unsympathetic to the libertarians, but rich in information.

Gerald Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (1943; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) was written during and just after the Spanish Civil War and has since become a classic. The author, a British observer, objective in his treatment of the libertarian Left, weaves together Spanish political history with the peninsula's cultural traditions. Brenan emphasizes the depth of local—provincial and municipal—feeling among Spaniards and sets anarchism within the overall framework of Spanish politics. Temma Kaplan's *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868–1903* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977) examines the peasant movement in the south, explaining it not as a moral-religious movement but as a rational response to extreme economic inequality.

George R. Esenwein's *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989) focuses on the ideological dimension of the early libertarian movement, examining in particular Bakuninism and federalism and exploring their expression in libertarian trade unions, the FRE, and the FTRE. Gerald H. Meaker's *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974) brings into a single narrative the various components of the revolutionary Left—anarchosyndicalists, socialists, and Communists—tracing the evolution of each and their many interactions. Scholarly, thoroughly researched, detailed, and informative, the book emphasizes Spanish labor's response to the Russian Revolution.

Edward E. Malefakis's *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1970) explains the structure of land tenure in Spain as well as rural social structure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Brilliantly researched, it underscores the consequences of the failure of land reform in the Second Republic. Joan Connelly Ullman's *The Tragic Week: A Study of Anticlericalism in Spain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) examines the Barcelona uprising of 1909, in which an antiwar protest became a riot against Church property and a major social upheaval. The savage repression of this revolt marked the end of an era of reform and did much to inspire the creation of a revolutionary national trade union, the CNT.

Robert W. Kern's *Red Years/Black Years: A Political History of Spanish Anarchism 1911 to 1937* (Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976) focuses on the CNT and the FAI as specifically anarchist movements. The title is based on a misnomer—the Spanish anarchists, in contradistinction to other libertarians in Spain, were hostile to politics. Nonetheless Kern ably traces the history of the CNT from its origins, through the *trienio bolchevista*, the dictatorship, the Second Republic, and the civil war and revolution, covering the FAI's briefer history as well. He conceives of his book as “a group biography of the major Spanish anarchists,” Montseny, Ascaso, Abad de Santillán, and Durruti. Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (1977; repr. San Francisco, CA, and Edinburgh: A.K. Press, 1998) is marred by a failure to distinguish sufficiently among the anarchists, syndicalists, and anarchosyndicalists, but I have tried to rectify this error in the present account.

Jerome R. Mintz's *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982) is a detailed study of the anarchists in this Andalusian town, concluding with the uprising of 1932 (which contributed to the toppling of Azaña's government). As a result of the author's fieldwork, interviewing residents who recalled the uprising, the book has colorful anthropological as well as historical dimensions.

For many years José Peirats's works on Spanish anarchosyndicalism were the only comprehensive studies available. Peirats (born in 1908) was a member of Libertarian Youth in Lérida during the revolution and became a *miliciano* on the northeastern front. After the civil war, disgusted by the failure of the Spanish anarchosyndicalist leaders to live up to their principles, he wrote a three-volume history of the CNT, of which Vol. 1 has recently been translated into English by Chris Ealham and Paul Sharkey as *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, ed. Chris Ealham, Vol. 1 (East



Sussex: Meltzer Press, 2001). Peirats's *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Mary Ann Slocum and Paul Hollow (c.1977; repr. London: Freedom Press, 1990), written in 1964, sharply criticizes the anarchists for being unprepared to address "the complex problems that a revolution brings with it."

Robert Alexander's two-volume *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Janus, 1999) attempts to provide an overview of the anarchists in the civil war and revolution, especially their role in the republican military and in the agrarian and urban collectives. Although the book is the product of much research, it is tarnished by poor editing and by outright errors, such as its citation of García Oliver's malicious gossip concerning Pablo Ruiz.

One of the best histories of the anarcho-sindicalist movement in the 1930s has never been published in English: Stephan John Brademas's dissertation, "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain: A Contribution to the History of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement in Spain, 1930–1937," PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1953, was published in Spanish as *Anarcho-sindicalismo y revolución en España 1930–1937* (Madrid: Ariel, 1974). Another dissertation that remains unpublished in English is Myrna Margulies Breitbart's massive "The Theory and Practice of Anarchist Decentralism in Spain, 1936–1939: The Integration of Community and Environment," Clark University, 1978, which provides an outstanding overview and assessment of the Spanish collectives.

Juan Gómez Casas's *Anarchist Organization: The History of the FAI*, trans. Abe Bluestein (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986) is a friendly account of the FAI from its antecedents in Bakunin's Alliance of Social Democracy up to the present day. Stuart Christie's *We, the Anarchists!: A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927–1937* (Malta: Meltzer Press, 2000) provides a fast-paced and clear account of the history of the FAI from its founding to the abandonment of its insurrectionary policy during the civil war. Abel Paz's *Durruti: The People Armed*, trans. Nancy MacDonald (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977) is a sympathetic account of Durruti's career. What is real and what is mythic about much of Durruti's life is often left to the reader to decide.

In the United States in 1936–39, as I can personally testify, information about the revolution in Spain and the CNT-FAI was difficult if not impossible to come by. In 1936–37 the British author George Orwell traveled to Spain and fought in a POUM militia column, experienced firsthand the brutality and duplicity of the Spanish Communists, and wrote about it in his now-classic *Homage to Catalonia*. The book was written in 1938 but did not find an English-language publisher until 1952. When it

did appear, it was a veritable exposé. Another eyewitness was Franz Borkenau, a very knowledgeable writer who was personally experienced in the politics of the international Left. After observing conditions in the republican zone in 1936 and 1937, Borkenau wrote *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eye-Witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (1937; repr. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1963), which concluded that the Communists "combine both the revolutionary centralization of Robespierre and the Thermidorian policy of his successors. They make a dictatorship, but it is a dictatorship not in favor of the revolutionary classes."

Not until the publication of Burnett Bolloten's *The Grand Camouflage: The Communist Conspiracy in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1961), however, were the eyes of many people outside Spain opened to this reality. Bolloten's crucially important book showed that the Stalinists had perpetrated a "grand camouflage" on the world public, to wit:

Although the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July, 1936, was followed by a far-reaching social revolution in the anti-Franco camp—more profound in some respects than the Bolshevik Revolution in its early stage—millions of discerning people outside Spain were kept in ignorance, not only of its depth and range, but even of its existence, by virtue of a policy of duplicity and dissimulation [on the part of the Communists] of which there is no parallel in history.

This thesis has since become foundational for most historical investigation of the revolution, and indeed the civil war. As a United Press reporter in Madrid during the 1930s, Bolloten amassed an immense collection of personal archives and devoted much of his lifetime to gathering material evidence of what he regarded as the Stalinists' treachery and brutality.

Eighteen years after *The Grand Camouflage*, Bolloten published *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power During the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), which added new material to the previous book, especially on the events of May 1937 in Barcelona. Much of this book was incorporated into his final book on the subject, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), which he completed a few months before his death. To this 1,400-page volume he added material on the Communists' assault on the POUM and the course of the civil war up to its end. Drawing on many primary sources and original documents, Bolloten's books constitute a factual encyclopedia that is an important source for all who write on the Spanish Civil War.

David T. Cattell's *Communism and the Spanish Civil War* (New York:



Russell & Russell, 1965) also details the internal subversion of the Spanish revolution by its self-styled revolutionary leaders. Stanley G. Payne's *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), part of the *Revolutions in the Modern World* series, is an account of the revolutionary Left that, written from a liberal perspective, is highly informative but biased against the libertarians whom he describes as "one of the disasters of twentieth-century revolutionary maximalism."

Pierre Broué and Emile Témime's *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970) is a straightforward history of the revolution and civil war, remarkable for its compactness and insight. Its authors are sympathetic to the dissident Communists. Part I is devoted to the revolution itself, while Part II takes up the international aspects of the civil war. Ronald Fraser's *The Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979) is also of immense value as a source of primary material. Between June 1973 and May 1975 Fraser interviewed more than 300 participants in the revolution and civil war; this brilliant book presents their stories and observations in colorful detail. Between December 1936 and December 1938 a group of anarchists published a biweekly periodical entitled *Spain and the World*, in which leading libertarian figures commented on the events of the revolution. Selections from this periodical have been collected and published under the title *Spain and the World* and published under the title *Spain: Social Revolution and Counterrevolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), constituting a contemporary account of the civil war.

Gaston Leval, a dedicated anarchosyndicalist, scoured what remained of republican Spain in the late 1930s to gather material on the Spanish libertarian collectives. For years his reports were the most authoritative survey on the subject. His *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1975), still holds a preeminent position as an account of Spanish collectivization, but it must be read with the greatest care. Leval was critical of the bourgeois tendencies that infected many collectives, but overloads his book with data on the collectives' material output. Diego Abad de Santillán's *After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain Today*, trans. Louis Frank (New York: Greenberg, 1937), expresses what Spanish anarchosyndicalists hoped could happen as a result of the revolution. Written by a prominent CNT-FAI figure while the revolution was ongoing, it articulated an economic order for revolutionary Spain, based on the author's experiences with workers' demands and with particular emphasis on the organization of work through councils.

Vernon Richards' *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939* (1953; repr. London: Freedom Press, 1983) is still an excellent assessment of the libertarian movement in Spain. Richards, an anarchist, naturally identifies strongly with the "workers' heroic struggle against the Franco regime," but is "more interested in seeking the reasons for the defeat of the Revolution than for Franco's military victory." He puts the question, "To what extent then was the revolutionary movement responsible for its own defeat?" and answers it with unsparing emphasis on the CNT-FAI's errors.

On the Friends of Durruti, Agustin Guillamón, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Oakland: A.K. Press, 1996), is the best account of the group in English. Making extensive use of primary sources, it explores both the ideology of the Friends and their actual political behavior. For the Trotskyist perspective on the civil war, the reader should consult Felix Morrow's *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (1938; London: New Park Publications, 1963), which was written while the war was going on. The book regards the Friends of Durruti as a comradesly organization, although they were avowedly not Trotskyist. On the POUM, Victor Alba and Stephan Schwarz's *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the POUM* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988) is a responsible history of the dissident Marxist party, which the Stalinists maligned as "Trotskyist" and "fascist." Partly a translation of Alba's *Histoire de Poum*, published in Paris in 1975, this long-overdue book gives a coherent and relatively complete account of this tragic and memorable movement.



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