

THE ANARCHISTS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR



Robert Alexander

Volume Two

THE ANARCHISTS
IN THE SPANISH
CIVIL WAR



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To Pedro Pagés (Victor Alba)

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Part Five

*The Anarchists' Role in
Republican Politics*

An Overall View of the Anarchists' Role in the Politics of Republican Spain

The spontaneous Revolution following the suppression of the military rebellion in more than half of Spain presented the anarchists with the first quandary they were to face during the Civil War. They could have seized absolute power in Catalonia and Aragón, and perhaps in some other parts of the Loyalist territory. But they could not win the Civil War by themselves.

The suggestion that they establish an 'anarchist dictatorship' was rejected in Catalonia, and hence in the rest of the Republic. They needed the cooperation of the Socialists, Communists, POUM and Republican parties and of the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) in the effort to defeat the Franco forces. So the anarchists made the fundamental decision to share power, which was their first compromise with their basic philosophy.

However, in the urban economy of Loyalist Spain, especially in Catalonia, the anarchists established a large degree of control. They also did so in the rural economy of the part of Aragón which their troops reconquered from the Rebel forces. Elsewhere, particularly in the Levante region and in Asturias, they collaborated with the Left Socialists in exercising control of the economy, aid of the local public administration.

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Within weeks of the outbreak of the Civil War, the anarchists were faced with another major quandary, with the necessity of compromising a fundamental principle, that is, their opposition to participation in any established government. In fact, of course, from the moment the Rebellion was suppressed within Loyalist Spain, the anarchists had participated in *de facto* governments on a local and regional basis. But they could say to themselves that these were revolutionary bodies which put power really in the hands of the workers and peasants, and helped to pave the way towards ultimate establishment of libertarian communism.

However, the participation of the anarchists in duly constituted local, regional and ultimately national governments was something else again. But shortly more than two months after the beginning of the War they agreed to enter the government of Catalonia and put an end to the *de facto* Militia Council regime established on July 21. Less than a month and a half after that, they even agreed to enter the Republican government under Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, where they stayed for almost nine months. Even after being ousted from the national and Catalan governments, they continued to argue in favor of their reincorporation in them, which they partially achieved in April 1938 when Asturian CNT leader Segundo Blanco became minister of Education in the cabinet of Prime Minister Juan Negrín.

On a local level, too, the anarchists participated in legally established governments. They served as mayors of such cities as Valencia and Gijón (Asturias), and as municipal council members in innumerable cities, towns and villages.

Soviet Intervention in the Civil War

The anarchists were soon faced with an even more serious quandary, the rapid rise in the power of the Stalinists. The Communists started as a small element in the coalition supporting the Republic in the Civil War. But because of their discipline, their ready acceptance of the military logic of the Civil War, and their appeal to the anti-revolutionary elements on the Republican side, they grew rapidly.

However, the decisive factor in the rise of the Stalinists in Loyalist Spain was the fact that Stalin's Soviet Union was the only important power to give material support to the Republic during the Civil War. Mexico was the only other country which frankly aided the Loyalist forces with the limited arms which it had available. However, there is some indication that the Loyalist government did not take the advantage it might have done of Mexico as a channel through which it might have received arms.

Gordón Ordáz, Spanish ambassador to Mexico at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War (and many years later president of the Republican Government in Exile) is the authority for the claim that during the early months of the War, he received concrete offers for arms from firms in the United States, Canada, and Japan and, when he related those offers to the Republican government, he either received no reply or a refusal to make money available. These included offers of bombing planes, hydroplanes, machine-guns, rifles, and other material.¹ Andrés Suárez speculates that the failure of Largo Caballero's government to act on these offers transmitted to it by its ambassador was due to the fact that the cabinet ministers involved were Julio Alvarez del Vayo and Juan Negrín, both of whom were Stalinist fellow-travellers who were not anxious to see the Republic freed from the need for depending on the USSR for its foreign sources of arms.²

The Western democracies shamefully launched the farce of Non-Intervention less than a month after the Civil War began. Ostensibly put forward by the Popular Front government of France, headed by the Socialist Léon Blum, Non-Intervention was undoubtedly undertaken at the behest of the Conservative government of British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and with the connivance of the USSR.

There is some indication that, as might have been expected, the French Popular Front government was ready to aid its Spanish counterpart. E. H. Carr has noted: 'Giral turned to Paris. A telephone call to Blum on July 20, 1936, asking for help in obtaining arms and aeroplanes from France, elicited a sympathetic reply.'³

Julian Gorkin has recorded a discussion he had at the time with Jules Moch, the Socialist leader who was then sub-secretary of state in the Blum government. Moch told Gorkin:

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We are persuaded that our intervention in the Spanish conflict would bring war with Germany. And under what conditions? Exposing us to remain isolated. The French government has asked the English and the Russians what would be their attitude in case we gave effective aid to the Government of Madrid. London replied, 'The British Government considers both fascists and communists to be enemies. If there is a country in which they make war on one another, we abandon them to their fate. We refuse to intervene.' The answer of Moscow was still more Sybyline. In summary it was: 'The Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 obliges us to aid one another in case one of our countries is attacked by a third power, but not in case of war resulting from the intervention of one of our countries in the affairs of a third.'⁴

According to the Non-Intervention accord, virtually all of the countries of Europe agreed not to provide help to either side in the Spanish Civil War. However, from its inception, the Nazi government of Germany and the Fascist regime of Italy totally ignored the agreement which they had signed, and there is little doubt that the extensive armaments and the transport facilities they provided to get Franco's Moorish and Foreign Legion troops to southern Spain, as well as the actions of the German and Italian navies and air forces in frustrating the Spanish Loyalist navy's efforts to thwart those troop movements, saved the Rebellion during the first weeks of the War, when it was on the verge of total defeat.⁵

However, for their part, the British and French cut off most of the Republic's efforts to obtain arms from Western Europe. Although Louis Fischer said that French Air Minister Pierre Cot sent 100 airplanes to the Spanish Republic,⁶ the Blum government quickly embargoed the shipment of arms, an embargo which was by no means complete but was none the less largely effective. The French government seized arms shipments which the Catalans were sending through France to try to relieve beleaguered Loyalist forces in Irun and San Sebastian. The Blum government even went so far as to seize gold held on deposit by the Spanish government in French banks.⁷ All of this violated treaties between France and the Spanish Republic

which supposedly guaranteed the Republic's right to obtain arms, and even committed the French to help the Republic if it was faced with insurrection.

Although not a party to the Non-Intervention accord, the Roosevelt administration effectively supported it. It thwarted the Republic's efforts to buy arms in the United States and even brought pressure on the Mexican government to prevent transshipment of some material which the Republic had been able to obtain in the United States. In these actions, Roosevelt as conceding to strong pressure from the Catholic Church in the United States, which throughout the War was vehemently on the side of Franco.⁸

Gabriel Jackson has made the point that in spite of supposed US neutrality during the Spanish Civil War, important United States companies strongly backed the Franco cause. He cites, in this connection, the action of the International Telephone and Telegraph Company in making private lines available to the military conspirators in the last phases of the plot to military men, and the fact that the Texaco Company sold petroleum to the Rebels on credit throughout the War.⁹

The Soviet Union also formally adhered to the Non-Intervention Pact. On August 28 1936, the commissar of foreign relations issued a decree which prohibited 'the exportation, re-exportation or transit to Spain of all kinds of armaments, munitions, war material, airplanes and warships'. This decree caused consternation among the Spanish Communists, and Palmiro Togliatti and Jacques Duclos were rushed to Spain to explain it to their comrades. Togliatti summed up the argument: 'The USSR must think of its security as the pupils of its eyes. An ill-considered action could bring about the rupture of the equilibrium and provoke the war in the East.'¹⁰

A Stalinist history of the Civil War presented a more extensive rationalization of Stalin's initial cooperation with Non-Intervention. After acknowledging that it had been officially launched by the French Popular Front government, and had even at first been accepted by the Giral government of the Republic, it claimed:

Political conditions were thus created in which a rotund negative

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of the USSR to the proposal of the French government would have had consequences unfavorable to the cause of the Spanish people . . .

In effect, if the Soviet Government, in that situation had flatly rejected the French proposal, there would have turned against it not only the reactionary and fascist forces, but the Socialist parties and other influential democratic sectors, accusing it, first, of wanting to intervene in Spain even against the wishes of the Spanish Republican Government; second, of offering a justification to Hitler and Mussolini to aid Franco; third of causing the failure of a plan conceived of by Léon Blum to put an end to Italo-German intervention in Spain . . .

It must also be remembered that in 1936 there existed in the world only one socialist country, the USSR, which was far from Spain . . . It was not enough for the USSR to be disposed to send arms to the Spanish antifascist combatants. It was necessary to create minimal diplomatic and political conditions so that those arms could get to Spain.

Finally, the authors of the history argued that if Non-Intervention with Soviet participation had worked, it 'would have created a new situation with two possible results: first, retreat of the fascist dictators . . . and second, return to the Spanish Republic in a very short time its right to buy arms.' In any case, they concluded, Soviet participation showed up 'the real intentions of England and France in proposing the policy of "Non-Intervention".'¹¹

What the Spanish Communists did not report was the degree to which the USSR, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, did collaborate with the Non-Intervention. Many years later, the Republican politician Claudio Sánchez Albornóz, writing in the periodical *Indice*, of November 1 1972, wrote: 'News about Russian aid. We have heard Gordón Ordáz, in Buenos Aires, refer to the episode of his purchase of North American airplanes for the government of the Republic, in the first period of the civil war, and how he succeeded, with great care and great difficulty in having them sent from Mexico to Europe via Arcangel. Gordón Ordáz completed his account declaring that those airplanes did not arrive in

Spain; the Russians kept them and sent an equal number of old machines.¹²

However, after two months' hesitation, Stalin decided to intervene, more or less surreptitiously, on the Republican side in the Civil War. But he did not move to aid the Republic until he was assured of obtaining most of the Republic's gold supply, at the time one of the world's largest.

The Stalinist history of the Civil War noted: 'In so far as the Banco de Espana was concerned ... it was converted in practice into an organism directed and controlled by the Ministry of Finance of the Republic. The government could thus mobilize the gold deposits of the Banco for the service of the necessities of war, the service of the supreme national interests of Spain.'¹³ The history's authors argue, citing memoirs of several members of the Largo Caballero government (but with no comment from the authors themselves), that the transfer of the Spanish Republic's gold to the USSR was for the purpose of preventing its falling into the hands of Franco.¹⁴

Indalecio Prieto wrote that, during this operation, the first shipment of Spanish gold to Odessa was of 13,000 chests, 'weighing eight hundred fifty-one and a half tons – round figures, discounting the packaging ... The three hundred forty and a half tons remaining were divided, in equal parts, in two other expeditions: one, before that to Odessa, was to Marseilles, and the other, much later, to Barcelona. Those figures, together with a deposit in Mont de Marsan – deposit taken over by Franco – which dated from 1931, to cover a loan of the Bank of France to that of Spain, represents the total of yellow reserves of the latter.'¹⁵ Josip Maria Bricall estimated that 1,592 million pesetas worth of gold were 'deposited' in the Soviet Union, out of a total gold supply worth 2,202 million pesetas at the beginning of the Civil War.¹⁶

In any case, as a consequence of the Republic's utter dependence on the Soviet Union for arms, particularly airplanes, tanks and other heavy equipment, the Soviet diplomatic, military, secret police and other officials, as well as the representatives of the Communist International, who were also subordinate to the Soviet Communist Party and government, were able to bring great influence to bear on

the Spanish Republican government, particularly after the ouster of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero and his replacement by the Socialist Party's Communist fellow-traveller, Juan Negrín, following the May 1937 events in Catalonia.

The Stalinist Drive to Absolute Power

The one-time secretary-general of the Spanish Communist Party, José Bullejos, judged the role of the party in Republican Spain during the Civil War thus: 'The activities of the Communist Party were designed to impose totally its hegemony over the government and the Republican army; in its relations with the Socialist Party it sought its absorption, animated by the recent conquest of the Socialist Youth. Largo Caballero and his friends, before allied with the Communists, reacted against the manoeuvre and began at that moment a bitter struggle between the Socialists and anarchists on the one hand and the Communists on the other, a struggle which, with increasing sharpness each day, continued throughout the war.'¹⁷

Certainly, the Stalinists saw the anarchists as a major impediment to their drive to power in the Republic. This was clearly indicated by Palmiro Togliatti, the most important Comintern official in Spain during the Civil War: The ideology and practice of these Anarcho-syndicalist organizations frequently hinder the principles of proletarian organization and proletarian discipline from penetrating into the ranks of the working class.

Spanish Anarchism is a peculiar phenomenon, a reflection of the country's economic backwardness, of the backwardness of its political structure, of the disunity of its proletariat, of the existence of a numerous group of declassed elements, and, finally, of a specific particularism – all features characteristic of countries with strong survivals of feudalism. At the present time, when the Spanish people are exerting every effort to drive back the furious attack of bestial fascism, when the Anarchist workers are fighting bravely at the fronts, there are not a few people

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who, under cover of the principles of Anarchism, weaken the solidarity and unity of the People's Front by hasty projects for compulsory 'collectivization', the 'abolition of money', the preaching of 'organized Indiscipline', etc.¹⁸

Certainly the Stalinists' drive to achieve absolute power in the Spanish Republic was served by what Burnett Bolloten has called 'the connivance, the unsuspecting good faith, and the obtuseness of others'. He cited in this regard an article of the Stalinist war-time military leader Valentín González (El Campesino), writing in an anarchist exile periodical after he had quit the Communist ranks.

'With few exceptions, especially during the early part of the war, how many Spanish politicians and military men were there who did not welcome the Communist agents with open arms and refused to play their game? At least I was a convinced Communist, and my attitude had some logic to it; but what logic was there in the attitude adopted by the others? Without the lack of understanding and the complicity that were almost general would it have been possible, in the course of a few months, for a party, as weak numerically as the Communist party, to penetrate – and nearly dominate – the whole government apparatus? ...'¹⁹

Gerald Brenan has given a good picture of the nature of the Communists' relentless drive for power within the Republic during the Civil War, and of its consequences:

They suffered from a fixed belief in their own superior knowledge and capacity. They were incapable of rational discussion. From every pore they exuded a rigid totalitarian spirit. Their appetite for power was insatiable and they were completely unscrupulous. To them winning the war meant winning it for the Communist party and they were always ready to sacrifice military advantage to prevent a rival party on their own side from strengthening its position. Thus they kept the Aragón front without arms to spite the Anarchists and prevented a very promising offensive in Extremadura from taking place because the credit for its success might have gone to Caballero...

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But perhaps more serious than this in the long run was their lack of moral or political integrity. Their opportunism extended to everything. They seemed to have no programme that could not be reversed if its reversal promised them any advantage, and they were just as ready to use the middle classes against the proletariat as the proletariat against the middle classes ... Thus not only did they disapprove of even such rural and industrial collectives as had arisen spontaneously and flood the country with police who, like the Russian OGPU, noted on the orders of their party rather than of the Ministry of the Interior, but by their perpetual intrigues and machinations they helped to sap the fibre of the various Popular Front parties and of the two great trade unions, on whose firmness and solidarity the morale of the Republican forces depended.²⁰

The anarchists were clearly victims of the Stalinists' opportunism. According to José Peirats, 'The agility of maneuver of the Communists consistently got the better of the unskillful opportunism of the anarchists, recently converted to the snares of politics.'²¹

Of course, during the Civil War and afterwards, the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers strongly denied that they were seeking to seize total power in the Republic. Typical of their line of argument were the writings of Louis Fischer, during the War a foreign correspondent of *The Nation*, and a close ally of the Communists, although subsequently he turned against them.

In a pamphlet published in 1937, Fischer wrote about Soviet intervention in the Civil War: '... the Bolsheviks do not believe that a revolution can be exported. They hold that the need for revolution grows in national soil. They are convinced that ultimately Spain will become Communist. But they do not wish to interfere in internal Spanish affairs because they know how deeply the Spaniards would resent it ...'²²

In so far as the Spanish Communists were concerned, Fischer wrote 'The democracy slogan means that the Communists have no desire to establish in Spain a dictatorship guided by one party as in Russia. The Communists do not wish to suppress the Anarchists or Socialists or left Republicans or any anti-fascist group ...'²³ This was

written, of course, after they had forced the outlawing and persecution of the POUM.

However, perhaps unwittingly (or perhaps not), Stalinist history of the Civil War, published 30 years after the conflict began, did reveal the true intentions of the Spanish Communists and their Soviet masters, and how the anarchists impeded this: 'And if those positions of the anarchists conflicted with the necessities of the antifascist war, they no less conflicted with the development of the revolution, with the consolidation in Spain of the popular democracy.'²⁴ In 1966, and for 20 years before that, 'popular democracy' had been the favorite phrase the Stalinists used to describe the regimes established by Stalin in Eastern Europe after the Second World War.

Even during the Civil War itself, Spanish Communist leaders made statements which also indicated the objectives of their drive to power. Soon after the establishment of the Negrín government, Jesús Hernández, the Communist minister of education, said at a meeting in Barcelona, 'He who does not accept our slogans is an agent of fascism and a counterrevolutionary.' For her part, La Pasionaria at about the same time promised 'to denounce without any vacillation, without any sentimentalism, all those whom we think are suspiciously disaffected with our regime...'²⁵

The Subservience of Spanish Stalinists to Stalin

During the Civil War, there were four Stalinist parties in Spain. One was the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), which operated throughout the Loyalist territory except in Catalonia and the Basque country. Another was the Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia (PSUC), which was formed in that region a few days after the beginning of the War by the merger of the Catalan sections of the Communist and Socialist parties and two small regional organizations. Both the PCE and the PSUC belonged to the Communist International. The third was the Basque Communist Party, which apparently had a formally different organization from the PCE.²⁶

A fourth Stalinist organization of considerable importance was the Juventud Socialista Unificado (JSU), which had been founded in

April 1936 by a merger of the Socialist Youth Federation (until then under the influence of the Socialist Party faction headed by Francisco Largo Caballero) and the Union of Young Communists. Upon its establishment, it was affiliated with the Young Communist International, and before the end of the War most of its top leaders (although not so many of its regional and local ones) had joined the PCE.

There was a long tradition of subordination of the Spanish Communists to Moscow. One of the early secretaries of the Communist International, the Swiss Jules Humbert-Droz, had intervened directly to bring about the merger of the two different Communist parties which were at first formed in Spain. Subsequently, in the early 1930s, he was Comintern resident delegate in Spain.²⁷

On at least two occasions, the Comintern intervened to replace the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party. The group leading the party at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War – of whom José Díaz (general-secretary), Jesús Hernández, Vicente Uribe, and Dolores Ibarruri (made famous during the War as ‘La Pasionaria’) were among the most prominent – had been installed by the Comintern.²⁸

At the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, the resident Comintern representative in Spain was Victorio Codovila, an Italo-Argentine and long-time secretary-general of the Argentine Communist Party. Enrique Castro Delgado, one of the principal Communist military leaders during the War, indicated the *de facto* role of Codovila when, in describing a politburo meeting, he said, ‘The Political Bureau around a large and rectangular table. At the head of it José Díaz, then the other members of the Political Bureau. And in front of them Codovila, the real chief of the Party in his capacity of delegate of the Communist International.’²⁹

Codovila was soon joined by others. Boris Stepanov (variously described as a Bulgarian and a Russian), and whose real name seems to have been Stefan Minev), the Hungarian Erno Gero (a prominent post-Second World War figure in the Hungarian Communist regime) and Fritz Dahlem, a member of the central committee of the German Communist Party who, from December 1936, was a member of the political commission which directed the International Brigades.³⁰

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Palmiro Togliatti, then and until his death, head of the Italian Communist Party, was the principal Comintern 'adviser' of the Spanish Communists during the Civil War. Gero's particular assignment was that of supervising the Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia.

The most important Comintern delegate was Togliatti. Burnett Bolloten has said that when he replaced Codovila 'he became the virtual head of the party, directing strategy and writing many of the speeches of José Díaz and La Pasionaria. Using the aliases Ercole Ercoli and Alfredo, Togliatti remained in Spain with Stepanov until the end of the Civil War.'

Bolloten also cited John Gates, the US Communist who was head commissar of the Fifteenth International Brigade, to the effect that 'Togliatti was the most powerful Communist figure in Spain. His responsibility was the whole policy of the Spanish communists...'³¹

There is some disagreement among those who have written about Togliatti's activities in Spain about when he arrived there. As we shall see in a later chapter, Jesús Hernández, member of the Spanish Politburo, told many years later about Togliatti's participation in Politburo meetings at which the downfall of Prime Minister Largo Caballero was decided upon in the spring of 1937. On the other hand, the editor of a book of Togliatti's reports to the Comintern, Paolo Spriano, wrote that Togliatti arrived in Spain 'at the end of July 1937'.³²

It would seem highly unlikely that Hernández would not know who Togliatti was, and not know when he attended Spanish Politburo meetings. It is true that the reports of Togliatti which are published by Signor Spriano begin with one apparently written from Paris early in July 1937, and the first one directly concerning Spanish affairs is dated August 30. The only reasonable explanation would seem to be that Togliatti was there at least as soon as the early months of 1937, went out to participate in a meeting on the Spanish question between representatives of the Communist International and the Labor and Socialist International on which he reports in his memorandum to the Comintern on July 8 1937. and then returned to Spain, where he remained during much of the rest of the War.

In his reports to the Comintern, Togliatti was frequently critical of the other Comintern representatives in Spain. Codovila, Gero, Stepanov and Dahlem all gave reasons for complaint by Togliatti at one time or another.³³

Direct Soviet Interference in Loyalist Spain

However, the Comintern delegates were not the only representatives of the Stalinist regime to whom the 'leaders' of the Spanish Communist Party were subordinate. The broader range of advice to which they were subject is indicated by Jesús Hernández, then minister of education in the Largo Caballero government, in his description of a meeting, of the political bureau of the PCE in March 1937: 'Present all the delegates of Moscow: Stepanov, Codovila, Gero, Togliatti, Marty – in function of organizer of the International Brigades – and for the first time also Orlof of the GPU, and Galkins, councillor of the Soviet Embassy.'³⁴

But it was not only the Spanish Stalinists who received direction from representatives of Stalin in Spain. Both Ambassador Marcel Rosenberg and the Soviet consul-general in Barcelona, Vladimir Antonov-Ovsenko, during the first year of the War, were constantly indicating personally and even publicly, what policies the governments to which they were accredited should follow and what actions they should take. Prime Minister Largo Caballero on one occasion became so enraged at this that he literally threw Ambassador Rosenberg out of his office.

There were two other kinds of overt interference by Soviet officials, in which they acted quite independently of the Spanish authorities. We have seen in earlier parts of this book something of the degree to which Soviet officers exercised command functions in the Popular Army without having any formal right to do so; and the way in which the Soviet military men in charge of handling weapons and war material coming from the USSR favored Communist-controlled military units and refused to provide adequate supplies to those commanded by opponents of the Communists.

Finally, there was the increasingly massive intervention of the

Soviet secret police, the GPU. Walter Krivitsky said that when, early in September 1936, Stalin decided to aid the Spanish Republic with arms and food, he at the same time ordered Yagoda, the head of the GPU, to establish a branch in Spain. At a meeting on September 14, in the GPU's Lubyanka headquarters, it was announced that Alexander Orlov had been assigned to this task.

Krivitsky said: 'This Lubyanka conference also placed the Soviet secret police in charge of Comintern operations in Spain. It decided to "coordinate" the activities of the Spanish Communist Party with those of the OGPU.'³⁵

Krivitsky commented on the activities of the GPU in Spain. He said that right after the beginning of 1937, 'The business of *Stalinizing* Spain now began in grim earnest. The OGPU was in charge... Thousands were arrested, including many foreign volunteers who had come to fight Franco. Any criticism of methods, any unflattering opinion of the Stalin dictatorship in Russia, any association with men of heretical political beliefs, became treason. The OGPU employed all the methods familiar in Moscow of extorting confessions and of summary executions...'³⁶

Stalin's Objectives in Spain

Although it is clear that Stalin, both directly and indirectly, played a major role in the domestic politics of the Spanish Republic during the Civil War, mere knowledge of that fact does not answer the question of what it was that he was seeking in carrying out that role. There is probably no one who is still alive, nearly 60 years after the event, who could answer this question with certainty. However, both the behavior of the Soviets towards the Republic and the behavior of the Spanish Stalinists may offer some suggestions.

One can start, I think, by accepting the conclusion of Jesús Hernández, after he quit the Stalinist ranks: 'In the war of Spain, Moscow played to win for Moscow. Nothing more and nothing less. The cause of our people was for them like a simple pawn on the playing board of their calculations. If it had been possible to win the

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game by having us triumph too, it would not have hesitated to give us the triumph... Neither hate nor affection towards the Spanish people, nor sentimentalism, nor principles, nor scruples. For Stalin all those are nothing more than words without significance nor content of any kind.³⁷

Walter Krivitsky set forth his understanding of what Stalin was trying to achieve in Spain:

After the outbreak of the Franco rebellion, Stalin turned his eyes toward Spain. He made haste slowly, as he always does. There was a period of watchful waiting, of furtive exploration. Stalin wanted to be sure first that there would be no quick and easy Franco victory. Then he intervened in Spain...

His idea was – and this was common knowledge among us who served him – to include Spain in the sphere of the Kremlin's influence. Such domination would secure his ties with Paris and London, and thus strengthen, on the other hand, his bargaining position with Berlin. Once he was master of the Spanish government – of vital strategic importance to France and Great Britain – he would find what he was seeking. He would be a force to be reckoned with, an ally to be coveted...³⁸

The Spanish historian, Salvador de Madariaga, who maintained a position of 'neutrality' during the Civil War, broadly agreed with the analysis of Krivitsky. He wrote that Stalin's aim in Spain was 'to secure a Western outpost for his aid against the dangers which were lurking ever larger on the European horizon.' To this end:

It was therefore indispensable for Stalin to gain time to allow for the internal evolution of the Spanish Revolution, which in his eyes could only mean the gradual devouring of all the other heads of the hydra by the orthodox Communist head. Meanwhile, he would be both preparing for the coming war, if war there was to be, and seeking an agreement with Hitler which would enable him either to ward off the Soviet–Germany war for good and all or to gain time still for his tanks and airplanes. In terms of Spain, this meant carrying on the Spanish war as

long as possible while strengthening his position there while the war lasted. The first added to his time for negotiating with Hitler; and second raised the value of his assets in the negotiation.³⁹

Krivitsky emphasized Stalin's caution in the Spanish situation:

Stalin, unlike Mussolini, played it safe in Spain. Far from boasting of his intervention, he played it down timidly and indeed at the beginning concealed it altogether. The Soviet intervention might have been decisive at certain moments had Stalin taken the risks on the Loyalist side that Mussolini took on the Franco side. But Stalin risked nothing. He even made sure before moving that there was enough gold in the Bank of Spain to more than cover the costs of his material aid. He took no chances of involving the Soviet Union in a great war. He launched his intervention under the slogan: 'Stay out of range of the artillery fire!' This was and remained our guiding slogan throughout the Spanish intervention.⁴⁰

Krivitsky also noted the wider context within which Stalin viewed the Spanish Civil War:

Stalin argued that the old Spain was gone and that the new Spain could not stand alone. It must join either the camp of Italy and Germany, or the camp of their opponents. Stalin said that neither France nor Great Britain would willingly allow Spain, which commands the entrance to the Mediterranean, to be controlled by Rome and Berlin. A friendly Spain was vital to Paris and London. Without public intervention, but by an adroit use of his position as the source of military supplies, Stalin believed it possible to create in Spain a regime controlled by him. That done, he could command the respect of France and England, win from them the offer of a real alliance, and either accept it or, with that as a bargaining point, arrive at his underlying steady aim and purpose, a compact with Germany.⁴¹

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The Soviet historian Roy Medvedev largely confirmed Krivitsky's analysis:

...Stalin's patent indifference to the needs and fate of the Spanish revolution was related first of all to internal events in the USSR. In 1937–1938 Stalin was too busy organizing the mass repression in his own country. It was at this very time that the NKVD apparatus was significantly expanded, and millions of people found themselves in camps and prisons.

It may also be assumed that Stalin wanted to take his distance from the events in Spain, that he did not want a victory over fascism there that would have been seen as the result of maximum support by the Soviet Union. Such a victory would have complicated any subsequent agreement with fascist Germany – something that was on Stalin's mind long before 1939.⁴²

Burnett Bolloten has emphasized that in order for Stalin's objectives to be achieved it was absolutely necessary to downplay, and even to deny, the Revolution which had occurred following the suppression of the military rebellion in more than half of Spain after July 19 1936. It was necessary to present the Spanish Civil War simply as a struggle between 'democracy' on one side and 'fascism' on the other. Any recognition of the revolutionary transformation of the Spanish Republican economy which had taken place following the beginning of the Civil War would alienate powerful economic interests in France, Great Britain and other democratic countries which would reinforce those countries' adherence to 'non-intervention', which in practical terms meant an embargo on the shipment of arms to the Republic in its struggle with the Franco forces.⁴³

Víctor Alba has suggested the change in Stalin's attitude towards the Spanish Civil War as the victory of the Franco forces became more apparent: 'After the Munich Conference, Stalin wanted to have negotiations with Hitler. He thought that abandoning Spain would be interpreted in Berlin as a guarantee of good faith. As a result, the Russian military advisers imposed the battle of the Ebro which in two months liquidated 70,000 soldiers of the Republic and all of the material had human reserves of the Government.'⁴⁴

The Anti-Revolutionary Policy of the Spanish Stalinists

The Spanish Stalinists – including the Spanish Communist Party, the PSUC of Catalonia and the Juventud Socialista Unificada – from the beginning of the Civil War followed policies which were designed to undermine, and if possible destroy, the Revolution which had occurred after the suppression of the military uprising of July 19 1936.

Nowhere was this more clearly stated than in the PSUC's English-language bulletin, in its report on the March 1937 plenum of the Spanish Communist Party: 'The Popular Front was the force which crushed the fascist rebellion... Therefore the Communist Party of Spain and the United Socialist Party of Catalonia have recognized that the Spanish Republic, and that alone, must be a government wherein are represented all forces who struggle against fascism. The struggle can only end with the rise of a new type of democratic and parliamentary government, with a strong social sense where reaction and fascism shall be finally crushed. Without renouncing its programs of socialization, the Party has adopted an energetic and serious attitude against all premature attempts of pseudo-revolutionaries...'⁴⁵

Juan Comorera, in his speech to that same plenum noted: 'Before the advice of certain people whose idea is to make the revolution before doing anything else, the United Socialist Party of Catalonia has, from the very beginning, declared that the most important task is to organize for the winning of the war. After seven months we are beginning to correct the grave mistakes we have made.'⁴⁶

There were at least two reasons for this policy of the Spanish Stalinists. In the first place, the Communists' anti-revolutionary stance conformed fully to Stalin's own game plan for the Spanish Civil War. But there was certainly something else which motivated the Spanish Stalinists. The fact was that they had played virtually no role in the Revolution which had occurred with the onset of the War. That Revolution had been largely the work of the labor and peasant unions, over which the Stalinists had little influence at the beginning of the conflict. The CNT was thoroughly anarcho-syndicalist, and the Communists had had virtually no success in trying to penetrate it.

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The Unión General de Trabajadores was thoroughly controlled by the Largo Caballero faction of the Socialist Party, and although the Communists had recently given up their own trade union confederation and had its affiliates join the UGT they had not, by the beginning of the War, had much luck in trying to gain power within the UGT.

Therefore, given the situation of a Revolution which they did not control, they were strongly opposed to it. As early as 1930, Dmitri Manuilski, then the head of the Comintern, had presaged this attitude of his Spanish comrades. He had said that 'a partial strike (in any country) could have greater importance for the international working class than that type of "revolution" à la española, carried out without the Communist Party and the proletariat exercising the directive function.'⁴⁷

Clearly, the Stalinists' concept of a revolution was one which would establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', that is, a dictatorship of the Communist Party. Certainly, that was not the kind of revolution that had taken place after July 19 1936.

The opposition of the Comintern to the revolution which had occurred in Loyalist Spain was expressed early. According to E. H. Carr, on October 19 1936, its executive committee issued a statement 'condemning, the "mania" of far-fetched projects, tendencies to "create a new society", which threatened to disrupt the popular front.'⁴⁸

As was obligatory for Communists, they rationalized their position in theoretical terms. Perhaps no one did this more authoritatively than Palmiro Togliatti:

The Spanish people are solving the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution... This means that in the interests of the economic and political development of the country, the agrarian question must be settled by abolishing the feudal relations which dominate the countryside. It means that the peasants, the workers, and the working population as a whole must be relieved of the intolerable burden of an outworn economic and administrative system. It means that the privileges of the aristocracy, the church and the religious orders must be done away

with and the uncontrolled sway of the reactionary castes must be broken.

The Spanish people is solving in a new way the task of the bourgeois-democratic revolution which is in accordance with the deepest interests of the vast mass of the people. In the first place, it is solving them in circumstances of civil war brought on by the insurgents. In the second place, it is forced in the interest of armed struggle against fascism to confiscate the property of the landlords and employers involved in the insurrection... In the third place, it is able to draw on the historical experience of the proletariat of Russia, which completed the bourgeois democratic revolution after it had conquered power, for the great proletarian revolution splendidly achieved 'in passing' the very objectives which form the basic content of the revolution in Spain at its present historical stage. Finally, the Spanish working class is striving to accomplish its leading role in the revolution, and place upon it a proletarian imprint by the sweeping range and the forms of its struggle.⁴⁹

Stalinist opposition to the Revolution took many forms. One was to deny its existence. Franz Borkenau noted this in his first trip to the Republican territory in August 1936:

Representative members of the PSUC express the opinion that there is no revolution at all in Spain, and those men (with whom I had a fairly long discussion) are not as one would suppose, old Catalan socialists, but foreign communists. Spain, they explain is faced with a unique situation: the Government is fighting against its own army. I wonder how it is that communists, who, all over the world, for fifteen years have discovered revolutionary situations where there were none, and done tremendous mischief by it, now do not recognize revolution when, for the first time in Europe since the Russian revolution of 1917, it is really there.⁵⁰

As early as July 29 1936, Dolores Ibarruri claimed that 'our country is now going through the phase of the democratic-bourgeois

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revolution.' She added: 'This struggle is the democratic revolution which in other countries such as France, was carried out more than a century ago.'⁵¹

Typical of the Spanish Stalinists' position at the time was a statement issued on their behalf by the French Communist Party: 'The Central Committee of the Spanish Communist party has asked us to make known to public opinion, as a reply to interested and fantastic reports in a certain press, that the Spanish people in their struggle against the rebels are not striving for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but have only one aim: THE DEFENCE OF THE REPUBLICAN ORDER AND RESPECT FOR PROPERTY.'⁵²

In March 1937, José Díaz, secretary-general of the PCE said: We are fighting for the democratic Republic, for a democratic and parliamentary republic of a new type and with a profound social content...'⁵³

Another line of Stalinist attack on the Revolution was their advocacy of substituting nationalization of enterprises for collectivization of them by the workers. According to Burnett Bolloten, 'State capitalism or nationalization, the Communists knew, would eventually enable the central authority not only to organize the manufacturing capacity of the anti-Franco camp in accordance with the needs of the war and to control the output and allocation of war material, often assigned by the labor unions to their own locals or militia units, but also to weaken the left-wing of the Revolution as one of the principal sources of its power. They did not, of course, openly acknowledge the political motive of their desire for nationalization and defended it only on military and economic grounds.'⁵⁴

Characteristic of this line of argument of the Communists was a statement by José Díaz in March 1937. He said of 'premature experiments in collectivization and socialization' that 'if, in the beginning, these experiments were justified by the fact that the big industrialists and landlords had abandoned their factories and estates and that it was necessary to continue production, later on they were not... today when there is a government of the Popular Front, in which all the forces engaged in the fight against fascism are

represented, such things are not only inadvisable, but they have the opposite effect from that intended. Today we must coordinate production rapidly and intensify it under a single direction so as to provision the front and the rear with everything they need.⁵⁵

Communist Minister of Agriculture Vicente Uribe, gave practical meaning to the Communists' drive for nationalization in his famous agrarian reform decree of October 7 1936. The law proclaimed that all landholdings belonging to those who had sided with the rebellion became property of the state, although also providing for peasants to have use rights to the land they cultivated, either individually or collectively.⁵⁶

The Stalinists as Defenders of Private Property Rights

A major strategy of the Stalinists in trying to destroy the Revolution was that of positioning themselves as the principal defenders of the small and medium-sized property holders. In doing so, they filled a vacuum which was created in the early stages of the Civil War.

Burnett Bolloten has stressed the inefficacy after July 19 of the Republican parties which had been the principal spokesmen for the petty bourgeoisie before the outbreak of the Civil War: 'Nor could they turn to the liberal republican parties, such as the Izquierda Republicana, the Unión Republicana and the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya ... the strongest middle class party in that region, for the majority of the leaders were either accommodating themselves to the radicalism of the situation or were characterized by inertia born of fear.'⁵⁷

Into that situation stepped the Communist Party and the PSUC in Catalonia. The attitude of the Stalinists was shown by a declaration in *Mundo Obrero*, the PCE daily in Madrid:

In a capitalist society, the small tradesmen and manufacturers constitute a class that has many things in common with the proletariat. It is, of course, on the side of the democratic Republic, and it is as much opposed to the big capitalists and

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captains of powerful fascist enterprises as the workers. This being so, it is everybody's duty to respect the property of these small tradesmen and manufacturers.

We therefore strongly urge the members of our party and the militia in general to demand, and, if need be, to enforce respect for these middle-class citizens, all of whom are workers, and who therefore should not be molested. Their modest interests should not be injured by requisitions and demands that are beyond their meager resources.⁵⁸

Most economic organizations of the middle class had disappeared upon the outbreak of the Civil War. The Stalinists hastened to organize new ones. In Catalonia, soon after the War began, the PSUC organized the *Federación Catalana de Gremios y Entidades Pequeños Comerciantes e Industriales* (GEPCI), which soon had 18,000 'tradesmen, handicraftsmen, and small manufacturers.'⁵⁹ GEPCI became part of the UGT of Catalonia, which the PSUC controlled.⁶⁰

We have noted in an earlier chapter the communists' initiative in organising the landowners of the Valencia region into a new peasants' federation. It took the place of, and was largely made up of the same people as a pre-war peasant organization controlled by the Right-wing parties which after July 19 were supporting the Rebels.

This role of the Stalinists as defenders of the holders of property was quickly reflected in the membership of the PCE and PSUC. Franz Borkenau, returning to Republican Spain for a second visit in mid-January 1937, observed that the PCE had increased its claimed membership from about 3,000, before the military uprising, to 220,000 which it claimed at the end of January 1937. However, he noted: 'Since July the communists have not won over, either from the anarchists or from the socialists, a single trade-union branch of manual workers, a single large factory, a single industrial region, They have won over branches of State and private employee trade unions, and villages and country districts in considerable number.' Borkenau added that in so far as change of political allegiance on the part of the workers was concerned, 'there seems to be very little of that'.⁶¹

As a consequence of the fact that the Stalinist parties had expanded their membership rapidly, but had failed to attract manual workers from their previous allegiance, Borkenau concluded: 'The Communist Party, to a large extent, is today the party of the military and administrative personnel, in the second place the party of the petty bourgeoisie and certain well-to-do peasant groups, in the third place the party of the employees (white collar workers) and only in the fourth place the party of the industrial workers. Having entered the movement with almost no organization, it has attracted in the course of the civil war, those elements with whose views and interests its policy agreed.'⁶² This situation did not change in any significant degree during the remainder of the Civil War.

The only case I have discovered in which the Stalinists absorbed a workers' group which had previously been part of the CNT was that of the CNT Opposition affiliate in Sabadell, in Catalonia. There, the opposition stayed independent at the time of the unification of the CNT and opposition in the May 1936 CNT congress at Zaragoza. A report on that congress noted that the leaders of the group subsequently 'sold out supinely to the Communist Party and the bolshevized UGT'. The result was that 'there was lost to the CNT a Federation which was strong at the time, of 12,000 members'.⁶³

Palmiro Togliatti reported to Moscow often on the lack of a working-class base for the Spanish Stalinists, and the preponderance of non-proletarian elements in their ranks. For instance, he recognized that the PSUC was 'predominantly petty bourgeois'.⁶⁴

Elsewhere, he noted that the PCE's 'links with the factories are weak'.⁶⁵ He also told his Comintern bosses that 'It must not be forgotten ... that the connection with the masses, above all in the interior, was always one of the weakest points of the party',⁶⁶ and that in Madrid the party was 'very separated from the masses, very sectarian ... very strong tendency to bureaucratization'.⁶⁷ Finally, Togliatti noted that, in contrast with the Socialist Party, the executive committee of which was largely made up of trade unionists, there were no trade unionists in the politburo of the PCE.⁶⁸

Togliatti was particularly critical, in this regard, of the leadership of the PSUC. He criticized that party's refusal to fight against the

legal rural *sindicatos*, which were supposed to have a monopoly of selling the peasants' products, and which he claimed were speculating with those products at the expense of the peasants: 'Many local leaders of the party, former members of reactionary organizations, speculated like all the rest . . . so did those in the leadership.'⁶⁹

Talking of the situation in the remaining Republican area in central Spain after the fall of Catalonia to the Franco forces, Togliatti said that what he called the 'persecution' of the Communists there was 'fed from below by the explosion of all of the hatred of our party and the spirit of revenge of the Caballeristas, anarchists, provocateurs etc.' He emphasized the weakness of the party's 'contacts with the masses'.⁷⁰

The Stalinists' Use of Force Against the Revolution

The Stalinists were perfectly willing to use force against the Revolution, when the opportunity to do so presented itself. Their increasing influence in the military hierarchy and in those of the various reorganized police forces of the Republic, together with the rapid and extensive growth of the Soviet GPU in Loyalist Spain, gave them increasing opportunities to exert force.

We have seen in earlier chapters the attacks that were made on rural collectives by Stalinist-led military and police units in the Levante and Castille in the spring of 1937. We have also seen the efforts of the Stalinist troops under Lister to destroy the collectives in Aragón and the concurrent destruction of the Consejo de Aragón.

But it was not only in the rural regions that the Stalinists used force against their opponents. After the May Days in Barcelona, there was a wave of arrests, disappearances, murders, and even a major show trial organized under Stalinist auspices. The methods which Stalin was at the time using in the Great Purges in the Soviet Union was transplanted to a marked degree to Republican Spain and continued for the rest of the Civil War. The POUMist leader Julian Gorkin has written: 'During the year and a half that I had to spend in the jails of Madrid, of Valencia and of Barcelona . . . I bumped into various thousands of Left Socialists, anarchosyndicalists of the CNT and the

FAI, POUMists, ex-militiamen and members of the International Brigades. That is to say, antifascists and anti-Stalinists. In the jails one could confirm – better than in the streets – the cold assassination of the Spanish revolution...⁷¹

Stalinist Vendettas Against Their Revolutionary Opponents

In their drive to gain absolute power within the Spanish Republic during the Civil War, the Stalinists were *a priori* faced with major impediments. Aligned against them were the anarchists of the CNT-FAI, the single most numerous political element within the Loyalist territory, the faction of the Socialist Party led by Francisco Largo Caballero, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) in Catalonia, Valencia and a few other areas. Even a substantial segment of the Right wing of the Socialist Party which, if not favorably disposed towards the Revolution none the less did not want the establishment of a Stalinist dictatorship in the Republic, had to be confronted by the Communists.

Wisely, the Stalinists first attacked their weakest opponent, the POUM. First mounting a ferocious campaign to have the POUM ousted from the government of Catalonia, which they achieved by December 1936, they then carried on an even more vitriolic attack, seeking to have the POUM outlawed – which they succeeded in bringing about after the May Days of 1937 in Barcelona.

The next victim of the Stalinists' drive for power was the Left wing of the Socialist Party led by Largo Caballero. He was first forced out of the prime ministership and ministry of war. The Stalinists next succeeded in splitting the Unión General de Trabajadores, and then its reunification under anti-Largo Caballero leadership. 'The Old Man' himself was submitted to virtual house arrest for the duration of the Civil War.

It then came the turn of Indalecio Prieto and his followers within the Socialist Party. Although he had collaborated with the Communists in driving Largo Caballero out of office, and had been rewarded with the ministry of defence, he sought to limit Communist influence

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– both Spanish and Soviet – within the Republican armed forces, a fact which led in March 1938 to his removal from office and virtual exile.

Even the principal regionalist parties – the Basque Nationalists and the Catalan Left Party – were driven out of the Republican government a few months before the end of the War, as a result of policies pushed by the Stalinists and their loyal servant, Prime Minister Juan Negrín.

Finally, there were the anarchists. They were by all odds the most formidable opponents of the Stalinists, whose triumph over them was much less complete than that over the POUM, Largo Caballero and Prieto Socialists and regionalists. There was not the kind of head-on collision with the anarchists such as occurred with the other anti-Stalinist groups until less than a month before the end of the War. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the anarchists were able to continue their control over a substantial part of the rural and urban economies of Loyalist Spain until the end of the War. They continued to control an appreciable part of the armed forces of the Republic and they continued to be a force to contend with in the politics of the Republic.

Over the 33 months of the Civil War, the anarchists' position in the politics of the Republic changed drastically, from one period to the other. Certainly, from July until December 1936, they were dominant in Catalonia, as well as in Aragón, where their predominance continued until after the May Days of 1937. They shared power largely with the Left Socialists in the Levante during the first year of the War and in Asturias until the end of the military struggle there. They never shared power in the Basque country after the establishment of the Republic there, and their influence in Madrid was greatly inferior to that of the Stalinists and their allies throughout most of the War, although in some other parts of the center area it was more extensive. Of course from November 1936 to May 1937, they participated in the Republican government of Francisco Largo Caballero, and helped him in his struggle against growing Stalinist influence there.

From December 1936 until the May Days of 1937, the anarchists were on the defensive in Catalonia, and were under growing attack

by the Stalinists throughout Loyalist Spain. After the May Days, they were eliminated from the Republican and Catalan governments and their regime in Aragón was destroyed. Indeed, after the May Days it can be said that they were engaged in a desperate struggle to maintain at least a minimum of control over political affairs and to fight doggedly to defend their shrinking influence in, and control over, the economy.

However, there is little doubt about the fact that the struggle between the Stalinists and the anarchists was the most important single factor in Spanish Republican politics throughout the Civil War. Herbert Matthews, the *New York Times* correspondent on the Loyalist side during the War, recognized this as early as August 1937: '...The important thing is that the Communists here are waging a powerful campaign of propaganda against the Anarchists, and the Anarchists, after lying low for a few months are now showing signs of fighting back. The political development of republican Spain can almost be explained in terms of this conflict; even the outcome of the civil war may depend on its results.'⁷²

One of the more disastrous results – from the point of view of the anarchists – of protracted struggle with the Stalinists was the growing schism within the anarchist movement itself. The national committee of the CNT continued to be willing to make one compromise after another, apparently in the hope of preserving what could be preserved. The leadership of the Federación Anarquista Iberica and the leadership of the Libertarian Youth, on the other hand, had had enough by the middle of 1938, counselled forceful resistance to the incursions of the Communists, and of Prime Minister Juan Negrín. As a result, although there was never a formal split within the libertarian ranks, there were bitter polemics within the movement during the last few months of the War.

The final showdown between the Stalinists and the anarchists came early in March 1939, with the overthrow of the Negrín government and the establishment of the National Council of Defense. It was largely anarchist-led troops which supported the council against attempts by Communist forces to overthrow it. Anarchists played a major role in planning and executing the coup to oust Prime Minister Negrín, an effort which had the support

of virtually all other political groups – Socialists, Republicans and others – as well as many of the remaining professional army officers, including General Miaja, one-time member of the Communist Party.⁷³

Conclusion

The anarchists were major participants in the politics of Republican Spain during the Civil War. In the opening phase of the War, they had *de facto* power in Catalonia and Aragón, and in the Levante and Asturias shared power principally with the Socialists. On a local level in this same period, they exercised power in other regions of the Republic as well.

After deciding during the first days of the War not to try to exercise power by themselves, and after much soul-searching, they finally decided to enter the duly constituted governments on a regional and national basis. This decision, of course, was a fundamental break with their basic philosophy, but was made necessary by the exigencies of war and the developing drive for absolute power within the Republic by the Stalinists. We have already looked at the second great ideological compromise which they made at about the same time, that is, to have their militiamen become members of a new regular army.

The anarchists were the single most important element resisting the drive of the Stalinists to set up their own dictatorship within Loyalist Spain. Although the Stalinists' drive succeeded in sowing dissensions in the anarchist ranks, it did not succeed in definitively defeating the libertarians. They continued to fight a rearguard battle to defend their rural and urban collectives, their (admittedly limited) share in the command levels of the armed forces, and their voice in national politics.

One can only speculate on the overall effects of the sustained drive for power of the Stalinists, which the anarchists had to spend so much time and energy on trying to circumvent, on the ultimate fate of the Civil War. The anarchist writer Lazarillo de Tormes, writing late in 1937, thus commented on the Negrín government:

If the stupid struggle that this Government maintains to keep itself in power wounds public opinion and the workers' organizations in their most cherished interests; or it permits, with its intolerable passivity, that other organisms even more unpopular than the Government itself do so. Thus, one day it confronts international opinion with the kidnapping of Nin; on another it alienates the sympathies of the UGT as a result of the villainous campaign against Largo Caballero; on another, finally, it arouses the ire of the CNT with the destruction of its collectives and abuses perpetrated in the free zone of Aragón. All this has the immediate result of increasing popular hostility, in the face of which the Government, for its part, adopts new measures of defense which increase its discredit and the discontent of the others leading only to a vicious circle... And the war? The war... has been practically forgotten in this mass of disputes.⁷⁴

Certainly, the Stalinists' brutal suppression of rural collectives in Aragón, and attempts to do the same in the Levante and Castilla could not have helped but disorient the peasants – not to mention diverting them from the tasks of providing the Republic with the food it needed. So, too, the constant attempts of the Stalinists, through governmental action, guile and sometimes force, to dismantle the urban collectives, which the workers had established during the first weeks of the War, could have had no other result than to diminish the enthusiasm of the members of the collectives for the Republican government, and of diverting the collectives from their economic tasks.

By the latter part of 1938, what was supposed to be the major justification for the Stalinists – that the Soviet Union was providing the only substantial aid from outside the country for the Republic's cause, and the implied, if not actual, threat that such aid would be withdrawn if the demands of the Spanish and Soviet Stalinists were not met – no longer even existed. By the second half of 1938, Soviet aid was down to a trickle, the International Brigades organized by the Comintern had been withdrawn, and the Spanish Republic was left to its own resources.

By that time, Stalin had lost interest in helping the Spanish

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Republican cause. He was moving towards the 'arrangement' with Hitlerite Germany which he finally achieved in the third week of August 1939. However, even during the last phase of the Civil War, after the loss of Catalonia to Franco's troops, Stalin, through the Comintern and the Spanish Communist Party, continued to urge a continuation of the by then hopeless struggle, in the hope that the Spanish Republic could still serve as pawn in the complicated game he was then playing with the British and French on the one hand, and with Adolf Hitler on the other.

The Anarchists in the Catalan Government, July–December 1936

From the suppression of the Rebel uprising in Catalonia on July 19–20 1936, until early in December of the same year, the political influence of the CNT–FAI was predominant in Catalonia. During the first few weeks, they largely dominated the Central Committee of the Antifascist Militias, which was the effective government of the region, although the shadow regime of the Generalidad de Catalonia, headed by President Luis Companys, remained in existence. Then, with their formal entrance into the government of the Generalidad late in September, the anarchists continued largely to dominate the regional government, until it was reorganized in December 1936. Thereafter, the anarchists were thrown strongly on the defensive.

The First Meeting of Anarchist Leaders with Companys

Fighting was scarcely over in the streets of Barcelona when, in the late afternoon of July 20, President Luis Companys called the regional headquarters of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and asked to meet in the palace of the Generalidad with a delegation of the CNT. A group, consisting of José Asens of the regional committee, Aurelio Fernández, Buenaventura Durruti, Juan García Oliver and Diego Abad de Santilán, thereupon went to the palace and conferred with the president.

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In his memoirs, Juan García Oliver recounted the essence of the discussion between Companys and the CNT leaders:

Companys recognized that we alone, the Barcelona anarchosyndicalists, had defeated the rebellious army. He declared that we had never been treated as we deserved, and that we had been unjustly persecuted. That now, masters of the city and of Catalonia, we could decide whether to accept his collaboration or send him home. But if we thought that he could still be useful in the struggle which, even if it had certainly terminated in the city, we could not know when and how it would be terminated in the rest of Spain, we could count on him, on his loyalty as a man and a politician, convinced that a humiliating past had ended, and that he sincerely wished Catalonia to march at the head of the socially most advanced countries.¹

They agreed that he stay as head of the Generalidad.

Companys then suggested that, if the anarchists were willing, he would assume responsibility for the establishment of a Committee of Antifascist Militias, 'which would assume the leadership of the struggle in Catalonia'. He added that, with this possibility in mind, he had summoned leaders of the other parties and organizations which had supported the struggle of July 19–20 against the rebellious troops.²

The Communist version of events had the anarchists proposing the establishment of this committee.³ This seems highly unlikely, in view of the controversy which later took place within the ranks of the CNT over the advisability of establishing such an organization instead of making official the anarchist control of Catalonia which in fact existed at that moment, and particularly in view of the fact that García Oliver led the group which was opposed to the Central Committee of Militias. The version of events presented by García Oliver, who was there, seems much more likely than that of the Communist leaders, who were not.

Companys then led the CNT leaders into an adjacent room, where were Juan Comorera of the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya*, Rafael Vidiella of the Catalan branch of the Spanish Socialist Party, Ventura

Gassol of the Republican Left, Pey Poch of *Acció Catalana*, Andres Nín of the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM), and José Calvet of the peasants' organization, the *Unió de Rabassaires*.⁴ The Communists' account of the Civil War claimed that the assembled politicians had agreed on the establishment of a new Popular Front government in Catalonia, in which would participate all of the parties there represented.⁵ However, there is no indication that this was suggested at the time to the anarchist leaders. Their meeting with the assembled politicians resulted in little more than shaking hands and an exchange of pleasantries.

The anarchist leaders thereupon withdrew and conferred shortly. García Oliver then informed Companys, in the name of his colleagues, that they had come to see him only to listen, rather than to carry on any negotiations, since they had no idea what he was going to propose. He told the president that they would return to the CNT regional headquarters, and confer there with the regional committee about Companys's proposals.

After a short meeting of the regional committee, it was agreed to telephone Companys 'that the constitution of a Committee of Antifascist Militias of Catalonia was accepted in principle, if there was agreement on its composition, and that a definite reply had to wait the decision of a Plenum of Local and County Organizations which would meet on the 23rd...' It was agreed that Aurelio Hernández, Buenaventura Durruti and Juan García Oliver would continue negotiations with Companys and the representatives of the various parties and groups involved concerning the nature of the proposed Militia Committee, pending a final CNT decision as to whether or not to participate in it.⁶

The Plenum of July 23 1936

Three days after the meeting of the anarchist leaders with President Companys, there took place the most decisive anarchist meeting of the Civil War. That gathering of delegates from all of the local and county organizations of the CNT and the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* in Catalonia took a decision which fundamentally determined

THE ANARCHISTS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

the direction and policy of the Libertarian Movement for the next 32 months. In a real sense, virtually all of the policy decisions of the movement until the end of the Republic flowed from the basic accord agreed upon at the July 23 1936 plenum.

The meeting took place in a building which the anarchists had seized as their Barcelona headquarters. This had been the seat of the principal Catalan employers' organization, the Fomento del Trabajo Nacional, on the Calle Layetana a block and a half from the cathedral in the center of the city, and now came to house the offices of the regional committees of the CNT and the FAI, the local committees of those two organizations, as well as the Peninsular Committee of the FAI and committees of the Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youth) and Unión de Mujeres Libres (Union of Free Women).

The basic decision to be made at the meeting was whether the anarchists should take power in Catalonia and establish libertarian communism, or whether they should ratify the tentative decision to participate in the Antifascist Militia Committee, and in doing so agree to share power (to a greater or less degree, depending on the circumstances) with the other organizations and parties which were aligned against the military Rebels and in defense of the Republic. Certainly no more fundamental question could confront the Catalan – Spanish – anarchists.

The position in favor of taking absolute power was first argued by the county delegation from Bajo Llobregat. Its representative said that 'he understood that with the Comité de Milicias the march of the social revolution was being blocked ... he proposed to retire the delegates of the CNT and the FAI and to go ahead with the revolution, ending with the implanting of libertarian communism, thus being in conformity with the agreements of the Organization and with its principles and ideological objectives.'

Juan García Oliver supported the position of the Bajo Llobregat delegation, arguing that Companys and the various parties and groups saw the Antifascist Militia Committee as 'a second class Commissariat of Police'. He argued that 'errors can and should be cancelled', adding that 'the revolutionary march has been acquiring such profundity that it obliges the CNT to very much take into

account that as the major element in the revolutionary complex it cannot leave the revolution without control and guidance, because that would create a great vacuum which, as in Russia in 1917, would be taken advantage of by the Marxists of all the tendencies to take over the revolutionary leadership, destroying us.'

Finally, García Oliver said, 'The moment had come to, with full responsibility, end what was begun on July 18, get rid of the Militia Committee and force events so that, for the first time in history, anarchosindicalist unions will go for everything, organizing libertarian communist life in all of Spain.'

Federica Montseny, Diego Abad de Santillán, Mariano Vázquez ('Marianet') all opposed the position of Bajo Llobregat and García Oliver, each with different arguments. La Montseny said: 'Her conscience as an anarchist would not permit her to accept ... to go for everything as García Oliver proposed, because the installation of an anarchist dictatorship, because it was a dictatorship, could never be anarchist...'

Diego Abad de Santillán argued that any attempt of the anarchists to 'go for everything' would be at best very short-lived. The major foreign powers would certainly blockade Catalonia, he said, and pointed to the presence of British warships in the harbor of Barcelona as indicating the possibility of armed intervention as well. He urged continued collaboration in the Militia Committee, 'forgoing for the moment the putting into practice of libertarian communism'.

Marianet also supported continued participation in the Militia Committee, 'without giving up actual governing from the streets'. He likewise opposed 'compromising the Organization in dictatorial practices, as would be the case if the CNT went for everything...'

Both the delegate from Bajo Llobregat and García Oliver replied in the arguments of Montseny, Abad de Santillán and Marianet. However, they got no backing from anyone else. It was widely noted that Buenaventura Durruti, who was present, did not participate in the debate on one side or another, although until then he had been closely associated with García Oliver.

The issue was finally put to a vote. The only delegation to vote for the Bajo Llobregat motion to withdraw from the Militia Committee

and to go forward immediately with the establishment of libertarian communism, was that of Bajo Llobregat itself. On the motion, then introduced by Diego Abad de Santillán to continue participation in the Militia Committee, all delegations except that of Bajo Llobregat voted in favor.

However, that was not quite the end of the drama of the July 23 plenum. After it was over, the members of the FAI Grupo Nosotros, which included such leading figures as García Oliver, Durruti, Gregorio Jover, Ricardo Sanz, Antonio Ortíz, Domingo and Joaquín Ascaso and Miguel García Vivancos met in the headquarters of the Militia Committee. At that meeting, Juan García Oliver proposed that the militiamen over whom Durruti was to assume command the following day, undertake immediately to seize the main government and public utility buildings of Barcelona and go forward with the proclamation of libertarian communism. Buenaventura Durruti opposed this, saying that it would not be appropriate until after Zaragoza had been recaptured and anarchist control over Aragón had been established. Apparently none of the others present seconded García Oliver's proposal, and all possibility of 'going for everything' disappeared.

García Oliver himself has probably best summed up the significance of the anarchist decision of July 23, 1936: 'Between social revolution and the Militia Committee, the Organization opted for the Militia Committee. It will have to be left for time to decide about who was right, the majority of the Plenum . . . or the *comarca* of Bajo Llobregat who with me sustained the need to go forward with the social revolution, under conditions which never before had been so promising.'⁷

Certainly, the decision of the Catalan anarchists on July 23 1936 is the best refutation of the claim of some of their opponents, particularly the Stalinists, that during the Civil War, the anarchists were seeking to establish their own dictatorship. Typical of these claims was that published in the Communist account of the Civil War, edited by Dolores Ibarruri and others: 'Impelled by the desire to carry out their "revolution", the anarchists, instead of incorporating fully in the war against fascism, prepared themselves to impose their hegemony over the other labor and democratic forces, concentrating

and hiding in the rearguard enormous quantities of arms; there where they could implant the dictatorship of the Committee of the FAI, refusing to recognize the Popular Front and the existence of the republican Government.’ They sought, said La Pasionaria and her colleagues ‘the establishment of the anarchist dictatorship in all of Spain’.⁸

Frank Jellinek, who was basically more sympathetic to the Stalinists than to the anarchists, rejected this claim of the Spanish Communists. He wrote in mid-1937: ‘The anarchists had the power. They refused to use it. They still stood on the margin, and, while they refused Companys’ offer of a leading share in the Generalidad, they equally refused to destroy the Generalidad.’⁹

The Establishment of the *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas*

In the meantime, even before the anarchists had made their final decision as to whether or not to participate in the *Comité de Milicias Antifascistas*, that body was taking form. In fact, its first meeting took place late on July 20, with those present apparently being Juan García Oliver, Durruti and Aurelio Fernández for the CNT, José Tarradellas, Artemio Aiguader and Jaime Miravittles of the Catalan Left Republican Party (*Esquerra Republicana*), Pey Poch for the Catalan Action Party (*Acció Catalana*), Juan Comorera for the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya*, Rafael Vidiella of the UGT and the Spanish Socialist Party, and Julian Gorkin of the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*. At that meeting, José Tarradellas moved to exclude from the *comité* the Catalan extremist party, *Estat Catala*, since its leader José Dencas (who had played a leading role in the October 1934 uprising) had indicated his fascist leaning by taking refuge in Rome. On the motion of García Oliver, it was agreed formally to establish the *Comité de Milicias* on the basis of three representatives of the CNT, three of the UGT, three for the Catalan Left Republican Party, two for the FAI and one each for *Acció Catalana*, the POUM, the Socialists and the peasant organization the *Rabassaires*.¹⁰

However, President Luis Companys, whatever he had told the CNT leaders on July 20, did not intend that the *Comité de Milicias Antifascistas* would be a dual power with the Catalan Generalidad. This was made clear in a decree which appeared in the official bulletin of the Generalidad on July 22. It declared created 'a citizen militia for the defense of the Republic', named Enrique Pérez Faras the chief of the militia, and Luis Prunes the commissioner for the defense of Catalonia, and said that 'there is designated a committee of coordination and direction of the citizen militia, consisting of a delegate designated by the Councillor of Government, another designated by the General Commissar of Public Order, and representatives of the labor groups and political organizations participating in the struggle against fascism.'¹¹ Clearly, the Militia Committee was, in Companys's mind, to be totally subordinate to the government of the Generalidad.

However, the anarchists were quite unwilling to accept that. At a meeting of the *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas* later on that same day – attended, except for the anarchist representatives, by delegates of less rank in their particular organizations than those who had attended the founding meeting two days before – they made this very clear. When Luis Prunes sought to take charge of the meeting, García Oliver immediately challenged him.

According to García Oliver, 'I interrupted drily, telling him that those who were meeting there were not present to deal with a citizens' militia about which we knew nothing, but to organize the Committee of Antifascist Militia of Catalonia which, in principle had been agreed upon in the brief exchange of impressions between the representatives of the CNT and the president of the Generalidad, with the consent of the leaders of other antifascist sectors of Catalonia...'

García Oliver then presented a proposed seven-point decree of the Antifascist Militia Committee. After considerable discussion, that decree was adopted by those present. Its first clause read: 'There is established a revolutionary order, to the maintenance of which are pledged all of the organizations which make up this committee.' Subsequent points of the decree provided for what amounted to a revolutionary police force subordinate to the committee, and

authorized all groups participating in the committee to begin to open ‘centers of recruitment and training’ of militiamen. Finally, point seven of the resolution stated: ‘The Committee hopes that, given the need to constitute a revolutionary order to confront the fascist nuclei, it will not be necessary, in order to obtain obedience, to recur to disciplinary measures.’¹²

Once this resolution had been accepted, the meeting went on with other business at hand. First, it assigned particular jobs to several of the committee members. Juan García Oliver was named to head the department of war; Aurelio Fernández, also of the CNT, was named chief of the department of internal security; and Durruti was named chief of transport. Jaime Miravittles of the Catalan Left Party was named chief of propaganda; José Torrens of the Rabassaires was made chief of supply. At the same time, José Asens of the CNT and Tomás Fabregas of the Acció Catalana party were considered added to the department of internal security, while Diego de Abad de Santillán became the assistant in the department of war charged with organizing the militia.

There was then a discussion of the menace presented by the Rebel seizure of most of Aragón. It was agreed that the first military task of the committee was to dispatch a militia column to Aragón to seek to recapture Zaragoza and Huesca. Buenaventura Durruti volunteered to organize and head this column, and the committee accepted this, also naming Major Enrique Perez Faras as technical adviser of the column. As a result, it became necessary for the CNT regional committee to name a replacement for Durruti on the Militia committee, and it named Marcos Alcón, of the glass workers’ union.¹³

Thus, on the initiative of the anarchist members of the Central Committee of Antifascist Militia, it constituted itself in effect into the *de facto* government of Catalonia. It thus was to remain until September 27 1936.

Nature of the Central Committee of Antifascist Militia

There is no doubt that effective power remained in the hands of the

Central Militia Committee between July 20 and September 27 1936. Although the government of President Companys remained in existence, and continued to issue decrees, its actions were totally impotent unless endorsed by the Militia Committee.

I had this fact brought home to me personally, in an incident which was trivial, but none the less significant. I was in Barcelona for a few days about a month after the outbreak of the Civil War. I had a small box camera, for the use of which my guide and I thought it would be a good idea to get official authorization. We set out to do so, first going to the city hall of Barcelona. People there said that they had no power to give such authorization, and suggested that we go to the Generalidad. There, too, we were told that they had no authority to grant the permission we were seeking and suggested that we go to the Central Militia Committee.

At the Central Militia Committee there was not the slightest doubt that they *did* have authority to allow me to use my camera. After I first agreed to have my guide turn in to them all of the film I had used – which they promised to send to me when it was developed (and they did so) – I received a document signed by Jaime Miravittles as Chief of Propaganda of the Militia Committee duly authorizing me to use my camera as I wished.

During the first two months of the Civil War, it was the Central Militia Committee that fulfilled virtually all governmental functions in Catalonia. Diego Abad de Santillán said: ‘The Comité de Milicias was a Ministry of War in time of war, a Ministry of the Interior, and a Ministry of Foreign Relations all at the same time, inspiring similar organisms in the economic and cultural sectors.’¹⁴

It was the committee that organized and sent to the front in Aragón – and the Levante and Madrid as well – militia formations, organized the supply of those armed forces, and sought to centralize their leadership. It was the committee that took the lead in establishing the Council of the Economy of Catalonia, to try to bring some order into the economic life of the region and in reorganizing its school system. In earlier chapters, we have dealt with the military, economic and educational aspects of the work of the Antifascist Militia Committee, some of which were given a legal basis as decrees of the Generalidad of Catalonia.

However, another major responsibility of the committee during the first two months of the war was the maintenance of public order. For the anarchists this was particularly difficult because of their ingrained rejection of the kind of governmental authority which, *de facto*, they clearly had to exercise.

Although the Assault Guard and Civil Guard police had participated alongside the workers in the struggle to put down the rebellion on July 18–20, and some of their units probably remained intact, they were demoralized and in great disarray. The main job of policing during the early months of the Civil War fell on the so-called *patrullas de control* (control patrols) organized by the trade union and political groups which had participated in the street fighting.¹⁵

There were 700 men in these patrols, of whom 325 came from the CNT, 145 from the UGT, 45 from the POUM and 185 from the Esquerra. They were under the supervision of 11 section delegates (four each from the CNT and the Esquerra, and three from the UGT), and José Asense of the CNT was secretary-general of the organization. The control patrols worked under Aurelio Fernández, the member of the Comité de Milicias in charge of public order. For quite some time there also existed police groups organized by the various parties and union groups.

A court system was also soon organized. A *comité* of justice of Catalonia and a juridical bureau were established in Barcelona, headed by Eduardo Barriobero and Angel Samblancat, two lawyers who belonged to the CNT. Three revolutionary tribunals were established in Tarragona, Gerona and Lérida, made up of laymen, usually workers. César Lorenzo noted: 'These organisms celebrated marriages and divorces, dealt with civil and commercial litigation, prosecuted wrongdoers and administered the prisons, judged the rebels, suspects and irresponsible people, etc.'¹⁶

Similar groups were organized on a local basis in the rest of Catalonia by the new municipal authorities which were established after July 20. For police purposes, the writ of the Antifascist Militia Committee did not run much beyond the capital city.¹⁷

Then and later, in their campaign to discredit the anarchists, and particularly their role in Catalonia in the early months of the War,

the Communists painted the *patrullas* in the darkest of colors. Thus, Jesús Hernández wrote of ‘the sinister “Halt!” of control patrol, the arrests, the careful search among documents for a card of the PSUC or the UGT for an assassination’, and that ‘in the mornings there appeared in the outskirts of the city the cadavers of the murdered men’, and claimed that more than 200 trolleycar and bus workers had been murdered by them.¹⁸

However, the anarchists rejected such claims. Thus, Diego Abad de Santillán said of these improvised police:

We do not defend the institution of the *patrullas*, as we have not defended the civil guard or the assault guard. But they had a sense of humanity and of responsibility that kept them loyal to the defense of the new revolutionary order. With time perhaps they would have been just another police corps, but the defamation to which they were subjected lacked justification ... the population which lived through the first ten months of the revolution in Catalonia would bear testimony to the difference from the point of view of repressive methods with what came afterwards, under the ‘order’ established by Prieto, Negrín, Zugazagoitia, with the torture chambers of the Communist Party or the General Directorate of Security...¹⁹

Abad de Santillán insisted that the Comité de Milicias and the anarchists in particular sought to punish abuses of authority by their followers in the patrols. He cited at least two cases in which anarchists of some local prominence were executed for such abuses.²⁰

The overwhelmingly predominant influence within the Comité de Milicias was that of the anarcho-syndicalists. Franz Borkenau, in his diary of his first visit to revolutionary Spain in August 1936, noted: ‘In Barcelona there rules, besides the old regional administration of the Catalan Generalidad, the new Comité Central de Milicias ... composed, on a basis of parity, of all anti-Franco political parties and trade unions, but in fact under the preponderant influence of the anarchists...’²¹

Certainly, President Companys was not happy with the superseding of the Generalidad’s power by that of the Central Militia

Committee, as he showed on various occasions. Juan García Oliver recounted one instance in which Companys unexpectedly came to one of the meetings of the committee and accused them of failing to maintain public order: 'I'm obliged to tell you that if you are unable to re-establish order ... I shall do so with the means at my disposal.'

As García Oliver noted, the question at issue was 'who was going to govern from then on, the government of the Generalidad and its Assault Guards or the Comité de Milicias and its militiamen.' He himself, without rising from his chair, answered Companys: 'It's better that we pretend that we haven't heard what you have said to us, Companys. We have a lot to do. The enemy is at the gates of Catalonia. Goodbye!' But 'Companys stood petrified. From that moment it was clearly established that it would be the Comité de Milicias Antifascistas which would direct the destinies of Catalonia.'²²

On August 1, in an apparent maneuver to split the Comité de Milicias, President Companys named a new cabinet headed by Juan Casanovas, president of the Catalan parliament, and containing representatives of the newly formed Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia (PSUC), as well as of the Rabassaires. However, although Mariano Vázquez, regional secretary of the CNT, had tentatively agreed to this change in the Catalan government, Juan García Oliver and other anarchist members of the Comité de Milicias reacted strongly against it. They forced a further reorganization of the cabinet, dropping the members from the PSUC. The new government, established on August 6, and which remained in office until September 27, included nine representatives of the Catalan Left, one of Catalan Action, and one of the Unió de Rabassaires, together with a military man, Colonel Felipe Díaz Sandino.²³

At some point during the existence of the Central Militia Committee, President Companys and other leaders of his party apparently thought about the possibility of using the regular police to challenge the *de facto* control of the anarchists. According to Ronald Fraser, 'An idea was mooted to bring in all the *guardia civil* units which remained in the villages. The anarchists had got wind of the plan: Companys and Tarradellas for the Generalidad not Durruti, García Oliver, Mariano Vazquez of the CNT; they came armed.'

Fraser cited the account of Jaime Miravittles of what occurred in that meeting. Miravittles quoted the anarchist leaders as saying, 'If you try bringing in the *guardia civil* we shall call a general strike immediately; there will be a massacre of the Generalidad and Esquerra leaders.' Miravittles added: 'They were well aware that the plan was aimed at them, that the force would be used to fight them, to win back control of the situation, and they were prepared to carry out their threat. Naturally, the order to the *guardia civil* was never given.'²⁴

Both these maneuvers and those proposed by Companys and the Esquerra Catalá leaders underscored an issue which was to persist throughout much of the War: that of the relations between the anarchists and the Catalan Left. It reached a climax in the early days of May 1937, when in the armed conflict, Companys and his associates sided with the Stalinists against the CNT, which not only had the effect of removing the anarchists from all control of regional policies, but also, ironically enough, made the Catalan Left leaders the virtual prisoners of the Stalinists, and resulted in almost completely destroying the autonomy of the Catalan regime, which was the highest aspiration of the Catalan Left leaders.

Local Regimes Within Catalonia

While the Comité de Milicias was being established in Barcelona and certainly aspired to exert control over all of Catalonia, in fact revolutionary authorities were established on a local basis throughout the region. According Víctor Alba:

The committees were formed on July 19–20 and in fact took over local control. They were installed almost always in the town hall, requisitioned automobiles, carried out arrests, expropriated arms, occupied buildings, issued permits to circulate, established armed controls on the highways.

In some places – particularly at the insistence of the POUMistas – those committees were formed exclusively with representatives of the labor organizations, without delegates of the Esquerra or of

Acció Catalana. In other places, where the POUMists were less influential, the CNTistas accepted participation of representatives of the Republican parties. In Lérida, where the POUM was like the CNT was in Barcelona – the basic force – the Committee was made up of representatives of the CNT, POUM and PSUC. Josp Rodes, of the POUM, was the president and commissar of Public Order.²⁵

However, Lérida was the exception. César Lorenzo has noted, ‘Generally, the revolutionary committees were formed with representatives of all the political and trade union groups, but libertarian influence was predominant.’ He said that there were a few cases in which the committee was made up only of CNT members, and even a handful in which the CNT did not have representation.

Lorenzo gave as typical of the local committees those of Vich, Valls and Badalona. In the first, there were two members of the CNT, one of the FAI, one each of the Esquerra, UGT, POUM and Unió de Rabassaires. In Valls there were five of the CNT, two each of the Esquerra and the Unió Socialista de Catalunya and one each of the UGT and the POUM. Finally, in Badalona, there were five libertarians (two of the CNT, two of the FAI and one from the railroad union), one each of the Socialist Party, Communist Party and UGT (in fact, three Communists), and one each of the Unió de Rabassaires, Acció Catalana, Estat Catala and the POUM, and two from Esquerra.²⁶

In theory, the local committees were supposed to pass their decisions to the county committees, which in turn passed them to the Comité Central de Milicias in Barcelona, and the Comité Central similarly forwarded its orders through the county committees to the local ones. However, César Lorenzo observed: ‘In truth, the authority of the Central Committee of the Militia was not very solid. The local committees obeyed only themselves, relations were very loose between them and the Central Committee...’²⁷

Popular Justice in Revolutionary Catalonia

During the existence of the Central Militia Committee and afterwards, at least until the May Events of 1937, there existed a system of popular justice in Catalonia. Sanctioned by the Catalan government, it took the place of the pre-July 19 court system in the region.

The French anarchist Renée Lamberet has described the popular tribunal of Tarragona, which had jurisdiction throughout that province. It was presided over by a person named by the Generalidad of Catalonia, and there were two *jurados*, or lay judges, as well as two prosecutors associated with the tribunal. These four were 'designated by the CNT and UGT and the political parties. Upon being accepted by the Generalidad, the members of the *jurado* began to function.' They were aided by secretaries of the old court of the province.

Proceedings commenced with the prosecutors interviewing the accused, after which they reported to the tribunal, and that body classified them as 'grave, urgent etc'. It then passed its information to the antifascist Committee of the place from which the accused came, 'asking for details of the politico-social activities of the accused'. A prosecutor and a secretary then went to the accused's place of origin, where they called a meeting of the antifascist committee, to gather details of the case, and asked two members of each organization represented on the antifascist committee to submit a written report on the case. When the case finally came to trial, the accused was represented by a lawyer of his choice.

Lamberet gives the details of two cases which came before the Taragona popular tribunal. One involved three priests accused of helping to organize the rebellion in Taragona. The other concerned an old man accused of armed robbery in a provincial town, and who claimed that he had taken the money from local landowners who, to cover themselves, had organized a *sindicato* in the village and in its name had forced local peasants to make contributions. The priests were sentenced to death but were later pardoned. The old man was declared innocent.²⁸

The Formation of the Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia

One political event of major future significance during the period of the Comité Central de Milicias was the establishment of a new Stalinist party in Catalonia, the Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia (PSUC). This was formed a few days after July 19, by a merger of the Catalan branches of the Spanish Socialist and Communist parties, and two small Catalan parties, the Unió Socialista de Catalunya and the Partit Català Proletari.

The first efforts to merge into one organization the Marxist and semi-Marxist parties of Catalonia had been made as early as March 1935, in the wake of the failure of the uprising of October 1934. At that time, the Bloque Obrero y Campesino, a dissident Communist Party more or less associated with the International Right Opposition and headed by Joaquín Maurín, had called together a conference for that purpose. That meeting was attended not only by the four groups which ultimately formed by PSUC, but also by the Bloque and the Izquierda Comunista, headed by Andrés Nin which had, until shortly before, been the Spanish affiliate of Leon Trotsky's International Communist Left Opposition.

Víctor Alba has said that the only parties participating in this March 1935 conference which really deserved the name of 'party' were the Bloque and the Unió Socialista de Catalunya. The others were 'minuscule groups'.

These early negotiations failed to bring about unity. On the one hand, the Unió Socialista de Catalunya, headed by Juan Comorera, had close links with the Esquerra Català of Luis Companys – Comorera having been a member of Company's cabinet – and the USE did not want to participate in what might become a serious rival to the Esquerra. On the other hand, the Stalinists wanted no unity with either the Bloque or the Izquierda Comunista, both of which they regarded as being composed of 'renegades' and 'traitors'.

As a consequence, the only unification achieved before the outbreak of the Civil War was the merger in October 1935 of the Bloque Obrero y Campesino and the Izquierda Comunista to form the new Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM).²⁹

Negotiations among the other four parties continued in a more or less desultory fashion until the outbreak of the Civil War. A major stumbling block in the discussions was apparently that of the international affiliation of the proposed new party. Understandably, the Catalan Communist Federation wanted it to join the Communist International, while the president of the Catalan federation of the Spanish Socialist Party, Rafael Vidiella, at the time a strong supporter of Largo Caballero, felt that it should join the Labor and Socialist International, with which the PSOE was associated.

Juan Comorera, the principal figure in the *Unió Socialista*, was opposed to the new Catalan party having any affiliation. In the light of Comorera's subsequent behavior as head of the PSUC, it is ironic to note that, according to Burnett Bolloten, he 'is allowed to have told members of the executive committee of his party that it was essential to prevent the Communists from capturing the new organization.'

Several factors may have finally led to a resolution of these polemics and the formal merger of the four tiny Catalan parties. Burnett Bolloten was almost certainly correct when he wrote that 'under the impact of the Revolution these differences melted away. The leaders of the four parties knew that the emergence of the CNT and FAI as masters of the situation left them scant hope of survival unless they united their forces.' He added: 'After a heated debate, Juan Comorera and Rafael Vidiella ... withdrew their objections to adherence to the Communist International, and the new party was formed.'³⁰

Even with the pooling of the membership of the four groups which went to form it, the PSUC did not begin as a large party. Bolloten estimated that at the time of the merger, the *Unió Socialista* had between 1,200 and 1,500 members, the PSOE Catalan Federation had between 600 and 700, the Communist Party 'less than 400', and the *Partit Catalá Proletari* only about 80. However, he added that Luis Cabo Giorla, a member of the central committee, credited the PSUC with 5,000 members at its inception.³¹

Nevertheless, the membership of the *Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalonia* grew rapidly once the party had been established. By March 1937 it was claiming 50,000 members, which Burnett

Bolloten concluded ‘does not appear to be greatly exaggerated’.³² José Peirats has noted that among the early recruits to the PSUC were the paramilitary branch of the Catalan extremist party Estat Catalá, known as the *Escamots* who ‘entered as a bloc’ into the new party.³³

There are at least three major reasons for the rapid increase in the size of the PSUC. First, of course, was, the fact that in the early months of the Civil War, all political and trade union groups supporting the Republic experienced an influx of new adherents. Some groups were more cautious than others about screening their new recruits – and the Communists (including the PSUC) had less caution than some of their competitors.

But another factor of major consequence in the rise of the PSUC was what was certainly a major strategic error on the part of the anarchists at the beginning of the War. With their orientation in favor of ‘workers’ unity’, the anarchists had from the beginning tended to treat the Unión General de Trabajadores virtually as an equal – whether in the Comité de Milicias, in new revolutionary administrations in the municipalities, or in the organization of industries and other enterprises taken over by the workers.

Although in much of Republican Spain such parity was fully justified by the balance of forces between the two labor organizations, that was certainly not the case in Catalonia, where the CNT was the overwhelmingly predominant labor group after July 19, and the UGT, according to José Peirats, ‘was virtually non-existent’.³⁴ The anarchists’ ‘generosity’ to the UGT served as an exceedingly useful tool for the Stalinists to spread their influence rapidly.

Before the formation of the PSUC, the UGT in Catalonia had been controlled by the Catalan Federation of the Spanish Socialist Party. With the formation of the new party, the UGT automatically came under its control, thus in effect becoming a tool of the Stalinists. Then, shortly after the formation of the PSUC, the Unión General de Sindicatos Obreros de Catalonia (USSOC), controlled by the Unió Socialista de Catalunya, which had broken away from the UGT in 1934, returned to it. Also, on August 2, the Centro Autonomista de Dependientes de Comercio e Industrial (CADCIO, a white-collar

workers' group which had been controlled by the Partido Catalá Proletari) also joined the UGT.³⁵

On August 11 1936, the CNT and the FAI compounded their error by signing an agreement with the Catalan UGT and the PSUC establishing a liaison committee composed of two representatives each of the CNT and UGT and one each from the PSUC and the FAI. This committee 'will have the mission of seeking points of coincidence which exist between these organizations, submitting them to their discussion and approval, so as subsequently to issue orientations and public slogans,' Point five of the nine-point agreement added: 'This Committee will urge and counsel their affiliates and organizations to form in all work sites Factory Committees, with proportional representation of affiliates of the CNT and the UGT.' Point six promised, 'Mutual respect of the unions of each central body and freedom of unionization for workers in one or the other of the two central groups', while point seven promised 'to renounce all kinds of attacks and criticisms of a violent type...'³⁶

It is notable that the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) and the trade-union group then controlled by it, the Federación Obrera de Unificación Sindical (FOUS), were not included in the committee, in spite of the fact that at that moment, the POUM and its trade union group were larger and more influential than the Stalinist organizations. This fact reflected the anarchists' simple concept that the labor movement was divided between 'libertarians' and 'Marxists', and that if one Marxist group was represented, there was no need for the other. This was not the last time that the anarchists would fail to see that their logical allies in Catalonia were the POUM and not the Stalinists.

On October 25 1936, a further pact was signed between the CNT-FAI and UGT-PSUC. It promised to mobilize support for the new council of the Generalidad and its decisions. It also pledged 'collectivization of the means of production', with 'respect' for small industry; municipalization of housing; formation of a Popular Army; 'control of foreign trade'; nationalization of banking; workers' control in private industry, but no compulsion on small industry; support for the New Unified School; full collaboration with the Republican government, once the anarchists became part of it;

agreement for the two trade union groups not to raid one another; and finally, 'joint action to eliminate irresponsible groups which might, through bad faith or misunderstanding, endanger the execution of this program.'³⁷

The POUMists were critical of the terms of the CNT–FAI–UGT–PSUC agreement, Their periodical, *The Spanish Revolution* reported: 'It seems to us that the program which they have established is aiming at strengthening the Council of the Generality and tying the decisions and activities of the trade union organizations to it ... The problems of the new organs of power and the new structure of the social order are forgotten. The pact is a flagrant contradiction of the position which the CNT has held; on the other hand, it is in direct agreement with the opinions defended by the PSU, which consist in guiding all the revolutionary impulses of the working masses within the limits of the bourgeois democratic republic.'³⁸

The rapid increase in membership of the PSUC, and of the UGT which it controlled, did not come about through winning over the workers from the CNT. The Communist leader Jesús Hernández, in his viriolic polemical book against the anarchists (written later in Russia at the behest of the Comintern) claimed that during the first months of the War, 'there began a process of exodus from the CNT, and the PSUC and UGT attracted ... enormous proletarian contingents in Barcelona and all Catalonia.'³⁹ However, it is clear that such was not the case.

Franz Borkenau, writing about mid-January 1937 about whether the rapid rise in membership of the PSUC and UGT was due to their attracting CNT workers, noted that 'there seems to be very little of that ... The explanation of the contrast between membership figures and influence among the workers seems to lie in the fact that the Communist Party has changed its social character. This is most obvious in the case of the Catalan PSUC ... Not many industrial workers are members of the PSUC, but it claims, nevertheless, 46,000 members, the majority of whom are State and private employees, shopkeepers, merchants, officers, members of the police forces, intellectuals both in town and country, and a certain number of peasants.'⁴⁰

What gave the PSUC a mass base was its recruitment from the

middle-class and conservative elements. According to Burnett Bolloten, 'To protect the interests of the urban middle classes in this region the Communists organized eighteen thousand tradesmen, handicraftsmen, and small manufacturers into the *Federación Catalana de Gremios y Entidades de Pequeños Comerciantes e Industriales*, Catalan Federation of Small Businessmen (known as the GEPCI), some of whose members were, in the phrase of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT organ, "intransigent employers, ferociously antilabor," including Gurri, the former president of the Tailoring Trades Association.'⁴¹

What was true of the PSUC was also true of the UGT in Catalonia, which the Stalinists controlled. In a CNT pamphlet on the May Events it was noted: 'The workers were organized in their majority in the syndicalist CNT, the petty bourgeoisie organized itself, in the months after the 19 of July in the UGT... Not only workers, but also merchants, proprietors of small businesses, shops, sellers in the markets, etc., entered the UGT.'⁴²

The POUMist leader Juan Andrade has made this same point in a somewhat different way. He said that 'the CNT was the reason' for the growth of the PSUC. He added that it 'terrorized so many people that, in reaction, they came to consider the communists as the party of order'.⁴³

Finally, the fact that the PSUC was a Stalinist party is clear. According to Burnett Bolloten:

From the time of its formation, it will be recalled, the PSUC adhered to the Communist International. Shortly thereafter the Communists became the ruling nucleus. In addition to controlling its organizational work, its press, and trade-union activities, they were in charge of internal vigilance, as all records were in the hands of Joaquín Olass, the head of the party's control commission. 'Pedro' – the Comintern delegate, whose real name was Erno Gero and who, after World War II, became a member of the Soviet-controlled Hungarian government – was placed at Comorera's elbow, and Spanish Communist leaders were sent regularly to Barcelona with directives...

The PSUC was directed behind the scenes with extraordinary

energy, tact, and efficiency by 'Pedro'. He watched over *Treball*, the party organ and, aided by a perfect knowledge of Catalan, smoothed over differences in the inner circle of the party resulting from the Catalan nationalism of some of its leaders and their reluctance to accept the centralizing aims of the Spanish Communists.

Finally, Bollothen noted that a direct link was established between the PSUC and the Spanish Communist Party: 'Within a few months, both Comorera and Rafael Vidiella ... reinforced their ties with the Spanish Communist party, when they were made members of its central committee.'⁴⁴

Councils of Workers and Soldiers

During the period of the *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas*, the anarchists established another institution which was of major significance in that revolutionary period. This was a series of councils of workers and soldiers, which, according to José Peirats, 'had similar purposes as those created during the first phase of the Russian Revolution'.⁴⁵

The principal inspirer of these councils was Juan García Oliver, who was in charge of the military aspects of the *Comité Central de Milicias* for the CNT. There was fear that officers of the Civil Guard, Assault Guard and *carabineros*, although ostensibly opposing the Franco insurrection, might in fact be conspiring to go over to it with their paramilitary forces. García Oliver was determined not to let that happen.

He first called in two leaders of the CNT textile workers' union, Dionisio Eroles and Alfonso Miguel. As García Oliver wrote many years later:

I met with them. I explained the situation; the state of latent conspiracy of some officers of the Civil Guard; the necessity to put an end to it without bloody conflicts. I counted on these two to establish Councils of Workers and Soldiers, a kind of

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sindicato with civil guards, *carabineros* and Security and Assault guards. These councils must be mixed, composed of representatives of each branch of the three forces of Public Order and by militants of the CNT, to begin with, and of the UGT immediately afterwards...

The purpose was to break the *esprit de corps* and discipline, to then give them the new revolutionary spirit...

Shortly afterwards, García Oliver met with a sergeant and two corporals of the Civil Guard, sent to him at his request by Major Guarner, one of his principal career military collaborators. On the spot, he promoted the sergeant to be a major and the corporals to be captains. He then asked them whether it was true that there was latent subversion among some of the officers of the Civil Guard, and they confirmed that there was.

García Oliver then said to the three new officers: 'That state of insurrection must end immediately. You will put an end to it, aided by responsible members of the CNT, comrades Dionisio Eroles and Alfonso Miguel, who are here. Unless you have objections, you will form Councils of Workers and Soldiers, a kind of mixed *sindicato* of the Civil Guard, *carabineros* and Security Guards, and will proceed to form barracks councils, which will immediately arrest the officers in state of rebellion.'

When asked by the new major whether the councils should shoot those officers, García Oliver said no, that they should be sent to the prison ship *Uruguay*, where they would be placed at the disposition of military courts.

García Oliver continued, 'The cleanup which was made in the barracks of the Civil Guard was complete. But not many of the officers were sent to the *Uruguay*. Without forcing the situation, the Central Committee of the Councils of Workers and Soldiers left to the officers themselves whether they wanted to continue in the service, accepting the Councils, or be sent as prisoners to the *Uruguay*.'

The workers' and soldiers' councils were abolished after the government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín came to power in mid-1937.⁴⁶

Seeking Cooperation With the Moroccan Nationalists

The anarchists in the *Comité Central de Milicias* also sought to encourage an insurrection behind Franco's lines in Spanish Morocco. Again, García Oliver had a major role in that effort. Some time before the outbreak of the Civil War he had published a pamphlet in which he had urged that 'when the revolution begins in Spain, it must be attempted, as a means of international defense, to bring about an insurrection of the peoples of North Africa.'

García Oliver summoned José Margeli, a leader of the CNT Graphic Arts Workers' Union, to inquire about a certain Sr Argila, an Egyptian whom Margeli had introduced to him a couple months before the War began. This man, it turned out, represented a Panislamic Council, and had contacts with Moroccan nationalists. Argila suggested that a Catalan delegation be sent to Geneva to contact there the *Comité de Acción Marroquí* (Committee of Moroccan Action – CAM).

When the Catalan delegation returned from Geneva, three members of the CAM came with them. The Catalans offered to supply arms and other help to Moroccan rebels, but the Moroccan representatives were hesitant, fearing intervention by the French, who controlled most of Morocco, if an insurrection broke out in the Spanish-controlled area. They wanted the Republican government to be involved in the negotiations, and that it seek to get French acquiescence in an insurrection in Spanish Morocco.

García Oliver and the other Catalan negotiators agreed that if the CAM would sign an agreement with the *Comité Central de Milicias*, the Catalans would then seek the support of the Spanish government and urge it to take the matter up with the French. So a pact, of which three copies were signed – one for the CAM, one for the *Comité Central* and one for the Spanish Government – was finally signed in the *Comité Central*'s headquarters. When García Oliver informed Prime Minister José Giral of the agreement, Giral sent one of his ministers, Julio Just, to Barcelona, where he discussed the question at length with the Catalans, and took the third copy of the Catalan–CAM pact to give to Giral. But, as García Oliver wrote, 'A few days later the government presided over by Giral resigned and I heard

nothing more of what happened to the pact. I suppose that they didn't even dare to raise the issue with the French government.⁴⁷

As a matter of fact, an important figure in the new government of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, Carlos de Baraibar, was also interested in trying to foment an uprising in Morocco, where he had friends among the nationalists. However, he was unable to overcome Largo Caballero's fear that a Moroccan insurrection would bring a hostile response from the French, who Largo Caballero still hoped might aid the Republican government in the Civil War.⁴⁸

The Anarchists' Entry into the Catalan Government

Dual power of the government and the Central Militia Committee persisted in Catalonia for more than two months. The Stalinist history of the Civil War correctly stated: 'Here there existed two powers: the legal, formal power, which belonged to the Government ... and the real, effective power, which belonged to the Comité de Milicias, and in fact, to the anarchists.'⁴⁹ What this Stalinist history did not note, of course, was the striking similarity to the Russian situation between March and November 1917, when the Soviets represented a dual power to the provisional government, an oversight due to the fact that it was anarchists and not Bolsheviki who controlled the 'real' power.

This situation continued until September 27 1936. On that day, the CNT and the FAI, as well as the PSUC and the POUM, entered the government of Catalonia, and a few days later, the Comité de Milicias was dissolved.

Different anarchist writers have given different explanations for the anarchists making the tremendous break with their ideology and tradition by entering a duly constituted government. César Lorenzo, whose father Horacio Prieto, was at the time national secretary of the CNT, has argued that the anarchist leaders came to see the necessity of putting an end to the confusing situation which had existed in Catalonia during the first two months of the War, in which revolutionary committees in each community exercised virtually

sovereign powers within their area of jurisdiction, and each party and trade union group had its own military and police forces.⁵⁰

Diego Abad de Santillán, on the other hand, attributed the Catalan anarchists' decision to their growing conviction that so long as the Comité de Milicias was the *de facto* government of Catalonia, the Republican government in Madrid would refuse to give Catalonia the aid in terms of financing and military equipment which was required to carry forward the war in Aragón; and that this same factor was a major element in the apparent hostility of the democratic governments, particularly those of Great Britain and France, towards the Republican cause. According to Abad de Santillán, the anarchist leaders hoped that both these handicaps to the prosecution of the War and the Revolution might be overcome if there was installed a Catalan government in which all antifascist forces were represented, and the Comité de Milicias was terminated.⁵¹

For his part, García Oliver attributed the anarchists' decision to less laudable motives. He argued that the leadership of the CNT and the FAI were becoming 'bureaucratized'. As part of that process, 'certain apparently anarchist groups hardly slept, they were so busy seeking pretexts to end the Comité de Milicias and find, at whatever cost, ways to undertake the functions of government.'⁵²

An official statement of the FAI Peninsular Committee and several CNT groups explained the anarchists' entry into the Catalan government by saying: 'This was the first step. If the organization had decided not to do so, the new government would have been set up without the CNT, and the United Socialist Party of Catalonia ... would have more positions; in effect they were taking advantage of the expected assistance from Russia and were plotting military initiatives that we had to oppose for ideological reasons... We would have been in an inferior position if we had remained outside the government. We were masters of the streets, most of the arms were in our hands. But could we use the weapons criminally and start a fratricidal battle in the streets that would have endangered the outcome of the struggle at the front? ...'⁵³

There were those Catalan and Spanish anarchists who opposed the entry of their movement into the Catalan government, and subsequently into that of the Republic. José Peirats, at the time a

Libertarian Youth leader who himself opposed these moves, said: 'At the beginning of the stage of government collaboration by the CNT the militants of Bajo Llobregat, loyal to anarchist extremism, constituted a movement of opposition to participation of the CNT-FAI in governments, and against the militarization of the militias. In Hospitalet de Llobregat there was published the periodical *Ideas*, of opposition to and criticism of libertarian deviationism.'⁵⁴

However, Peirats has also commented on the difficulties facing those who opposed this fundamental compromise with anarchist theory and philosophy: 'At the distance of many years, I think that those of us who opposed consistently the governmentalist thesis could not have offered any other way of resolving the problems of the time than a stoic and heroic gesture. I think, also, that there was an unconfessed complicity in many militants opposed to collaboration, who shouted their holy ire at the same time they allowed it to happen. And, however, they were also sincere in their way; sincere in their impotence. They couldn't offer any solution...'⁵⁵

Whatever the motivations of the various anarchist leaders for entering the Catalan government, the invitation to do so apparently came from President Companys late in August. This invitation was followed by a regional plenum of all local and county groups of the Catalan CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth. César Lorenzo noted in his account of this meeting (to which García Oliver makes no reference in his memoirs) that García Oliver argued strongly that the anarchists should take full power, abolish the Generalidad and convert the Comité de Milicias into the government of the region. However, the plenum rejected this, and in principle accepted the idea that the CNT should enter the Catalan government. Curiously, the same meeting decided that the FAI should not enter the government as such; that whereas it was acceptable for the CNT as a trade union group, albeit of anarcho-syndicalist orientation, to do so, that was not acceptable for the FAI, a doctrinal anarchist group.⁵⁶

Negotiations on the formal entry of the CNT into the Generalidad apparently continued for several weeks. Finally, between September 24 and 26 a regional congress of CNT unions, ostensibly called to discuss the economic situation of the region, in a highly uncharacteristic secret session, ratified the arrangements for the CNT to

obtain three posts in the new government, the title of which was changed to 'Council of the Generalidad', a change which the FAI subsequently admitted was a 'puerile concession to the sensibilities of the anarchists'.⁵⁷

The new ministers representing the CNT in the cabinet headed by José Tarradellas of the *Esquerra Catalana* were Juan P. Fábregas, councillor of economy; José J. Domenech, councillor of supply; and Antonio García Birlán, councillor of public health and social affairs.⁵⁸ Curiously, García Birlán belonged to the FAI but had not been a member of the CNT since 1917, while Fábregas had only joined the CNT after the outbreak of the Civil War.⁵⁹

However, the announcement of the entry of the CNT ministers did not quite complete the process of integrating the anarchists into the government of Catalonia. The resolution of the regional congress of CNT unions which had accepted the entry of these three into the Generalidad did not call for the dissolution of the *Comité de Milicias*, which still remained in existence.

Four of the five anarchist members of the *Comité de Milicias* – García Oliver, Aurelio Fernández, Marcos Alcón and José Asens – had grave reservations about entry into the government, and particularly about the posts which had been assigned to the CNT, which García Oliver characterized as being 'like three departments of the City Government of Barcelona'. These four met, after the announcement of the new cabinet, to decide what to do.

They finally agreed that, since no official move had been taken to dissolve the *Comité de Milicias*, it should continue to meet each evening, as had been customary. Only when President Companys and Prime Minister Tarradellas agreed to the establishment of secretaries-general in the departments of defense and internal security, and to name to those posts García Oliver and Aurelio Fernández respectively (who had controlled those parts of the *Comité de Milicias*) and agreed that they 'would really run those departments', would they agree to the elimination of the *Comité de Milicias*.

In conformity with this decision, the *Comité de Milicias* met on the evenings of September 27, 28, 29, 30. Although it had little business to handle in those meetings, they were attended by all of the regular members. Finally, on September 30, Artemio Aiguader,

the newly named councillor of internal security (a member of Esquerra Catalana) visited the office of Aurelio Fernández, who was still carrying on his activities as the internal security chief of the Comité de Milicias, and offered him the post of secretary-general of the councillorship of internal security, with full powers to run it. Shortly afterwards, Colonel Felipe Díaz Sandino, the new councillor of defense, together with Prime Minister Tarradellas, visited García Oliver, with a similar offer of the councillorship of defense.

Both Fernández and García Oliver consented to the propositions offered them and, on October 1 1936, their appointments were announced in the official bulletin of the Catalan government. That evening, the Comité de Milicias held its last official meeting. García Oliver, who had been its *de facto* chairman, gave a valedictory speech, summing up what the Comité de Milicias had achieved in its little more than two months of existence. It was agreed that the members of the Comité de Milicias would continue to meet regularly as an advisory body to the secretary-general of the councillorship of defense.⁶⁰

The Role of the Anarchists in the Generalidad, September–December 1936

In earlier chapters, I discussed the roles played by Juan P. Fabregas as councillor of economy, and Juan J. Domenech as councillor of supply. I have also dealt with the control of the Catalan military by Juan García Oliver (and after he became minister of justice in the Republican government, by Juan Molina) as secretary-general of defense, and Aurelio Fernández's control of the police forces as secretary-general of internal security. We have also seen the important role played by the anarchists in the reorganization of the public education system of Catalonia.

Here it is sufficient to observe that between the entry of the anarchists into the Generalidad until the cabinet crisis of December 1936, the key elements of the Catalan government remained largely in anarchist hands. The economy, both in terms of the organization

of the distribution of goods to the consumers and in the process of legalization of the collectives organized by the workers throughout most of urban Catalonia, remained mainly under CNT control. The military forces of the Catalan regime, both in Catalonia itself and in Aragón and elsewhere where Catalan troops were engaged, also was principally an anarchist responsibility.

Similarly, the maintenance of public order through the *patrullas de control* was also under anarchist control. However, during the last months of 1936 there was considerable regrouping of the old police forces, the Civil Guard (now called the National Republican Guard) and the Assault Guards, which was subsequently to cause great problems for the anarchists.⁶¹

One measure of the Generalidad with which its CNT members acquiesced and which also was to cause future trouble for the anarchists was that of October 9 – the dissolving of the local revolutionary committees which had taken power throughout the region at the onset of the Civil War. The campaign against the revolutionary committees had been led by the PSUC, and particularly by Juan Comorera, who called for ‘a legitimate authority to confront the irresponsible dictatorship of the committees’. Prime Minister Tarradellas also urged the change in municipal government, arguing that since the Comité de Milicias had given way on a regional level to the Consejo de la Generalidad, the *de facto* municipal regimes should also give way to legally constituted ones.⁶²

Under the new decree, *ayuntamientos*, or municipal councils, were to replace the revolutionary committees. Membership in each *ayuntamiento* would be apportioned among the parties and unions represented in the government of the Generalidad. Each organization would receive three *ayuntamiento* members for every one member it had in the *consejo* of the Generalidad.⁶³

The CNT accepted this new arrangement. Víctor Alba has argued that it did so because that ‘gave it a force in the *ayuntamiento* which it lacked on a local level’. It was principally the POUM which resisted this measure, at least on a local level, and particularly in Lérida, where the party had completely dominated the revolutionary committee.⁶⁴

Víctor Alba has pointed out that the PSUC was the major gainer

from the reorganization of the municipal governments. The PSUC until then had little representation in the committees and would have more in the new *ayuntamientos*.⁶⁵

This reorganization of the municipalities presaged a possible serious future weakening of the anarchists' political power. So long as they were strongly represented in the government of Catalonia, they would have more or less adequate representation in the local ones as well. But that situation would change once they were no longer in the Generalidad.

According to Josep Maria Bricall: '... the dissolution of the committees was not immediate, the new councils were constituted progressively in accordance with the new regime, which for its part offered them strong advantages and widened powers.'⁶⁶

Generally, within the council of the Generalidad between September 27 and mid-December 1936, there tended to be an alignment of the three CNT members and Andres Nín of the POUM on one side, usually against the PSUC-UGT and the Catalan Republican parties on the other. Sometimes, the CNT-POUM representatives won their points, but often they did not.

One issue on which they lost was the CNT-POUM proposal that the Generalidad establish a monopoly of the region's foreign trade, as the only practical way for the regional government to get control of the foreign exchange it needed to purchase arms, machinery for its war industries, and raw materials. However, the Stalinists and Catalanists – in spite of their supposed strong support of Catalan autonomy – rejected this idea.

Another issue on which the two sides clashed was that of the decree legalizing the Catalan workers' collectives. When this first came up for discussion, Juan Comorera, in the name of the PSUC, proposed the nationalization rather than the collectivization of the region's industries. Only in the face of a threat by the CNT and POUM representatives to resign from the Generalidad did the PSUC and Catalanists back down on that proposition.⁶⁷ As we have noted earlier, the collectivizations law, although far from perfect from the anarchist point of view, was generally acceptable to them.

Josep Maria Bricall has noted the significance of the formation of

Catalan government with anarchist participation, in so far as Catalan autonomy was concerned: 'One can say that the Government of Catalonia became the only depositary of political power... The Cenetista leaders were going to collaborate loyally with the Generalidad and in the policies developed by its Government during this period, which were to reaffirm phenomenally the power of the Generalidad, in the face of a new scheme of relations between the autonomous region and the central State, and to overcome the problem of public order and the power of the local committees, and to control the new economy through credit and the treasury.'⁶⁸

The Anarchists and Antonov-Ovsenko

On October 1 1936, there arrived in Barcelona the first Soviet consul-general ever to be posted there. He was Vladimir Antonov-Ovsenko. For the next few months, he was to play a very important part in the politics of Catalonia, seeking on the one hand to strengthen the PSUC, and on the other to weaken (and then destroy) the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, and then to undermine the anarchists.

According to Julian Gorkin, Antonov-Ovsenko was 'an authentic hero of October; designated by Trotsky as president of the Soviet of Petrograd and of the Revolutionary Military Committee... Loyal friend and partisan of Trotsky during the years 1923 to 1927, though in 1928 he was obliged to write that he recognized his past errors...'⁶⁹ While they were both members of the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union, Antonov-Ovsenko and Andrés Nin, head of the POUM after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, had collaborated closely.⁷⁰

Ironically, in view of what happened shortly afterward, it was Andrés Nin who officially greeted Antonov-Ovsenko at the Catalan government's official reception ceremony a few days after the consul-general's arrival. The reason for this was that he was the only member of the Catalan government who spoke Russian.⁷¹

The Soviet historian Roy Medvedev has sketched the significance

of Antonov-Ovsenko's mission in Catalonia: 'His task, for which he was given special powers, was to organize the liquidation of the anarchist groups in Catalonia, the extreme left organization POUM, which was then called "Trotskyist" or "semi-Trotskyist", and all other "Trotskyist" elements. And indeed, Antonov-Ovsenko participated in the swift liquidation of the left groups and anarchists in Catalonia, even though they were active in the fight against Franco's fascists. A year later Antonov-Ovsenko was recalled to Moscow and shot as an alleged "Trotskyist".'⁷²

It was soon clear to nearly everyone that Antonov-Ovsenko was sent to Barcelona to carry out a political task. However, it is also clear that Stalin and his collaborators did not particularly trust the new consul-general. Burnett Bolloten has noted that Erno Gero, the Comintern-GPU agent whose principal task was controlling the PSUC, also 'monitored the activities of Vladimir A. Antonov-Ovsenko, the Soviet consul-general in Barcelona.'⁷³

The consul-general wasted little time in starting his intervention in Catalan politics. Soon after his arrival, he met with the regional leaders of the CNT. Years later, Diego Abad de Santillán informed Víctor Alba: 'I remember that poor Antonov began his relations by saying to us that the presence of Nin in the Generalidad caused Stalin great unhappiness.' Santillán added: 'That would have been enough to assure our friendship with him (Nin).'⁷⁴

Although soon making it clear publicly as well as 'privately' that he was an implacable enemy of the POUM, Antonov-Ovsenko did not overtly attack the anarchists. Thus, at the time of the funeral of Buenaventura Durruti on November 22, the Soviet consul-general was one of the official speakers, together with CNT leaders Jaime Magriña and Juan García Oliver and President Companys.⁷⁵

By the end of November, Antonov-Ovsenko was publicly polemizing with the POUM. An official note of the consulate-general published on November 22 replied to an editorial of *La Batalla*, the daily of the POUM, commenting: '...Among the organs of the Catalan press there is a sheet which has undertaken the task of

supporting this fascist campaign. In its number of November 13 *La Batalla* attempted to provide material for fascist insinuations. The general consulate of the USSR in Barcelona rejects with contempt the lamentable inventions of that sheet.⁷⁶

After a cabinet crisis had in effect been provoked by President Companys's call on December 9 for 'a strong government with full powers which imposes its authority', Antonov-Ovsenko held a meeting on December 12 with leaders of the CNT, and then on the same day with PSUC leader Juan Comorera. Later that same day Prime Minister José Tarradellas met with the Soviet consul-general, after which Tarradellas commented to journalists that 'it would be useless to deny that a general political problem has arisen.'⁷⁷

However, even after he had helped to bring about the December 1936 crisis in the Catalan government, Antonov-Ovsenko did not immediately demonstrate the Soviet government's basic opposition to the Catalan anarchists. In fact, on December 22, after the cabinet crisis, the *Manchester Guardian* published an interview with him in which he 'expressed admiration for the anarchosyndicalists'.⁷⁸

García Oliver claimed that Antonov-Ovsenko, throughout his tour of duty in Barcelona, had what amounted to a schizophrenic attitude towards the Spanish anarchists. He recounted a final meeting with the Soviet consul-general, shortly before Antonov-Ovsenko returned to the Soviet Union, convinced that he was returning home to be shot on Stalin's orders. At that dinner, the two men engaged in a discussion of their respective political philosophies, and Antonov-Ovsenko admitted that upon his arrival, 'I remembered scenes lived in another time, at the beginning of the revolution in Russia... Three things I particularly admired when I got to Barcelona, and the three were your work: the mobilization of war industries, the Council of Workers and Soldiers and the Popular War School.'⁷⁹

The Anarchists and the December 1936 Catalan Government Crisis

Certainly, although the anarchists continued for some months after their formal entry into the government of Catalonia to control key centers of power in the region – the military, the economy and at least part of the police – there can be little doubt that their relative strength declined during those months. At the same time, the power and position of the Stalinists of the PSUC substantially increased, due to their becoming the principal rallying point of those middle-class and conservative elements who feared anarchist revolution, and because of the outright backing of the PSUC by the Soviet and Comintern elements who entered the region following the reorganization of the Catalan government at the end of September 1936.

However, the balance of forces in Catalonia was not yet sufficiently tilted in their favor for the Stalinists to undertake a show-down with the CNT–FAI (that would not come until the middle of 1937). But, by the middle of November, the PSUC did feel itself strong enough to try to rid the Catalan government of the dissident Communist party, the POUM, thus depriving the anarchists of a potential ally within the Catalan regime.

Franz Borkenau, writing a few months later, observed of the POUM: 'It is difficult to say whether it was more hateful to the PSUC on account of its anti-Stalinism in Russian affairs or its extreme Leftist tendencies in Spanish questions.'⁸⁰ The POUM press had denounced the first Moscow Trial in August 1936, the principal victims of which had been Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev. Also, shortly before the formal crisis of December, Andrés Nin had talked with President Companys about the possibility of giving refuge to Leon Trotsky who, under Soviet pressure, had to leave Norway.⁸ Locally, the POUM had sought to maintain the new revolutionary institutions established after July 19, providing particular resistance, as we have noted, to the dissolution of the municipal revolutionary committee governments.

The first move of the PSUC to oust the POUM from the Catalan government was apparently a document handed to the CNT members of the cabinet on November 24, suggesting the removal of Nin,

and proposing the establishment of a new administration ‘with plenary powers’. In the weeks that followed, not only the PSUC but the Catalanists, with President Companys in the lead, took up the call for ‘a strong government with plenary powers capable of imposing its authority on everyone’.⁸²

Burnett Bolloten has noted that ‘for more than three weeks the anarcho-sindicalist leaders resolutely opposed the PSUC’s demands’.⁸³ Franz Borckenau also wrote that the CNT leaders ‘felt that they were themselves concerned in the attack’ on the POUM by the PSUC.⁸⁴

However, there is considerable reason to believe that the anarchist leaders did not fully understand the long-term consequences for them of this violent attack by the Stalinists on the POUM. Their tendency was to regard the PSUC-POUM conflict as a family quarrel among Marxists, which was none of the anarchists’ direct concern.

This attitude was reflected in a statement issued by the regional committee of the CNT on December 13, in the middle of the government crisis. It pictured the problem as ‘the existing conflict between two sectors of the UGT–POUM and PSUC – represented in the Council of the Generalidad, a struggle exacerbated by the attempt to exclude or be excluded from the posts they held in that Council.’

This statement pledged the CNT’s own continuing loyalty to ‘the promise to honor the pact which all the antifascist organizations made when the Council of the Generalidad of Catalonia was established, and we did not demand and we don’t demand the representation which corresponds to the undoubtedly majority force.’ However, it had no mention, let alone a protest against, the demand that the POUM be excluded.⁸⁵

Víctor Alba was correct when he wrote: ‘The CNT and FAI leaders did not see that the problem of the moment was not ideological divergence between Marxists and anarchists but the strategic problem of revolution and counter revolution. If they had seen the reality not as a dispute between libertarians and Marxists but between revolutionaries and counter revolutionaries, they would have understood that there was much more in common between the CNT and

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the POUM than between the CNT and the UGT, controlled by the Communists...⁸⁶

But the anarchists learned this hard lesson only when it was too late. 'All through the time of their supremacy the anarchists had handled the POUM rather rudely,'⁸⁷ Franz Borkenau noted. Nowhere was this fact more evident than in the CNTers' handling of the trade union problem in Catalonia.

At the outbreak of the Civil War there existed in Catalonia three trade union groups which were loyal to the Republic. This contrasted with the situation in most of the rest of Loyalist Spain, where there were only the CNT and the Socialist-controlled UGT. The POUM had under its influence the so-called *Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical* (FOUS) which had been established early in 1936, and was strong in Lérida and Gerona, with a considerable membership in Tarragona.⁸⁸ It was reportedly larger and more significant at the time of the outbreak of the War than the UGT was in Catalonia.⁸⁹

The anarchists, with their over-simplified model of the labor movement as being either libertarian or Marxist, could find no room in their thinking for a third central labor organization in Catalonia. When, with the support of the CNT-FAI, the Catalan government issued a decree that all workers must be affiliated either with unions of the CNT or unions of the UGT, the FOUS was doomed to disappear, without any complaint from the anarchists.

Under these circumstances, the CNT refused to accept the FOUS unions – or members – within its ranks, on the grounds that they were Marxists. The FOUS, as a consequence, was forced to dissolve and have its organizations join the UGT. Although, for a short while, at least some of the ex-FOUS unions remained under POUM leadership, that soon came to an end. With the strengthening and centralization of the Catalan UGT under Stalinist control, it was soon able to dismiss the POUMist leaders from all positions of importance within the regional UGT and its affiliates.

Ignacio Iglesias is probably correct when he categorizes that decision of the anarchists with regard to the FOUS unions as one of the four major political mistakes made by the CNT-FAI during the first year of the Civil War.⁹⁰ It certainly meant the destruction of the

trade union base of the POUM, not to the benefit of the CNT, but rather to the advantage of the Stalinists.

Although between August and December 1936, the Catalan anarchists may have somewhat modified their view of the realities which they were facing, they were still not willing to offer more than passive resistance to the removal of the POUM from the council of the Generalidad. Franz Borckenau has said that, to help convince the anarchists and others who were reluctant to make this change in the Catalan government, the Russians held up some shipments of arms and other materials which had been scheduled to arrive.⁹¹ Burnett Bolloten attributes this same assertion to Rudolph Rocker.⁹²

In the end, the CNT–FAI accepted a face-saving compromise on the issue. It was decided that the reorganized government would be a non-party one. Officially, not only the POUM withdrew from the government, but so did the PSUC. However, Juan Comorera, and others who had represented the PSUC in the earlier cabinet, remained, but were labelled as representing the UGT, certainly a distinction without a difference.⁹³

That the CNT leaders still had much to learn was indicated by an editorial which appeared in *Solidaridad Obrera*: 'With this solution of the crisis we feel that no one has cause for complaint or reproach of any kind. The two antagonists, the POUM and the PSUC, whose conflict brought us to our present pass, have been excluded from the council of the Generalidad. Both are represented in the UGT ... both stem from the ideological branch, although slight differences of attitude and tactics separate them. In our opinion, neither has the right to cry out to protest.'⁹⁴

However, the POUM's daily, *La Batalla*, in its reaction to what had happened, hit closer to the mark. 'Now that the PSUC has obtained its immediate goal, does anyone believe that it will renounce its aims? ... With our elimination it has won its preliminary objective. For the moment it does not feel strong enough to go any further.'⁹⁵

It would be five more months until the PSUC felt strong enough to challenge its real enemy, the anarchists. That would give rise to the bloody May Days of 1937. Meanwhile, on December 17 1936, the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* indicated what was in store: 'So far as

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Catalonia is concerned, the clearing up of the Trotskyist and Anarcho-Syndicalist elements has already begun, and it will be carried out with the same energy as in the USSR.⁹⁶

The Anarchists in the Catalan Government December 1936– May 1937

Although until the cabinet crisis of December 1936, the anarchists largely dominated the government of Catalonia, controlling its military, most of its economic apparatus, and a substantial part of its police, they were clearly on the defensive after its reorganization in December 1936. The Stalinists had won substantial gains in the reorganization of the Generalidad, and in the months that followed they pushed relentlessly and ruthlessly to attain twin objectives: the total destruction of the POUM and the elimination of all anarchist control over the economy, the military and the police.

In this situation, the anarchists had lost an ally within the government, with the removal of the POUM. At the same time, the Stalinists were increasingly successful in turning the Catalanist parties, particularly President Luis Companys's Catalan Left, against the CNT–FAI.

Franz Borkenau, on his second visit to wartime Spain in January–February 1937, noted: 'In reality there remain only two protagonists on the Catalan political scene, the anarchists and the PSUC. And it is the PSUC which is now obviously gaining ground.'¹

Juan Comorera as Councillor for Supply

Juan Comorera, head of the PSUC and Councillor of Supply after the December 1936 reorganization of the Catalan regime, was the point man for the Stalinists' attack on the CNT. As we have noted in an earlier chapter, Juan Domenech, the CNTer who until the December crisis had been Councillor of Supply, thought that it was a grave political mistake for the CNT to allow the Stalinists to get control of the ministry charged with seeing to it that the consumers of Catalonia had sufficient food and other goods.

Comorera lost no time in showing how right Domenech's judgement had been. In his first interview with the press upon taking his new post, the PSUC leader 'publicly proclaimed the incapacity of his predecessor . . . denouncing at the same time with exaggerated pathos the alarming situation that the scarcity of foodstuffs would create. Comorera pretended that he had found completely empty the deposits of food destined for the population.'² José Peirats has suggested that Comorera went so far as to hide food so as to create shortages which could be blamed on the 'maladministration' of his anarchist predecessor.³

Although the CNT press quickly denied Comorera's charges and indicated that sources of food had been negotiated in other parts of Loyalist Spain by Domenech, that did nothing to deter Comorera in his campaign against the anarchists. He began to undo much of what his predecessor had achieved.

Comorera quickly staffed the top levels of his ministry with PSUC members. In contrast, Juan Domenech claimed that his own policy had been to try to choose people on the basis of their capacity to do the work required rather than on their political affiliation.⁴ Comorera also set about dismantling the distribution system which Domenech had organized. According to Burnett Bolloten, 'In an attempt to re-establish freedom of trade, Juan Comorera . . . decreed dissolution of the revolutionary committees that had assumed control of the wholesale food trades at the outset of the Revolution.' Comorera argued that they operated 'to the prejudice of society' and 'were responsible for the enormous increase in the cost of food'. Although Bolloten indicated that even the POUM and anarchist press had

criticized the ‘thousand and one abuses’ of some of these committees, he added that ‘the real point at issue was not so much the abuses as the political and economic power of the committees.’⁵

One immediate effect of this move by the Stalinist councillor of supply was that many anarchist-controlled collectives and municipalities which had been willing to buy, sell and exchange goods through the *Consejería de Abastos* when it was headed by a CNTer, were not willing to do so through the Stalinist-controlled organization, and so reverted to buying, selling and bartering directly with each other and with the collectivized industries.

Even in the case of those anarchist-controlled municipalities which still continued to deal with the *Consejería de Abastos*, Comorera sought to interfere with the smooth running of the supply system. He was not always able to do so. For instance, in the case of the city of Hospitalet de Llobregat, the man in charge of supply there was able to continue to get goods through the *consejería* because he was well acquainted with lower officials of that body, who would often, he said, provide him with goods he needed even in defiance of Comorera’s orders.

The supply officials of Hospitalet had certain success in getting goods from France. Here, too, Comorera interfered. On one occasion, a convoy of 40 trucks coming from France to Hospitalet was stopped by the Generalidad’s police, on the invitation of Comorera. It was claimed that the goods had come into Spain illegally. However, when the municipal council protested to President Companys, the trucks were permitted to continue on their way to Hospitalet. This was only one of several occasions on which Comorera sought to interfere with purchases from France destined for Hospitalet.⁶

The political implications of the struggle of Comorera and the anarchists in this period have been described by John Brademas. After noting the growing scarcity of wheat in Catalonia, he wrote: ‘Comorera immediately accused his predecessor ... of having created the situation and attributed the lack of bread to the collectivist system of distribution organized at the beginning of the war on the basis of the peasant committees. Comorera privatized the commerce of the bakers, provoking irritation by the CNT, which counter-

attacked, attributing to it the scarcity, the lines and the subsequent riots.⁷

One anarchist source said: 'The policy of Comorera consisted of breaking the power of the unions. To this end, he sought to pass the handling of food to the cooperatives. In this case, it was the small proprietors, small merchants and small leaseholders, who were assured larger profits, raising prices. The shortage of bread became chronic. The inflation grew and with it the discontent of the masses. There had been warehoused, commercially and politically, inflammable material sufficient to provoke a public fire, encouraged by demagoguery.'⁸

A further change which Comorera made almost immediately was to reverse a decision of Domenech not to allow the Catalan military to have their own supply service which, he feared, in competing for goods with the civilian supply apparatus, would raise prices.⁹

Another anarchist source commented on the Comorera rule in the supply councillorship: 'Comorera abolished the monopoly of Abastos. He reintroduced free trading. With this, the way was paved for price increases. The process of collectivization was interrupted in this sector. A species of NEP in miniature.'¹⁰

José Peirats has noted the contribution of the arrival in Barcelona of a Soviet supply ship in January 1937 loaded with foodstuffs, to the Stalinists' campaign against the anarchists on the food supply issue: 'If one takes into account the arrival in the port of Barcelona about the 20th of January 1937, of a new Soviet ship, whose official cargo consisted of 901 tons of wheat flour, 882 tons of sugar and 568 tons of butter, "donation of the Russian workers and peasants to the Spanish antifascists," one can ask if the Communist campaign on the shortage of products was designed to give luster to that event, or said in other words, to give a providential character to those shipments ... and to affirm at the same time the positions of the Communist Party...'¹¹

Josep María Bricall commented on Juan Comorera's role as councillor of supply: 'his fundamental policy consisted of reducing the power of the *sindicatos* in distribution, to stimulate the creation of distribution cooperatives and to eliminate in some ways the control of prices installed by his predecessor.'¹²

Under Comorera, the rationing system in Barcelona was installed in January 1937. At first only potatoes, bread, sugar and one or two other items were rationed. As the war went on, many more items were added to this list. After the exit of the anarchists from the Catalan government, the rationing system in Catalonia was taken over by the government of the Republic.¹³ Finally, in January 1938, the councillorship of supply was abolished, and its functions passed to the national supply commission of the Republican government.¹⁴

Stalinist Attacks on CNT Collectives

The Stalinists also began an all-out propaganda attack on the Catalan rural collectives. On January 23, the Catalan UGT (controlled by the Stalinists) held its first congress of land workers, attended by 40 delegates claiming to represent 30,00 peasants. At the front of the hall in which the meeting was held was a large sign: 'Less Collectivist Experiments and More Products.' The PSUC leader Victor Colomé (a one-time member of the POUM) told the meeting: 'It is necessary to end rapidly the confusing situation – in some areas chaotic – which exists today in the Catalan countryside, and this is indispensable to obtain victory against fascism. Although it is true that you are the ones who have to decide whether or not to collectivize, we must say to you that we are not supporters of it, because we don't think it is opportune at the present time.'¹⁵

Similarly, the Stalinists mounted a strong campaign against the CNT-controlled urban collectives. According to John Brademas, 'It was more difficult to disrupt the industrial collectivization and here the PSUC abstained from systematic intervention until April and May 1937. However, before that the PSUC began to criticize the administration of the Catalan war industries by the workers' committees. The Communists insisted that it was necessary to submit them to the centralized control of the Republican government to make possible a general economic plan.'¹⁶

As far as the anarchist urban collectives were concerned, the

PSUC in this period concentrated considerable attention on opposing the anarchists' effort to rationalize various industries under their control, creating larger and, they hoped more efficient plants. They particularly appealed to former owners of small workshops or plants who had joined the collectives early in the Revolution. These people were fearful that with the merger of their former installations with others they would lose all track of what had formerly been their property.¹⁷

The PSUC's strong defense of the Catalan small capitalists severely undermined Esquerra, the party which until July 19 had been the principal spokesman for the middle class of Catalonia. This was due to the cautious attitude which the party first adopted in the face of the CNT-led revolution.

Burnett Bolloten has noted that the first reaction of Luis Companys and other Esquerra leaders was to try to adapt to the Revolution, through cooperation with the anarchists, and ultimately to coopt the CNT-FAI into the incumbent regime. However, the result of this was to alienate many of those who had for a number of years supported the Esquerra:

'No amount of subtle statecraft or artful treatment of the CNT and FAI by President Companys and Premier Tarradellas could appease the more impatient members of the middle classes, who were faced with immediate or gradual economic ruin. They longed for a rapid end to anarchist power and saw in the dynamic leadership and aggressive policies of the PSUC the only hope of salvaging some of their possessions from the wreckage of the Revolution. No wonder that they continued to flock to the rival party in growing numbers.'¹⁸

Domenech in the *Consejería de Servicios Publicos*

One economic post of considerable importance which the anarchists continued to hold between December 1936 and May 1937 was the *Consejería de Servicios Publicos*, which was concerned with public utilities and the railroads. José Juan Domenech served in that position during those months.

In that post, Domenech sowed the seed of a number of projects

which bore fruit later. He found out quickly that the hydroelectric system of Catalonia, with the installations then in place, was capable of producing a good deal more electricity than it was then providing. So he sought to supplant the use of electricity for coal, which was in short supply. He presented the government with a project for providing as many families as possible with electric stoves, to take the place of coal or gas-burning ones. He also made some progress in electrifying the regional railroad system, and succeeded in acquiring a number of new electric trains.

He also sought to assure Catalonia its own supply of petroleum. Talking about this many years later, Domenech said that the central government had not been willing to supply the refineries in Catalonia with sufficient oil. As a consequence, he entered into negotiations with the Shell Co. in France, and reached an agreement for Shell to supply all of the petroleum needs of Catalonia. The company was willing to do this, because they hoped to get a foot in the Spanish market, which theretofore had been monopolized by the government firm, CAMPSA. Domenech presented this contract to the council of the Generalidad, but before it had been formally ratified, the May Events had occurred, and shortly afterwards the CNT was forced out of the government.¹⁹

Shortly before he left the public services councillorship, Domenech had it publish an extensive resumé of its programs and activities. In addition to information on expansion of hydroelectric facilities, and details on amplification of the use of electricity on the railroads and elsewhere, it discussed an experiment in Reus for the generation and use of methane gas from organic matter, with plans to extend this to other parts of the region. It also dealt with the extension of the telephone service under Domenech's general patronage and encouragement.²⁰

Stalinist Efforts to Control the Police

More sinister even than the Stalinists' offensive in the economic field, from the anarchists' point of view, was the Stalinists' drive to get exclusive control of the police forces of Catalonia. Since

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the early weeks of the Revolution, these had been dual in nature. On the one hand, were the pre-July 19 forces of the Civil Guard (now National Republican Guard) and the Assault Guards, under the control of the councillor of internal security of the Generalidad, and the *patrullas de control* of militiamen, under the direction of the Junta de Seguiridad Interior, headed by anarchist Aurelio Fernández.

The Stalinists and their allies moved quickly to try to reduce the influence of the anarchists in the “forces of order,” and to increase their own. The first serious step taken by Artemio Aiguader, the new councillor of internal security (a pro-Stalinist Catalan Left Party leader), was to appoint Eusebio Rodríguez Salas as police commissioner, in charge of the older forces. Rodríguez Salas had started out in Tarragona during the First World War as an anarchist, and in that phase of his career had lost an arm while raiding the Bank of Tarragona. Subsequently, he had joined first the Workers’ and Peasants’ Bloc of Joaquín Maurín, and then the small Catalan branch of the Communist Party, and with the formation of the PSUC had become one of its leading figures. He was cordially disliked by the anarchists.²¹

As Comorera sought to convince all and sundry that the anarchists, during their period of dominance of Catalonia, had made a mess of the economy, Rodríguez Salas pictured them as having created ‘an inferno, a land plagued with assassins in which the most dreadful chaos reigns.’ Thus, on one occasion, he denounced ‘the clandestine jails and cemeteries’ of Barcelona,²² naturally without reference to those of the Spanish Stalinists and even less to those of their Soviet counterparts, which were not only outside the control of any Spanish government but of any Spaniards at all.

However, the Stalinists’ attacks on anarchist participation in the maintenance of public order were not confined to speech making. Victor Alba has noted that for the Stalinists to get control of the police, ‘they had to diminish the authority of the CNT representatives. To that end, they played off, through underhanded maneuvers, the assault guards against the control patrols, and thus gained the adhesion of the former.’ He says that Rodríguez Salas ‘organized demonstrations of guards against Eroles, and resorted to

other intrigues'. (Dionisio Eroles was the representative of the CNT in the commissariat of police.)²³

The UGT (that is, the PSUC) members of the new Catalan government introduced a proposal to have all of the police forces – the patrols, the Assault Guards and National Republican Guards – merged into a single force. The anarchists strongly objected to this, saying: 'The patrols should not only be maintained; they should be increased... All these attacks directed against them are directed at the very heart of our revolution.'

Over the objections of the anarchist members of the government, decrees were approved to dissolve the various forces into a new internal security corps, 'in which, significantly, the positions of command were to be held mainly by the officers of the dissolved assault and national republican guards.'

There was considerable public controversy over these decrees, of which the CNT said the government had agreed to postpone consideration, provoking a reply by Prime Minister Tarradellas that there had only been agreement to postpone appointment of the officers of the new group, not to its establishment. According to Burnett Bolloten, 'In fact, because of the agitation, the appointments, which were to have been confined mainly to members of the assault and national republican guards, were never made, and the legislation died on the pages of the *Diari Oficial*, leaving the duality to police powers in the region unchanged.'²⁴ Thus, with the outbreak of the May Days, the anarchists still maintained control of an important element in the police powers of Catalonia, although, as we shall see, this did not do them much good in Barcelona and other cities once the conflict arose in the early days of May 1937.

Stalinist Efforts to Dislodge Anarchists from Control of the Military

Most serious of all, from the anarchist point of view, was the Stalinists' mounting campaign to deprive the anarchists of control of the Catalan military forces. Burnett Bolloten has noted that even before the cabinet crisis of December 1936, the Catalan government

had formally agreed to mobilize the draftees of the 1934–5 classes, a continuing subject of controversy, but that decision had remained virtually a dead letter. The anarchists argued that it would be ‘very childish to hand over our forces to the absolute control of the government.’ Even after the anarchists formerly took over the Catalan defense ministry after the December crisis, they continued to insist that anarchists called up for service be assigned only to libertarian militia units. The POUM generally supported the position of the anarchists.

On the other hand, the PSUC ‘pressed for the fusion of the militia into a regular army in the service of the republican government – by which is meant, of course, an army and a government subject to its will...’

As part of their campaign, the Stalinists organized a committee for the Popular Army and, late in February, it planned a substantial demonstration in Barcelona. The anarchists then demanded the suppression of the committee, and defense councillor Francisco Isgleas, of the CNT, threatened to resign over the issue. However, a compromise was reached whereby the committee was made ‘an auxiliary body of the defense council’, with Luis Companys as its president and Isgleas as its vice-president – a move which Bolloren insisted ‘was none the less a victory for the PSUC’.

The Republican government meanwhile continued its long-standing policy of inadequately supplying the Catalan forces on the Aragón front with arms and other requirements, while at the same time depriving the Catalan government of the funds with which it could have acquired these things for itself. Consequently, on March 18, after long negotiations with the Republican government by Prime Minister Tarradellas and Francisco Isgleas, the Generalidad finally agreed to definite dates for calling up the 1932–6 draftee classes. But a day after the first draftees began to go to the recruitment centers, the anarchists withdrew from the Generalidad, provoking a new cabinet crisis.²⁵

The balance of this struggle between the anarchists and Stalinists over control of the Catalan armed forces was indecisive before the outbreak of the May Days crisis. The great majority of the Catalan

troops on the Aragón front and elsewhere continued to be anarchists, and under anarchist command.

The Reconstitution of Local Governments

One important development during the December 1936–May 1937 period was the reconstitution of local governments throughout Catalonia. We have already noted that the substitution of legally constituted municipal councils for the *ad hoc* committees which had arisen on July 19 had been decreed by the Generalidad in the earlier period, but that this substitution had moved somewhat slowly. Now it was intensified.

Decrees issued in January 1937, according to Josep María Bricall:

We're going to restrict notably the municipal powers in the new norms which conceded to the Generalidad inspection and new powers, especially those derived from the war, the struggle against unemployment, and social welfare. The same decrees were going to provide for the municipalization of public services and regulate the control of the Generalidad through the Councilorships of Government, Public Services and Finances. Simultaneously, there was established a system of indirect sanctions against those councils and committees constituted illegally, in the sense of not providing them with a series of benefits ... provided in the decree ... promulgated on January 9, 1937.²⁶

This process was to continue after the May Events, as far as Bricall was concerned: 'On May 31, 1937, twenty important councils of Catalonia were deprived of the benefits of these decrees, and therefore were illegally constituted. At the end of 1937 the power of the Generalidad was fully established. In effect, the Generalidad annulled municipal decisions which violated others established in accordance with the law on municipalities; the Department of Finances named inspector-delegates in those councils to which loan has been made and the Government designated municipal commissars with absolute powers in those illegally constituted councils.'²⁷

Although the events sketched by Bricall happened after the anarchists had been completely eliminated from the Catalan government, the anarchists themselves helped to lay the basis for them by concurring in the Generalidad's decrees on reorganization of municipal regimes during the second part of their participation in the Catalan government.

The Stalinist Campaign Against the POUM

While seeking to undermine the anarchists in the Catalan economy, police and military, the Stalinists simultaneously pushed aggressively to achieve their other objective, the destruction of the POUM. Having forced it out of the Catalan Generalidad, they subsequently mounted a massive propaganda campaign designed ultimately to bring about its illegalization and extirpation.

Typical of the kind of attack of the Stalinists on the POUM was a cartoon published in the periodical of the PSUC's, Karl Marx Division, showing Andrés Nin, the POUM leader, embracing Franco, with an article which proclaimed that 'Nin has never worked, because he has always lived on money from Hitler.'²⁸

In their campaign against the POUM, the Stalinists did not hide their ultimate objectives. For instance, the Communist periodical *Frente Rojo* of Valencia on February 6 1937, after labelling the POUM as 'Trotskyite', included an article which stated: 'The day on which it is necessary to bring to trial the Trotskyites in Spain – because we, with our fraternal colleague *Mundo Obrero* ask that a People's Tribunal judge the fascist members of this organization . . .'²⁹

Less than a month later, José Díaz, secretary-general of the Spanish Communist Party, in setting forth what he thought was indispensable to win the Civil War, said: 'It is necessary to struggle to end the tolerance and lack of vigilance of certain proletarian organizations which establish links of collaboration with counter-revolutionary Trotskyism, with the band of the POUM, considering it a fraction of the labor movement . . . It is necessary to struggle to bring it to pass that fascism, Trotskyism and the uncontrollables are eliminated from the political life of our country.'³⁰

Aside from denouncing this Stalinist campaign against them, the POUMists sought to make the Communists offer substantive proof before an impartial body of their charges that the POUMists were collaborating with the fascists, and had plotted to murder Manuel Azaña, Largo Caballero, Dolores Ibarruri and José Díaz. On the suggestion of the Russian exile, Victor Serge, they decided to call for an international commission of inquiry to review the charges made against them.

According to the English-language periodical of the POUM, that body 'should include a representative of each of the following organizations: the Communist International, the Labour and Socialist International, the Fourth International, the International Workingmen's Association and the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity. This Commission should investigate independently and freely the concrete accusations levelled against the POUM. It should begin, in our opinion, by demanding the evidence for these accusations.'³¹ The Communists, of course, met this challenge with deafening silence.

However, the campaign against the POUM took other forms than just massive propaganda. On February 23, an operation on the Aragón front, in which the POUM's 29th Division was supposed to move to take the town of Vivel del Rio, with the support of the PSUC's 27th Division on its flank, failed when the PSUC division refused to support the 29th. When this incident was reported in the POUM newspaper *La Batalla*, the PSUC insisted that the government suspend the periodical, which occurred for four days.³²

The Stalinists succeeded in getting POUM representation removed from the Consejo de Economía soon after they were thrown out to the Catalan cabinet.³³

The Anarchists and the Stalinist Vendetta Against the POUM

The anarchists were slow in waking up to the fact that the violent offensive of the Stalinists against the POUM was just the first step in the campaign to gain absolute control by the PSUC of the economy at

polity of Catalonia and, of course the ultimate destruction of the CNT–FAI. Some of the anarchists, particularly the young people, were quicker to reach this conclusion than others.

According to Víctor Alba, ‘During four months, the POUM dedicated itself to pointing out that the anti-POUMist campaign is the first step towards elimination of the CNT. The CNTers, misled by their numbers, still believe themselves so powerful that they would be very late in understanding reality. They are in the government and don’t believe that they can be dispensed with.’³⁴

Alba has pointed out that the patronizing attitude, which the POUM often took towards the anarchists, did not help the latter to understand the increasing gravity of their own position. Typical in this regard was an article published on April 15 by Juan Andrade, one of the principal POUM leaders, in which he argued: ‘The problem consists in the Marxists aiding the CNT–FAI to overcome their prejudices and provide them with an orientation.’³⁵

However, by the middle of March, *Solidaridad Obrera*, the anarchist Barcelona daily, was arguing that the anti-POUM campaign of the Stalinists ‘would divide the antifascist front’. This comment brought forth a blistering attack in *Pravda*, the organ of the Soviet Communist Party.³⁶

The POUMists in this period were calling for a revolutionary front between themselves and the anarchists. Typical was the article by Juan Andrade in the English-language publication of the POUM late in March 1937: ‘... Two tendencies which were traditionally irreconcilable, the revolutionary Marxists (of the POUM) and the Bakunists (of the FAI) now hold similar ideas concerning the hopes and perspectives of the revolution... In the present circumstances, the most pressing need is the constitution of a Revolutionary Front between the two most advanced workers’ organizations; the POUM and the FAI... In Spain the problem of the Revolutionary Front does not consist simply in regrouping all the workers in one party, but rather in getting a united front between the two organizations which in fact agree substantially in their immediate outlook towards events.’³⁷ However, the FAI remained unresponsive to this appeal.

It was the *Juventudes Libertarias*, the anarchist youth movement, which was most willing to work with and defend the POUMists. As

early as December 1936, there were moves towards collaboration between the *Juventudes Libertarias* and the youth movement of the POUM and, on February 11 1937, a front of revolutionary youth was formed, consisting of the anarchist and POUMist youth groups as well as the cooperative youth, the *Mujeres Libres*, and the young people of the small *Partido Sindicalista*. Three days later, 'it presented itself to the masses at an enormous meeting in the Plaza de Catalonia.'

Although in retrospect, Fidel Miró, the wartime secretary of the *Juventudes Libertarias*, felt that this front 'had not amounted to much,' he added that it did hold a number of large meetings in various cities of the Republic. Also, Víctor Alba noted that there were plans for a meeting in Valencia in May to organize the front on a national basis, plans which were thwarted of course, by the events of early May and the subsequent suppression of the POUMist youth group, as well as of the POUM itself.³⁸

Víctor Alba, although stressing the failure of the anarchists to throw their full weight behind the POUM when the party was under massive propaganda attack by the Stalinists in the spring of 1937 did say, 'The only ones who, from time to time, protested were the CNTers'. He cited a comment in *Ruta*, an anarchist youth periodical, which said: 'We are not disposed to declare our solidarity with those who seek to sink some comrades in a shameful and discreditable way because of simple political appetites, launching gigantic waves of calumnies and infamies against them, knowing that they are lying, as occurs with regard to the JCI. Enough! It is not right that because of unhealthy appetites they seek to eliminate an organization which has fought and continues to fight, together with others, for the triumph of the Spanish revolution.' The JCI was the POUMist youth group.)

Alba also noted that the Italian anarchist leader, Camilo Berneri, who was then living in Barcelona and was closely associated with the Spanish anarchist leaders, was 'the anarchist who best understood the position of the POUM'.³⁹

On at least some occasions, anarchists took direct action to defend members of the POUM. A number of POUMists were arrested by PSUC-controlled police on various pretenses. On one such occasion,

four POUMists, of a working-class section of Barcelona, were picked up and held captive in the PSUC headquarters, the Hotel Colón on the Plaza de Catalonia. The anarchists in that section of the city sent a four-person delegation to the Hotel Colón to secure the release of the four POUMists. In that case they were successful, since the Stalinists were not ready at that point for a showdown with the anarchists.⁴⁰

Incidents of the Stalinist Drive Against the Anarchists

However, the Stalinists' campaign of propaganda and action was not confined to attacks on the POUM. After the December cabinet crisis, the PSUC felt strong enough to begin to attack the anarchists, who had until then largely dominated the Catalan scene. There were several incidents of note during that period.

One of these incidents took place in the town of La Fatarella, in the province of Tarragona, where peasants opposed to collectivization rose in armed revolt. According to José Peirats, they were 'heavily repressed by the *patrullas de control*, a kind of mobile police formed by all the parties and organizations in August 1936. The punitive operation of the *patrullas* produced thirty deaths among the insurrectionists and some deaths and injuries among the forces of repression, in which were included *guardias de asalto* of the Generalidad of Catalonia. The responsibility was, then, collective; but the leaders of the PSUC attempted to blame it entirely on the CNT and the POUM.'⁴¹

There were many other clashes between Stalinists and anarchists. Manuel Cruells has noted: that 'On February 17 a worker of the CNT is assassinated in Barcelona; on the 26th at Manresa there was an exchange of gunfire between elements of the two unions in which one worker died. At that same time there were also violent situations and deaths in Centelles and in Vilanova and in Geltru. The special judge named to investigate the facts in Centelles, in a declaration to the press, said that the autopsy of the bodies "has shown that the cadaver of the president of the Juventudes Libertarias had been mutilated".'⁴²

The Stalinists launched a propaganda offensive against Francisco Isgleas, the anarchist who was councillor of defense of the Generalidad. ‘They made him responsible for the fact that on the front of Aragón there were no offensive military operations . . . on the front of Aragón there was scarcity of arms, and particularly munitions. The haughty leaders of the Communist Party publicly accused the anarchist militiamen of being cowards.’⁴³

The Stalinists also mounted a campaign against Dionisio Eroles, head of the military police patrols. They organized a demonstration of police against Eroles, which provoked a statement from the Generalidad: ‘The government cannot tolerate such incidents, fruit of organizational rivalries.’⁴³ The PSUC and elements of the Catalan Left carried out ‘intensive propaganda’ in the ranks of the Assault Guards and ex-Civil Guards against the anarchists.⁴⁵

The Stalinists also opened a strong campaign against the Catalan war industries, largely controlled by the anarchists. At a meeting in Madrid early in April, Santiago Carrillo, head of the Juventud Socialista Unificada, ‘declared gratuitously that there existed in Catalonia magnificently installed war factories employed only in making munitions for pistols. Other orators added that in the Catalan war factories, instead of machine guns and rifles, domestic articles were being manufactured. These propaganda claims were amplified by the daily papers, *Mundo Obrero* (Valencia) and *Treball* (Barcelona), official organs of the CP and the PSUC.’⁴⁶

However, the Stalinists, although denigrating the output of the Catalan war industries, were not above trying to seize for themselves the products of those industries. This was shown in an incident early in March when 12 tanks in the warehouse of the war industries in Barcelona were mysteriously ‘requisitioned’, with papers which were quickly found to be fraudulent. Investigation soon proved that they had been taken without any authorization from the Catalan defense council, by high officers of the Voroshilof barracks controlled by the PSUC. They were forced to return the tanks. On March 7, *Solidaridad Obrera* editorialized: ‘If these tanks were not removed to be taken to the front, why was such a brilliant operation carried out. We presume in this the outline of a dictatorial attempt, against which, everyone knows, we shall rise immediately.’⁴⁷

The Emergence of the Friends of Durruti

In mid-March 1937 there appeared on the anarchist scene in Barcelona a new organization known as the Friends of Durruti, headed by Félix Martínez and Jaime Balius, the latter the director of the CNT newspaper *La Noche*. Its proclaimed objective was to fight against the ‘counter-revolutionary’ policies being followed by the CNT and FAI leaders. It was to play some role a couple of months later in the May Events.

The Friends of Durruti began publishing pamphlets, posters and other material. It remained small, and was more or less allied with the tiny Trotskyist organization which had been established under the aegis of the Fourth International.⁴⁸

The Cabinet Crisis of March–April 1937

In March 1937, the anarchists had become seriously enough concerned about the success of the Stalinists’ drive to undermine their power and destroy the Revolution, to provoke a major cabinet crisis in Catalonia. By that time, according to Manuel Cruells, there were moments in which the atmosphere of the meetings of the council became ‘strangling’, threatening the council of the Generalidad with total deadlock.⁴⁹

There is some disagreement over exactly what issue provoked the cabinet crisis. Burnett Bolloten maintains that it was the Catalan regime’s decision to begin to enforce the military draft in the region.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Víctor Alba attributed the crisis to the anarchists’ unwillingness to accept the decision of the government to establish a single police force, merging the patrols (which they controlled) with the National Republican Guard and Assault Guard (in which Stalinist influence was increasingly predominant).⁵¹ José Peirats concurred with Víctor Alba’s explanation of the origin of the crisis,⁵² as did Manuel Cruells.⁵³

In any case, the anarchists announced their withdrawal from the Generalidad on March 27, provoking a crisis which lasted almost a month. Burnett Bolloten wrote: ‘The PSUC and CNT were now

deadlocked over every crucial issue. The Libertarian movement had tried to protect the independence of its armed forces by temporizing or by feigning acceptance of the government's decrees, but the pretense could not be continued, and an open split in the cabinet was inevitable.⁵⁴

In the negotiations that went forward after the resignation of the anarchist councillors, the anarchists demanded that the decree on the police 'undergo such a fundamental change that only the title remains'. For their part, the Stalinists insisted that the decrees on police and the military be immediately implemented, and that the anarchists sign a pledge to that effect, which the CNT rejected out of hand.

Bolloten described the attitude of President Companys in the face of this crisis as: 'expressing his growing impatience with the CNT at the outset of the crisis,' expressing the need for 'a government that can govern and impose its will on those who obstruct its work'.⁵⁵

After a 'stopgap' government, consisting of two members of the Esquerra, two of the CNT (Isgleas and Domenech) and one each from the PSUC and the Unió de Rabassaires, was sworn in on April 3, the PSUC announced a victory plan which reiterated their demands for implementation of militarization of the militia, calling up of draftees, unification of the police, but also demanded, 'Nationalization of the basic war industries and the militarization of transport', and 'concentration of all arms in the hands of the government'.⁵⁶

For its part, the CNT paper *Solidaridad Obrera* not only rejected these demands of the PSUC, but noted: 'We have already made too many [concessions] and believe that the time has come to turn off the spigot.' The anarchist position was seconded by the POUM.⁵⁷

On April 16, President Companys organized still another cabinet, with three members from the Esquerra, three from the Stalinists, four from the CNT, and the inevitable José Calvet of the Rabassaires in charge of agriculture. The CNTers were Isgleas in defense, Andrés Capdevila in economy, Domenech again in public services and Aurelio Fernández in health and Public assistance.

However, even this new cabinet did not resolve the crisis. Bollothen commented: 'Like the makeshift cabinet formed on 3 April, the new government was stillborn. Its members could not agree on a common program, and the festering problems of military and police control remained in all their intractable complexity.'⁵⁸ Víctor Alba noted: 'On April 29, the new government . . . suspends its meeting because, said a note to the press, "it cannot continue its task under the pressure, the danger and the disorder from the existence of groups which in some parts of Catalonia try to impose themselves by coercion and to compromise the revolution and the war."⁵⁹

José Peirats agreed that the April 16 government did not resolve the crisis. 'The solution to the crisis was nominal. The problems which had provoked it remained pending in the hope of better and more favorable circumstances. What a reactionary decree had not been able to achieve, dark elements would attempt to do through provocation and the use of force.'⁶⁰ Peirats was foretelling, of course, the May Events, which were soon to transpire.

Preface to the May Events

In the last weeks of April 1937 there developed a state of tension between the Catalan Stalinists and their allies on the one hand, and the anarchists on the other, which led directly to the showdown in the first week of May. On the one hand, on April 25, Roldán Cortada, a PSUC leader, was assassinated. Subsequently, Rafael Vidiella of the PSUC accused the anarchists of his murder, and then Luis Cano, a leader of the CNT and municipal councillor in Hospitalet de Llobregat, was arrested and charged with responsibility for Cortada's murder. However, on May 2, he was freed by the judge before whom he was brought, because the judge held that there was no real evidence of Cano's involvement in the case.

Two days after the murder of Cortada, elements of the police under the control of Eusebio Rodríguez Salas attacked the frontier town of Puigcerda, and in the process killed Antonio Martín, the mayor of the town, and two other anarchists.⁶¹ This was a fundamental attack on the power of the anarchists in Catalonia.

Since July 19, the anarchists had controlled the towns on the frontier between Republican Spain and France. This gave them extensive control over the imports to and exports from Catalonia, reinforcing the autonomy of the region, and the control of the anarchists over its economy.

Right after the murder of Antonio Martín, Juan Negrín, minister of finance of the Republican government, sent detachments of the *carabineros*, the traditional frontier police under control of the ministry of finance, to seize control not only of Puigcerda but of other frontier posts.⁶² The *carabineros* had been a small force before the Civil War, numbering only about 15,000 men. But after Juan Negrín became minister of finance in the Largo Caballero government, he set about building up that group into an important paramilitary force. By April 1937, there were reportedly some 40,000 *carabineros*, although the borders they had to patrol were drastically reduced because of Franco control of the Portuguese border and at least half of the French frontier.⁶³

James Minifie of the *New York Herald Tribune* reported at the time: 'The anarchists have already noticed and complained about the increased strength of this force "at a time when we all know there's little enough traffic coming over the frontiers, land or sea". They realize that it will be used against them.'⁶⁴ In April 1937 they were indeed used against the anarchists along the Catalan frontier.

The attempt to seize Puigcerda and other frontier posts by the PSUC-controlled Catalan police, and then by the *carabineros*, did not go entirely unchallenged by the anarchists. They mobilized substantial forces to the south, and cut off the frontier towns from the rest of Catalonia and Aragón. However, after intervention of the CNT Catalan regional committee, a 'truce' was arranged, but with the result that the 'forces of order' took control of the frontier posts.⁶⁵ The anarchist sub-secretary of defense, Juan Molina, rushed to Puigcerda, and was there when the May Events began.⁶⁶

A final indication of the tense situation in Catalonia was the decision to call off all demonstrations to celebrate May Day, and to declare it a regular work day.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In the months between the reorganization of the Catalan government in December 1936 and the outbreak of street fighting in Barcelona and other Catalan cities during the first week of May (the May Events or May Days), Catalonia was the scene of a concerted attempt on the part of the Stalinists to undermine and, if possible, destroy the influence of the anarchists in the economy and polity of the region. At the same time, the PSUC carried on a determined campaign to totally obliterate the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista.

The Catalan anarchists were clearly on the defensive during this period. Within the government they were fighting the battle alone. The Esquerra, which had collaborated more or less closely with the anarchists during the early months of the War, were increasingly inclined to turn against the CNT-FAI in the December-May period, at least in part because they found themselves rapidly losing their middle-class constituency to the Stalinists.

In the early months of the period, the Stalinists were not yet prepared for an all-out showdown with the CNT and the FAI. However, by April they, with the aid of elements of the Republican government, particularly Finance Minister Juan Negrín, seemed ready for such an eventuality.

The anarchists' inexperience with 'practical' politics, and still lingering doubts about the necessity for engaging in it, served them poorly between December 1936 and May 1937. It led them to exaggerate their own power under the circumstances. It kept them also from seeking allies, particularly in the POUM, but also perhaps in the Esquerra. They continued to think in terms of themselves, the 'apolitical' group, on the one hand and 'the politicians' on the other. They also tended to continue to think in terms of their old stereotypes of libertarians and Marxists, rather than comprehending that the real struggle was over whether or not the Revolution they had launched on July 19 1936 was to continue – and that some Marxists wanted it to.

The results flowing from the anarchists' were to be disastrous for all of the political actors of Catalonia, except the Stalinists. The

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POUM was to be all but driven out of existence. The Catalan Left Party was to lose that which it cherished most, the autonomy of Catalonia. The anarchists were to have to continue to fight a losing battle in which the only gainers were to be the Stalinists – and ultimately Franco.

The Rise and Fall of the Consejo de Aragón

As was the case in most of the rest of Loyalist Spain, with the suppression of the Rebellion of July 17–19 1936, most pre-existing governmental institutions collapsed in Aragón and new revolutionary ones took their place. During the first week of the War, the Rebels seized virtually all of the Aragón region, the civil governor of the Aragón was murdered and, in the towns and villages, the military authorities and Civil Guard made short shrift of most of the municipal governments, many of which had been controlled by the Popular Front parties.

When three-fourths of Aragón was reconquered by Catalan militiamen the, the great majority of them anarchists, they had little incentive or desire to re-establish the status quo ante in so far as governmental institutions were concerned. Revolutionary committees, sometimes made up completely of members of the CNT, in other cases with representation of other political elements supporting the Republic, particularly the Izquierda Republicana Party, which was the largest Loyalist political party in the region, were installed as municipal authorities.

The part of Aragón which was retaken by the militiamen was overwhelmingly rural. The three major cities of the region, that is, Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel, remained in Rebel hands (except for the short-lived capture of Teruel by Republican forces in December

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1937). As we have seen earlier, in the great majority of rural villages and towns, collectives were established by the peasants, with village artisans, merchants and professional people, often also becoming part of them. In the vast majority of cases, these collectives were controlled by anarchists, although there were also a few examples of UGT collectives. Often, the administrative committees of the collectives played a double role as municipal authorities.

Thus, in the first weeks of the Civil War, the situation behind the Republican lines in Aragón was chaotic. It soon became apparent that there was a need to establish some instrument for coordinating the activities of the collectives and revolutionary committees, and to provide services for the region as a whole, as well as to prevent the sometimes arbitrary treatment of local communities by militiamen, particularly those from PSUC (Communist) units. Given their preponderance of power in Aragón at the time, it was the CNT-FAI that took the initiative in establishing such a regional authority. It was they who undertook to establish the Consejo de Aragón, as it was originally constituted.

The Establishment of the Consejo de Aragón

The decision to establish the Consejo de Aragón was taken at an extraordinary plenum of the Aragón regional confederation of the CNT held in Bujaralóz on October 6 1936. The meeting was attended by delegates from 139 local CNT organizations in the region, as well as from units of the Cultura y Acción, Roja y Negra and Durruti anarchist militia columns. The regional and national committees of the CNT were also represented.

The main debate at the meeting centered on establishment of a regional authority for all of Loyalist Aragón, what competence it should have, and the reasons for its organization. In the process of the discussion, delegates from a number of the rural collectives lodged complaints about the way they had been treated by the militiamen in their vicinities, such as arbitrary seizure of crops, and the need for establishing an authority which could regularize the relations between the civilian collectives and the improvised military units.

Among those participating in the discussion was Buenaventura Durruti himself. He reported on negotiations then in progress concerning the CNT proposal to Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero that a national defense council, composed of representatives of the CNT, UGT and the various political parties supporting the Republic replace the existing Republican government. In that context, he strongly urged the need for establishing a similar organization for the region of Aragón.

The issue which was most debated was whether or not the proposed Aragón regional council should have control over the Loyalist armed forces fighting on the Aragón front, or should be confined to handling economic, social and political problems behind the lines. Although opinion seems to have been divided among them, most of the delegates from the military units opposed the idea of giving the council military functions.

One of the military delegates, reported as representing the II Column, gave one of the strongest arguments against the proposed council's having control over military matters: 'I am a supporter of the constitution of the Council of Aragón, which would intervene in all kinds of activities behind the lines, but I disagree with the criterion of the comrades who maintain that there should exist in the Council of Aragón a Department of War. It is absurd to advocate that the fronts of Aragón be controlled by a Department of War which we create here. What we can do in my judgment is send to the committee which exists in Barcelona a representation of Aragón, so that together they can control and orient everything. The Council has much work to carry out of great use to the antifascist movement in other fields...'

The conference named a committee to draw up a resolution with regard to the establishment of the Consejo de Aragón. Its document, adopted by the meeting, stated: 'Taking into account the revolutionary events unleashed in the country as a consequence of the struggle provoked by fascism, and in conformity with the last accords of the Regional Plenums of the CNT, it is agreed to form the Regional Council of Defense which will take charge of all political, social and economic development of Aragón. The departments of the Council which will be formed are the following: Justice, Public Works,

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Industry and Commerce, Agriculture, Information and Propaganda, Transport and Communications, Public Order, Hygiene and Health, Public Instruction, Economy and Supply.'

This resolution also outlined the way in which the economy of the region would be reorganized by the new council. It provided that 'all the departments elaborate a plan which will always be submitted to the study and approval of the organizations represented; but once approved, they will be fulfilled in general in all their aspects. All the action of the various localities will consist of fulfilling the economic and social plan, with transitory or firm methods, which the new social structure will need. It will not be as it has been heretofore when there have been frequently contradictory projects and accomplishments.'

The same resolution noted: 'We have believed it inconvenient to create a Department of War.' Instead, it was decided to send two Aragón delegates to participate in the department of war in Catalonia. It also urged the establishment of a war committee, composed of delegates from all of the anarchist militia columns in the region and from the Consejo de Defensa of Aragón.

Finally, the congress decided that the new Council of Aragón should include representatives of other political groups, as well as the CNT. It proposed that there be seven anarchists, two representatives of the UGT and one from the Republican parties in the area.¹

However, preliminary negotiations to include non-anarchist elements in the Consejo de Aragón were at first unsuccessful. Félix Carresquer has noted that conversations were immediately opened with the Socialists and Republicans in the region, but they 'achieved unhappy results'. 'The Republicans, although they declared themselves favorably inclined, asked for time to reflect, while the Socialists were strong on their rejection, and without dissimulation expressed their hostility and lack of confidence.'²

Consequently, the original *consejo* consisted only of CNT-FAI elements. These members of the first version of the council were Joaquín Ascaso as president, Adolfo Ballaño in charge of justice and public Order, José Mavilla for agriculture, Miguel Jiménez for information and propaganda, Francisco Ponzán for transport and

commerce, José Alberola for public instruction, Adolfo Aznar for economy and supply, and Miguel Chueca for labor.³ These people included a carpenter, a construction laborer, a mechanic, a typographer, and three school teachers, but no peasants.⁴

Throughout the existence of the Consejo de Aragón, its most outstanding figure was Joaquín Ascaso. He was a cousin of Francisco Ascaso, the FAI leader killed during the July 19 fighting in Barcelona.⁵ He had grown up in Zaragoza, where he had joined the CNT while still in his teens. He was jailed and then went into exile during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Returning to Zaragoza thereafter, he became a leader of the CNT construction workers, and also of the anarchists' efforts to organize the unemployed. He had taken part in the December 1933 anarchist uprising, and apparently had at one time been a secretary of the national committee of the CNT.⁶

The First Manifesto of the Consejo de Aragón

Immediately after its establishment, the Consejo de Aragón issued its first manifesto. This dealt with a pressing problem, that of the relations between the villages and collectives and some of the militia units on the Aragón front, particularly those under Communist (PSUC) control. With that manifesto, the *consejo* sought to put some order in the process by which militia columns obtained food and other supplies from the peasants.

The manifesto started by saying that with regard to this problem, the *consejo* had two objectives:

To avoid, first, and as an essential point, that the Aragónese peasant, today proud of the efficacious support for his liberation given by his antifascist brothers, come to lose as the result of erroneous action of the political nature, the fraternal regard professed for them. And, second, because the Consejo de Defensa Regional cannot accept, in the name of the support which the great Aragónese majority has conferred on it that the Aragónese rights be trampled upon, and its indisputable right, as

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with other brother regions, to direct its own affairs in conformity with its characteristics, political temperament, and in the economic field, not forgetting for an instant the duties it has to fulfil in the liberating struggle which all the antifascists are conducting...

[The manifesto accused] some column chiefs, of a certain political faction, operating in our region as if they were in territory conquered from an outside and inside enemy; and following this mistaken conduct, there are imposed by these chiefs political and social norms totally against the wishes of our people, who with the assent of all its inhabitants have established norms of life, advanced we would affirm, in accord with the social transformation which the antifascist struggle is creating in Spain.

The *consejo*'s manifesto also accused some of the militia columns of 'requisitions of things and articles ... in the vanguard and rearguard; with the aggravating factor that these requisitions are total, without taking any account of the minimum needs of the village being requisitioned ... there has been plundering which takes no account of the needs of tomorrow, ruining systematically the villages ... leaving a mark of hate and pain which engenders the desire to eliminate that which is causing it.'

To remedy this situation, the manifesto said that the council 'advises and we hope will get from the column chiefs' certain procedures. These provided that henceforward all requisitions of food and supplies by the columns should be made through the *consejo* itself, 'which will fulfil them rationally in accordance with the possibilities of the region.' Furthermore, 'The antifascist columns must not and cannot meddle in the political and social life of a village which is essentially free and has its own personality.' The manifesto also directed the villages and collectives not to turn over any arms which they might have to anyone, without authorization of the *consejo*, and said they should resist any direct requisitions by militia columns 'within the means at their disposal'.⁷

Communist Opposition to the Consejo de Aragón

From the inception of the Consejo de Aragón, the Communist Party of the region strongly opposed it. At the beginning of the War they had only a minimal following, in Aragón. However, there, as elsewhere in Republican Spain, they sought to rally all those among the peasantry and other groups who were opposed to the revolutionary changes which had taken place as an aftermath of the frustration of the Rebel uprising.

José Duque, head of the Communist Party in Aragón, during the Civil War, explained in his own terms, the role of his party *vis-à-vis* the *consejo*: 'In spite of the Council, the terror and the investigation patrols, the Communists began to bring to the peasants the faith and belief that that situation of desperation was temporary and transitory. The Government of the Republic had issued an important agricultural decree which practically represented carrying the Agrarian Reform to its ultimate conclusions, giving the land of the large landowners and of all those who had participated in the rebellion to the peasants and agricultural workers... It was a measure the political consequences of which were used by the Communists in their simple proposal to end the disorder and desperation sowed by the Council.'

In the beginning at least, the Communists were alone in the violence of their campaign against the *consejo*. According to Duque:

Unfortunately, this decided attitude of the Communist Party in the face of the chaos sowed in the region by the anarchists, was not shared with the same firmness by the Republicans and Socialists. Both these sectors were against the *consejo*, understood the tremendous discredit for the Republic represented by the continuance of such a situation, but did not feel they had sufficient force to battle the *consejo*, to isolate it from the masses, to clarify with all clarity and hardness, as the Communist Party began to do before the people of Aragón, what was the real meaning of an organism whose mission was to multiply the state of indiscipline, of disorganization and anarchy existing since the first day of the uprising.⁸

The Communists did not limit their attacks on the Consejo de Aragón to mere words. Félix Carresquer has noted that Communist planes ‘one day in December bombarded “by mistake” the old house in which the new-born organ [The Consejo de Aragón] had just been installed.’⁹

The Reorganization and Legalization of the Consejo de Aragón

During its first two months, the Consejo de Aragón was a purely *de facto* regime, and not a *de jure* one, at least in so far as the Republican government of Spain was concerned. However, the *consejo* and the anarchist leaders in Aragón were anxious to get official recognition of the new Aragón regime from the Republican government of Francisco Largo Caballero.

The position of the Consejo de Aragón was particularly weak because of the attitudes of the government of Catalonia, and of the national leadership of the CNT itself. According to César Lorenzo, the Consejo ‘could even less please the Generalidad where all the sectors of antifascism already collaborated, and which until then had controlled Aragón as if that region was only a dependency or a colony . . .

‘The disapprobation was so general that even the leaders of the CNT proclaimed their discontent. According to them, not only did the creation of this council not facilitate their efforts, to join the government, but it was also illegitimate since it had not been decided upon with the approval of the National Committee or ratified by any plenum or regular congress.’¹⁰

Benito Pabón, a leader of the Partido Sindicalista of ex-CNT leader Angel Pestaña and himself ‘a great friend of the CNT’, ought to help the Consejo de Aragón to resolve the impasse. He urged them to take the first step by openly seeking legalization of their status by the Largo Caballero government. ‘He indicated tact, the complexity of the international situation’ made it inadvisable to ‘ostentatiously exhibit the predominance of the far Left, and he convinced them that it was indispensable to conserve certain appearances of bourgeois democracy.’¹¹

As a consequence, early in November a delegation from the Consejo de Aragón consisting of Joaquín Ascaso and Miguel Chueca, together with Benito Pabón, first went to Barcelona, where they were severely chastised by Catalan President Luis Companys. They then went to Madrid, to confer with Prime Minister Largo Caballero. According to Lorenzo, 'The latter had no objection to the idea of founding an autonomous regional organization, but demanded the participation of the political parties.' Republican President Manuel Azaña, with whom they also conferred, took more or less the same position as Largo Caballero.¹²

The delegation of the Consejo de Aragón had taken with them to Barcelona and Madrid a document, dated October 31 1936, which outlined the reasons for the establishment of the organization, and presented their ideas on the powers which they wished the Republican government to concede to the *consejo*.'

'The circumstances of abnormality experienced by the Aragón region, made it pressingly necessary to constitute a directing organism for the social, economic and political activities of this sector of the national territory. The inexistence of the Civil Government, provincial Deputations and all directing organisms of the three Aragónese provinces ... gave rise to a chaotic situation which threatened to produce economic ruin of this territory.'

Perhaps somewhat disingenuously, the document then continued: 'The structuring of the Council of Defense has been planned in accord with all of the parties of the Popular Front and the trade union organisms.' It expressed the *consejo*'s 'absolute identification with the Government of the Republic, and its firm determination to carry out all of the dispositions emanating from it.'

It was then proposed: 'The councillors will be designated proportionally to the number of members in that region of the political parties and the trade union organization. The Council will assume in its mandate: 1. The functions and attributions in the competence of the civil governors and provincial deputations; 2. Those which will be delegated by the Central Government; and 3. Those imposed by the abnormal circumstances in the region so that it can carry out the missions attributed to it.'

Finally, the document set forth the proposed objectives of the

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consejo: 'First, that of maintaining public order, preventing by all means abuses and arbitrary actions which have been occurring, particularly by irresponsible groups. Second, undertake the economic reconstruction of industry and agriculture in all of the liberated zone; and third, aid in every way, the military command for the greatest efficacy of the forces which are struggling for the liberty of the Spanish peoples.'¹³

As a consequence of the visit of the *consejo* delegation to Madrid, the Consejo de Aragón 'was officially recognized by the national authorities which delegated to it a certain number of civil and military functions (in particular those which had belonged to the provincial deputations and to the governors)...' However, it was the end of December before 'its legalization in due form' was completed.¹⁴ At that time, Joaquín Ascaso was named by the Republican government as governor-general of Aragón.¹⁵

The negotiations for the incorporation of other political groups in the Consejo de Aragón were protracted. The Communist Party presented particular problems. José Duque noted: 'The Communist Party was invited by Republicans and Socialists to participate in the negotiations with the *consejo*. It accepted, without making any promises, and on an informative basis. Without renouncing, either, the continuation of its political struggle against the *consejo* and for the reinforcement of the authority of the Government of the Republic.'¹⁶ Finally however:

[The Communists] were faced with either continuing to fight against the *consejo* or, in view of the attitude of Largo Caballero and of the rest of the forces of the Popular Front of the Region, to accept participation. The first position, sooner or later, would have brought with it armed conflict, a situation full of dangers, in view of the proximity of the front. The second outcome signified the possibility of strengthening the bonds of unity among all of the antifascist forces through the *consejo*, neutralizing the dissolving action of the anarchists and normalizing the life of the region on the basis of fortifying the authority of the Government of the Republic... The Communist Party decided, therefore, for participation.¹⁷

The *consejo* was finally reorganized, providing for seven members, including the President, from the CNT, two from the Izquierda Republicana, two from the UGT, two from the Communist Party and one from the Partido Sindicalista. Joaquín Ascaso remained as president, with the other CNT members being Evaristo Vinuales for information and propaganda, Adolfo Ballano for public order, Adolfo Arnal for agriculture, Miguel Chueca for labor, Luis Montoliu for transport and Communications and Evelio Martínez for economy and supply. The two Izquierda Republicana members were José Ignacio Mantecón for justice, and Jesús Gracia for treasury; the two UGT representatives Manuel Latorre for culture and José Ruíz Borao for public works. José Duque, head of the Aragón Communist Party, became councillor for health and social assistance, and his Communist colleague, Custodio Penarrocha, that for industry and commerce. Finally, Benito Pabón of the Partido Sindicalista became secretary-general of the Consejo de Defensa de Aragón.¹⁸ José Ignacio Mantecón never took his post, being replaced by Tomás Pellicer, also of the Izquierda Republicana.¹⁹

The Activities of the Consejo de Aragón

No comprehensive study of the activities of the Consejo de Defensa de Aragón during the ten months of its existence is available. However, one can piece together some view of what it accomplished in the various spheres in which it was active.

In accordance with what it declared to be one of its avowed objectives when it sought recognition from the government of the Republic, the *consejo* did put in place a mechanism for maintaining public order. With the rescue of a large part of Aragón from the Franco forces in August–September 1936, patrols had been established by the militiamen and local residents in the various communities of the region. The Consejo de Aragón, particularly after its reorganization to include forces other than the anarchists, sought to unify, and to at least to some degree discipline, these forces. It relied principally on the militiamen for public order purposes.²⁰

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José Duque reported that in the first meeting of the reconstituted Consejo de Aragón, the law and order question was dealt with:

With regard to dissolution of the 'investigation patrols', Ascaso said that that was 'his greatest desire'. But that, since the Government could not, for the moment, send forces of public order to Aragón, it was necessary to continue with the patrols and carry out also one of the agreements of the meetings preceding the reorganization of the *consejo*, to have one thousand agents of Public Order, with five hundred from the CNT and the other five hundred from the rest of the parties...

This agreement, from the numerical point of view, fortified the political position of the anarchists, but if one kept in mind that the commanders would have to be sent by the Government, the question did not have decisive importance, since furthermore, these forces, once organized, would depend on the Ministry of Government, and could be relieved and transferred from Aragón to other points of Spain.²¹

César Lorenzo has described the work of the Consejo de Aragón in organizing a regional police force:

Adolfo Ballano and Francisco Foyo, respectively councillor and general delegate of Public Order, undertook to organize a single police force at the service of the Council. They unified and put under their direct authority the groups of militiamen which had been formed spontaneously in each locality to look for suspects and saboteurs or to stop disorders and conflicts among individuals... Above all they put an end to aggressions, to arbitrary denunciations, to disappearances and to summary executions. Only groups of Public Investigation and Order exercised any longer the functions of police throughout the extent of Aragón and they replaced the ancient corps such as the Civil Guard and the Assault Guard who were aligned with the Rebels...

The new police or gendarmes did not have either ranks of uniforms, wishing thus to give value to their proletarian

associations and keep their revolutionary character. The delinquents, the reactionary elements, the perturbers and suspects were judged by the Popular Tribunals formed by militants of the CNT and, in case of being found guilty, were put in prison or condemned to forced labor.²²

A hundred secret police agents were sent by the Republican minister of government Angel Galarza to help reorganize the Aragón public order officers.²³

Augustine Souchy described a 'concentration camp of the FAI', which he visited in Alcaníz in the province of Teruel in the early part of 1937. In his perhaps over-idyllic account, he wrote:

At the foot of a hill there have been constructed the buildings of the camp. Dormitories, inspection rooms, stables... All that has been constructed by the prisoners, aided by their guards. The FAI directs this camp. It is not a prison. Nothing reminds one of a prison or of forced labor. There is no fence, no limitation. The prisoners can move freely. Their guards share life with them. They live in the same way. They sleep on similar cots in these primitive rooms. They addressed one another with the familiar 'tu'. Prisoners and guards are comrades. There is no uniform for one or the other, they are indistinguishable in appearance...

All the prisoners can receive visits of their family members each Sunday. They go for walks in the country and in the fields. There does not exist the sexual torture which prisoners and penitentiary inmates suffer so much from in other countries... The anarchists of the FAI are the first to introduce this human reform. Why are there still concentration camps? The struggle with fascism is not yet terminated. The anarchists have to protect themselves against the fascists.²⁴

Another major political task of the reconstituted *consejo* was to supervise the re-establishment of municipal councils, in conformity with a decree of the Republican government of January 4 1937. The new councils were not elected but their membership was apportioned

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in conformity with the following of different political tendencies in a particular community.

The CNT was represented in 66 of the 83 new municipal councils, and had the mayor in 23 of them. In 22 cases, only anarchists were in the new councils. The UGT, on the other hand, was represented in 43 of the 83, and had mayors in 16. It was the only element represented in six councils. The Izquierda Republicana Party had representatives in 18 municipal councils; the Socialist Party in only five, the Communist Party in only three, and Unión Republicana was represented in only one of the reconstituted municipal councils.²⁵

The juridical department of the *consejo*, which was in the hands of a member of Izquierda Republicana after the reorganization, also had considerable work to do. The affairs of the *consejo* not infrequently got into the hands of courts in other parts of Republican Spain, and this Department of the *consejo* was in charge of handling such situations.²⁶

Particularly until the full establishment of the Federación Regional de Colectividades in February 1937, much of the work of the *consejo* was economic, and even after the *federación* was set up the economic role of the *consejo* was considerable. According to Walther Bernecker, 'After its legalization in December 1936, the Regional Council could undertake the reconstruction of the collapsed; in the following months, it organized the agrarian collectives, intensified commerce with France, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, acquired agricultural machinery with the proceeds from the sale of saffron and promoted in February the union of all the agrarian collectives in a regional federation.'²⁷

Luis Monteliu, a CNT member of the *consejo* after its reorganization, has also emphasized that the department of economy and supply was one of the most important parts of the *consejo*. Collectives which needed things from outside Aragón, sought them through the council. It acquired goods in large quantities from factories in Catalonia and elsewhere, paying in part in goods of the collectives and partly in money. It got the money from a fund created by contributions from the collectives and from other sources. Also, the *consejo* was lucky in that it started with considerable reserves of goods and cash.²⁸

A report made to a regional plenum of the CNT of Aragón after the suppression of the Consejo de Aragón related: 'Our general policy in Supply tended to emancipating the producers and consumer from the tutelage of the intermediary... This objective was totally achieved since from the beginning of functioning of the Department of Supply, free commerce practically ceased to exist because it was a ruinous business for any who engaged in it, since we obtained for the villages what they needed at the lowest possible prices; in these conditions private trade had no reason to exist and eliminated itself.'²⁹

The supply department ran into frequent difficulties, particularly outside the region. 'We could cite many cases of seizure of our products by the police when our trucks went into non-Aragóneze areas; there was even seized an entire ship which carried food-stuffs acquired by us abroad; on the other hand, there were innumerable difficulties to export our products, some people going so far as to seize our exports, alleging that they were stolen goods.'³⁰

Monteliu noted that the department of transport played a significant role. It early bought a number of trucks to carry merchandise back and forth from the collectives. It also established a bus line running through Aragón which collected fares in cash, since it was mainly patronized by militiamen, who were paid in cash. The fares were enough to cover the gas and maintenance of the buses. Gasoline was one thing for which the *consejo* always demanded payment in cash.³¹

Additional details of the work of the department of transport and communications of the Consejo de Aragón were published in an article in the single number of a periodical, *Comunicaciones*, which that department was able to publish before the suppression of the *consejo*. After noting the pre-July 19 isolation of many cities and villages of Aragón, which made it difficult for them to communicate with one another or with the rest of Spain, the article said: 'At the present time it can be affirmed categorically that the liberated parts of the three Aragónese provinces, have abundant and very rapid means of communication, not only among the villages in them, but ... with other Spanish regions.'

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It noted that in addition to the bus line going virtually the whole length Aragón, some 204 kilometers, from Caspe to Binefar, the department had established other lines feeding into the main north-south one. It had also established a rapid mail delivery service between Valencia and most parts of Loyalist Aragón, using regular automobiles, but also special light trucks recently acquired to intensify this service, of particular importance not only for the civilians of the region, but also for the soldiers on the Aragón front.³²

José Duque wrote about his work as councillor for health and social assistance: 'In Health, José Duque succeeded in reorganizing the civil hospitals and in overcoming the enormous difficulties which the medical problem presented, since many doctors had been mobilized, and many who were fascists had fled or had died. Doctors were being provided to the villages which needed them and where the municipality was willing to pay.'

However, Duque had a number of conflicts with local anarchist authorities. As he said, he 'was enemy of "collectivization" of the doctors and was not disposed to provide health functionaries to the municipalities which paid with tokens and which forced the doctor, once terminated his visits and professional duties, to collect olives or undertake agricultural labors.'³³

The education department of the Consejo de Aragón was at least nominally in charge of all the schools which were set up in the collectives. As we have seen earlier, almost all of the collectives organized schools or expanded those which already existed before the outbreak of the War.³⁴ It is not clear just what degree of control the *consejo* had over the local schools, however, beyond helping them to get necessary materials.

The Consejo de Aragón issued a daily newspaper, *Nuevo Aragón*, while the regional organization of the CNT put out another daily, *Cultura y Acción*. The Communist leader José Duque claimed that *Nuevo Aragón* was 'the most personalistic periodical of Aragón and in addition ran up the flag of anticommunism'.³⁵ The paper published the decrees and other documents of the *consejo*.

One charge made by Communists and others against the Consejo de Aragón was that its leaders, or some of them, were corrupt, lived too well, and tried to accumulate personal property. Joaquín Ascaso

and others were arrested on such charges soon after the liquidation of the *consejo*, but were not convicted of anything and were soon released. However, many years later, when Ronald Fraser interviewed Macario Royo, a wartime member of the national committee of the CNT, he was told: 'There hung over some of the Council's leading members a cloud of immorality which was offensive to the libertarians.'³⁶

The Ideological Implications of Consejo de Aragón

There can be little doubt about the fact that there were certain contradictions between the actions of the Aragónese anarchists in organizing and maintaining the Consejo de Aragón, and their original libertarian ideas. César Lorenzo has pointed this out: 'One cannot deny that the Aragónese anarchosindicalists were obliged (without ever realizing it completely) to implant, in total contradiction with their ideal of a free association of free producers, an economic system which resembled more war communism than libertarian communism. The contrast was not less flagrant in what concerned justice and repression...'³⁷

Walther Bernecker has made this same point:

The creation of the Consejo de Aragón had involved a clamorous rupture with the former theory and practice of anarchism. The *consejo* assumed from the beginning all the functions of a regional government. The anarchists themselves said of it that 'it was a species of government equivalent to the Generalidad of Catalonia in the Aragónese territory', but in contrast to the Generalidad of Catalonia which got its legitimacy from the election of the Popular Front in February 1936, the Consejo de Aragón could only present a compromise between the apparatuses of the parties and unions and authorization by the central government. It lacked a democratic legitimization. Neither its establishment nor its composition responded to anarchist principles...

Contrary to the affirmation of its president, J. Ascaso, its

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origin was not based on a free election of the local and *comarcal* committees; in its establishment the chiefs of the anarchist centuries, and columns (above all Buenaventura Durruti) exercised an influence of some importance. Nor was there full agreement within the CNT on the Consejo de Aragón...³⁸

This assessment seems too harsh. The great majority of those attending the meeting which decided to establish the original Consejo de Aragón were representative of the collectives which had been established following the reoccupation of much of Aragón by Loyalist forces. It is true that a relatively small minority of delegates from militia columns were also there, but the records of the founding meeting which are available indicate that there was by no means unanimity among those delegates, nor was there a notable divergence between the peasant collective delegates and the militia delegates as such.

Also, from the beginning, the *consejo* had provision for including within its ranks those other political elements of the region which supported the Republic. In due time that was done, in a fashion which, if anything, probably provided those elements, particularly the Communist Party, more representation than it was entitled to in terms of popular support.

Finally, there is little evidence that the Consejo de Aragón exercised any marked degree of coercion over the collectives and communities over which it presided. There would seem to be considerable evidence that the *comarcal* federations of collectives had an infinitely greater impact on the lives of those belonging to them than did the Consejo de Aragón.

On the other hand, one cannot dispute the fact that the Consejo de Aragón *was* a regional government. In setting it up, the Aragónese anarchists were merely reflecting the profound quandary with which they were faced throughout Loyalist Spain as a consequence of coming to power in the midst of a Civil War, which forced upon them many decisions which, if conditions had been more ideal from their point of view, they certainly would not have taken.

The Mounting Communist Campaign Against the Consejo de Aragón

After the May Events in Catalonia, the Communists and their allies, having triumphed over their anarchist enemies in that region, could not possibly allow the dominance of the CNT-FAI in neighboring Aragón to continue. Anarchist control had not only been most complete in Aragón of all of the regions of Republican Spain but, after the May Events, it remained the only part of Loyalist Spain where anarchist influence remained predominant.

José Peirats has noted: 'At the end of July there began a political offensive in the grand style. It was started by the daily *Frente Rojo* of Valencia.'³⁹ After elaborating on the details of this attack, Peirats observed: 'We can see now that all these attacks were nothing more than a smokescreen to limit the effects which would be produced by other events. We would say that the general offensive was directed against the Consejo de Defensa de Aragón.'⁴⁰ Walther Bernecker noted that this press offensive of the Communist Party 'was only surpassed in aggressiveness by the attacks it directed at this same time against the POUM'.⁴¹

José Duque commented on this same campaign against the Consejo de Aragón: 'The national press, the most responsible ones (*Política, El Socialista, Mundo Obrero*, etc.), began to deal in detail with what took place in the Aragónese region, to demand of the Government a rapid solution to a situation which was an insult and ignominy for the whole country...'

Duque also noted that 'parallel to the press campaign there grew manifestations of discontent by the Aragónese population. Daily there came to the Regional Committee of the Popular Front resolutions of local organisms of the Popular Front, pronouncing in favor of dissolution of the *consejo*...'⁴²

On July 6-7, the Communist Party of Aragón held its second war conference. Its principal speaker was José Duque: 'The period of the "experiments" of libertarian communism, of the "committees", of the "little republics", and of the "principalities", has ended in Aragón. From now on, what has to control our region is the Government of the Republic... If the recently signed pact is not

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fulfilled, then, the Communist Party, very shortly, will denounce before the masses the Council of Aragón, as an inefficacious and perturbing organism worthy of being dissolved immediatety.'

At the end of July, the regional committee of the Communist Party issued a communique in which it proclaimed: 'The hour has come for the Consejo de Aragón to be dissolved, as an inefficacious and perturbing discipline.' José Duque noted: 'This communique was received by the anarchists as a declaration of war.'⁴³

Finally, an assembly of the Popular Front of Aragón met at the beginning of August. According to José Duque this meeting 'decided the fate of the Consejo'. 'In the Assembly there were in the first moments some vacillations. No one dared to confront directly the *consejo* and support openly its dissolution. One representative of the Socialist Party formulated semi-Trotskyite positions which tended to separate the workers' forces from the Republicans and reach agreement with the CNT. José Duque, in name of the Communist Party, was the one who presented the question with all clarity, obliging the others to support the only just position: that the Consejo de Defensa de Aragón should be rapidly dissolved by the Government of the Republic, without further contemplation.'⁴⁴

Meanwhile, in Aragón, the Communists and their allies mounted a campaign to undermine the authority of the *consejo*. The Popular Front in the region declared that any accords which it had reached with the CNT in support of the *consejo* had been reached 'irresponsibly' and were null and void. Efforts of a delegation of the Aragón CNT to clarify the situation with the Negrín government in Valencia were fruitless, for reasons which soon became clear.⁴⁵

Opposition to the Council of Aragón was certainly not limited to the Communists. For one, President Manuel Azaña noted in his memoirs that on June 4 he urged Negrín that he ought to abolish the Consejo de Aragón.⁴⁶ When it was finally suppressed, he wrote: 'It is the best thing this Government has done in the political field.'⁴⁷

Anarchist Reaction to Attacks on the Consejo de Aragón

The anarchists were by no means oblivious to this attack on their Aragónese stronghold. From their obviously weakened position after the May Events, they sought to rally support for the Consejo de Aragón.

A relatively early anarchist reply to the propaganda and political campaign being waged against the Consejo de Aragón was a front-page article entitled 'We defend the Consejo de Aragón', in the *Boletín de Información* of the CNT-FAI of July 7 1937. This article began: 'The Consejo de Aragón is an organism formed by the popular will in the heat of the Revolution and legitimized by the Government of the Republic. It was born, then, with all the requisites which could satisfy the most exigent in material of political law, and furthermore its members, who enjoy from the first moment the confidence of the people which has chosen them, has known how to act with efficiency, capacity and respect for the established laws.'

The article noted a 'destructive maneuver' being conducted against the Consejo de Aragón, 'for the purpose of eliminating it completely from the governmental functions which have been delegated to it'. Curiously enough, the only group which the article specifically names as seeking that objective is the Izquierda Republicana Party.

The article ended by proclaiming: 'The Consejo de Aragón which has justified by its correct conduct and its administrative and organizational abilities the confidence placed in it by its electors, has to be respected and defended by the high powers, in the name of that sentiment of concord which must be established among all the antifascists, if we wish truly that Spain not fall in the dishonor of being converted into a country subject to the foreigner.'⁴⁸

Joaquín Ascaso himself made a strong public defense of the Consejo Aragón and of the revolution which had occurred in the region after the start of the Civil War. Speaking over the Caspe radio on the first anniversary of July 19, he emphasized that with the Rebel uprising, the humble people of Aragón had been left to their own devices, that the politicians who at election time had proclaimed their love for the region, had been nowhere to be found.

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As a consequence, Ascaso said, the people had built their own new institutions. He particularly praised the rural collectives which had been formed in the region, admitting that they had committed errors, particularly in forcing some peasants to join them unwillingly, but that these errors were being overcome. He proclaimed that the collectives 'are the future'.⁴⁹

Ascaso defended the work of the Consejo de Aragón itself, saying that it had 'given Spain and the world, joining together the aspirations of the peasant who remained in the rearguard, an instrument of government, economic and politico-social, hitherto unknown, which rejected the totalitarian and absorbing spirit of all Governments which had hitherto existed, but however, did not seek to establish an independent regionalist area; its birth in the revolutionary outburst was inspired in the new modality which undeniably will develop the new Spain saved from reaction by the major proletarian effort.'⁵⁰

He argued that the Consejo 'was the child of the Revolution, and came out strong and robust; there was born a great and brotherly idea, but one without exclusivist spirit, and guided by this attitude, sought, fomented and achieved that in its strong arms will be included in the same spirit all the ideas which seek a new era.' He added that 'those who seek to exterminate it as a Consejo, are doing the same as doing away with its mother: the Revolution.'⁵¹

In defense of the *consejo*, Ascaso cited a 'pact which the Antifascist Bloc promised to fulfill'. This document, for which he gave no date, had been signed by representatives of the Communist Party, Unión Republicana, Federación Socialista Aragonesa, CNT, UGT, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas, Izquierda Republicana and by him as head of the *consejo*. This pact had as its first point that it 'considers that the Consejo de Aragón can and should continue in the same form in which it is presently constituted'. Other points of the document defined the council's jurisdiction in terms that had been agreed to with the Madrid government, called for reinforcing the principle of revolutionary authority,' proclaimed the right of the peasants to cultivate the land individually or collectively, as they chose.

The eighth and last point of the document, cited by Ascaso stated: 'The Consejo de Aragón which has to be the jealous and enthusiastic collaborator with the legitimate Government of the Republic, will

intensify production in the rearguard, will mobilize all the resources of the region for the better development of the war, will enliven the antifascist spirit of the masses so that they work and struggle constantly for the war; to that end, it will carry out an intensive purge of the liberated zones, imposing implacable order and pursuing the hidden fascists, the defeatists, speculators and all those who don't justify their activities and who present a danger for the attainment of our triumph.⁵²

Ascaso ended his discourse expressing 'my confidence in the Government of the Republic'. 'I hope and am sure that the Government of the Republic will appreciate the full value of the sacrifice which Aragónese antifascism is undergoing in these grave moments; and ignoring the intemperate voices of the "glorious" busybodies, will appreciate the direction the people of Aragón are taking through their responsible organisms, the basis of the future peace of its rearguard. If we are mistaken in this confidence which we have in our rulers, we shall not be responsible for the tragedy which undoubtedly will fall upon our region, and as a result, on all Spanish antifascism.'⁵³

On August 2, a plenum of *comarcas* of the CNT was held in Alcañiz. It passed a resolution to the effect that:

The CNT, after discussing and reasoning serenely on the situation presented, affirms its conviction that the antifascist bloc should be maintained for the good of the war and the revolution. If that desire was broken and shattered by those other organizations which have more or less numerous representation in Aragón, the CNT could never again be accused of being irresponsible, uncontrolled or provocative.⁵⁴

The resolution affirmed that it will not participate in any dirty manoeuvre which strengthens any other party in certain regions. The CNT, conscious and certain of its responsibility, says: That as it doesn't wish the antifascist front to be destroyed by political appetites, nor will it betray the accords of a signed pact on which the ink is still fresh, neither is it disposed, and it affirms this without boasting of any kind, to allow the political, social and economic conquests achieved to be destroyed.⁵⁵

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Finally, on August 7, the CNT held a public meeting in Alcañiz which was addressed by, among others, Federica Montseny. At José Peirats has noted:

This was the last of a series of meetings in Aragón, with the evident purpose of counteracting the bad atmosphere created there by the campaign of the Communist press. The orator attacked strongly the so-called Popular Front, which was responsible because of its inefficacy and its political blindness, for July 18, 1936. This Popular Front had been reborn now, late and to the damage of the revolutionary conquests, and was also dangerous for relations among the parties and organizations, brought together before in the Antifascist Front and in the Consejo de Defensa. She paid particular attention to the grave political situation created for the *consejo*, the federal nature of which she praised. Circumstances perhaps dictated that the orator treat with Russia with great benevolence and tact.⁵⁶

Preparations for the Destruction of the Consejo de Aragón

Meanwhile, the campaign to destroy the Consejo de Aragón on the part of the Communists and their allies was not confined to press attacks or public meetings denouncing the council. The new government of Juan Negrín was organizing a military incursion by Communist troops into the region, to carry out the destruction of the Consejo de Aragón, and with it, anarchist power.

Negrín's minister of defense, the Right-wing Socialist leader Indalecio Prieto, was as determined as the Communists were to destroy the position of the anarchists in Aragón. For this purpose, he called Lieutenant-Colonel Enrique Lister, commander of the 11th Division, an offshoot of the Communists' Fifth Regiment of the early months of the War. Lister himself recounted the circumstances of Prieto's charge to him:

He explained to me that the government had decided to dissolve the 'Council of Aragón, but that it feared that the anarchists

would refuse to accept that order ... so he had proposed to the Council of Ministers, which had agreed, to send military forces capable of applying the decisions of the government ... He told me that he would not put the order in writing concerning the mission which he was confiding to me ... that it would be a secret between the government and me, and that I should liquidate it without hesitation and without bureaucratic or legal formalities as I saw fit, since I would have behind me a unanimous government. Ostensibly, the division would be there for rest and reorganization.⁵⁷

César Lorenzo has commented on the preparations of the Negrín government for the liquidation of anarchist influence in Aragón:

In truth, the Negrín government had proceeded with extreme ability. To assuage the doubts of the population, it synchronized the liquidation of the power of Aragónese CNT with the preparation of a vast military operation ... of which the objective was nothing less than the liberation of Zaragoza, or at least to relieve Santander from the pressure of the rebel army and indirectly prevent the imminent fall of the Cantabrian bulwark ...⁵⁸

The choice of Lister was undoubtedly explained by the fact that he had already proved himself in his attacks on the collectives of Castilla ... Furthermore, the Lister division formed a solidly CP-controlled group, in spite of the presence in its ranks of numerous camouflaged libertarians who, as a measure of precaution ... had accepted membership in the Party.⁵⁹

The Communist Invasion of Aragón

Three units were involved in the military attack on the anarchists and the Consejo de Aragón. These were Lister's 11th Division, as well as the PSUC's 27th Division (the former Karl Marx Column), and the 30th Division (the ex-Macia/Companys Column) of the Catalan Left Party.⁶⁰

The Rise and Fall of the Consejo de Aragón

On August 11, the Negrín government published a decree dissolving the Consejo de Aragón:

The moral and material needs of the war demand in an imperious way the concentration of the authority of the State, so that it can be exercised with unity of criteria and objective... The Aragónese region, capable because of the quality of its people of the highest human and economic contributions to the cause of the Republic, suffers to a higher degree than any other from the dispersion of authority which results in damage to general and ideological interests...

The Consejo de Aragón, whatever its efforts may have been, has not succeeded in remedying this situation. While the rest of Spain has been experiencing a new discipline... Aragón remains outside this centralizing current, to which we owe in large part the victory which we have been promised.

The operative articles of the decree dissolved the Council of Aragón and deposed Joaquín Ascaso as delegate of the government in Aragón, and provided for the naming of a governor-general of Aragón. A second decree named José Ignacio Mantecón to the post of governor-general.⁶¹ Mantecón was an ostensible member of the Izquierda Republicana Party, but a close ally of the Communists, who later joined the Communist Party in exile.⁶²

The decree dissolving the Consejo de Aragón was the signal for Lister and the other anti-anarchist military elements to enter into action. José Peirats described what happened: 'The Communist military forces entered Aragón as conquerors... The invaders reached Caspe and invaded the headquarters of the CNT and the FAI... In addition to the arrest of officials one must add that of the editors of the organ of the Consejo, *Nuevo Aragón*. The daily was suppressed, or rather supplanted by the Communist periodical *El Día*. Other forces of the 11 Division made their triumphal entry into Alcañíz, headquarters of the CNT Regional Committee of Aragón...'⁶³

César Lorenzo has also described what happened:

At the same moment of the promulgation of the decree, the 11th

division commanded by the Communist chief Enrique Lister went into action, with the support of the 27th division (PSUC), and the 30th (Catalanists) installing the new governor general Ignacio Mantecón, arrested hundreds of libertarian militants (among them Joaquín Ascaso and other anarchist councillors and members of the Regional Committee of the CNT) eliminating libertarians from the municipal councils and replacing them with Communists, destroying the headquarters of the CNT, attacking the agrarian collectives, confiscating their equipment, pillaging their granaries, dispersing the administrative committees of the socialized enterprises and distributing the land among the former owners.⁶⁴

Joaquín Ascaso was accused of having stolen jewelry while head of the council. However, since the Negrín government could present no evidence to substantiate this charge, he was soon released.⁶⁵

President Manuel Azaña recorded in his memoirs that ex-governor Mantecón told him that at the time of the deposition of the Consejo de Aragón, Colonel Lister had proposed to him that he *dar el paseo*, that is, murder, the members of the *consejo*. Azaña wrote: “The game was clear,” he told me. “They would have been shot and then he would have blamed me, presenting himself as the defender of the proletarians.”⁶⁶

The Anarchists’ Reaction to the Destruction of the Consejo de Aragón

The reaction of the anarchists to the destruction of their power in Aragón was surprisingly mild. This was due not only to their realization of their weak political position at that time, but also to the disagreement among themselves concerning the significance of what had happened.

César Lorenzo has raised the question as to why the anarchist divisions in the area did not enter into conflict with the Communist forces which were destroying anarchist power there. ‘The soldiers ardently desired to do so, but the National Committee of the CNT

The Rise and Fall of the Consejo de Aragón

and the Peninsular Committee of the FAI intervened to prevent this, to avoid a new civil war; they demanded more patience and that they not undertake anything without agreement of the Organization, because an act of desperation would rapidly turn over the area to Franco. The CNT troops did not budge.⁶⁷

After the invasion of the Lister Division and other military units, the national committee of the CNT sent a delegation to talk with the new governor-general, Ignacio Mantecón, to secure the freedom of the more than 300 anarchist prisoners still held.⁶⁸ Walther Bernecker has described that attitude of the CNT delegation as being characterized by a 'courteous tone'.⁶⁹

César Lorenzo has suggested that the 'courteous' attitude of the national anarchist leaders towards the invaders of Aragón may have had factional explanations. Their 'passive attitude is explainable in terms of their lack of interest in an organism which had been constituted without their authorization and in defiance of internal discipline . . . It is necessary also to note that the Aragónese anarchists themselves were far from forming a united bloc: thus, when the new governor Ignacio Mantecón . . . interviewed members of the *consejo*, some such as Montoliu and Evelio Martínez agreed to aid his work and to put themselves at the orders of the government, while others, such as Miguel Chueca, strongly refused.' As a result, he concluded, 'the Aragónese libertarians fatally allowed themselves to be removed without resistance.'⁷⁰

Conclusion

Aragón was the part of Republican Spain where, for a year, the anarchists were most completely in control. They organized a regional apparatus which was for all practical purposes a government. However, with the growing power of the enemies of the Revolution, which had taken place immediately after the defeat of the Franco-fascist Rebellion in July 1936, particularly of the Communists, the days of the anarchist-dominated Consejo de Aragón were inevitably limited. In August 1937, it was finally overcome by the military force of the Communists, with the support of Right-wing

THE ANARCHISTS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Socialists and other anti-revolutionary elements. The fall of the Consejo de Aragón was a major step in the defeat of the Spanish Revolution.

Anarchist Participation in Other Regional and Local Governments

During the Civil War, the anarchists participated in regional and local governments in various other parts of Republican Spain, in addition to Catalonia and Aragón. In quite a few cases, they continued to play a major role in local administrations until the collapse of the Republic.

The CNT–FAI in the Asturias Region

Before the Civil War, the Socialists were the largest element on the Left in the Asturias region on the Bay of Biscay, with their main strength particularly concentrated among the coal miners and the workers of the regional capital, Oviedo. After the establishment of the Republic, the CNT had been able to establish a rival coal miners' union to the majority one affiliated with the Unión General de Trabajadores, but the Communists succeeded in wresting its control from the anarchists and withdrawing it from the CNT. The locals, still under CNT influence, then withdrew from the regional coal miners union to affiliate directly with the Asturian organization of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.¹

However, the principal centers of strength of the CNT were the port city of Gijón, and the town of La Felguera, seat of the principal

steelworks of the region. In those two centers, CNT predominance was clearly evident.

In spite of the fact that overall, the numerical strength of the UGT and Socialist Party was considerably greater than that of the CNT–FAI in the Asturias region, the importance of that fact was considerably diminished by the fall of Oviedo into the hands of the Rebels during the first week of the War. Various efforts to retrieve the city for the Republic were unsuccessful. Thus, in much of the rest of Asturias, which remained for 15 months in the hands of the Republic, the balance of forces between Socialists and anarchists was more nearly even, if in fact the anarchists were not more numerous. According to Ramón Alvarez, the membership of the CNT in the region rose from about 30,000 members just before the War, to an estimated 90,000 members at its high point during the War. (He noted that these figures were not ‘certain and absolutely reliable’.)²

CNT–UGT Relations in Asturias During the War

By the time the Civil War began, relations between the CNT on the one hand and the UGT and Socialist Party (PSOE) on the other, were much more friendly in Asturias than was the case in much of the rest of Spain. In March 1934, the CNT and UGT in the region had signed an agreement establishing an *Alianza Obrera Revolucionaria*, the only area in Spain in which the anarchists had joined the Workers’ Alliance which elsewhere generally was established by the UGT, the Socialists and various minority leftist groups. Six months later, this alliance in Asturias had led the only mass uprising – which lasted two weeks – of October 1934. The liaison between the two trade union groups had continued thereafter.

Ramón Alvarez has stressed the importance of the cooperation between the anarchists and the UGT during the Civil War.

We affirm in the strongest way that there was throughout the civil war in Asturias and León full agreement, if not absolute unity between Socialists and Libertarians, both in political and

military affairs, which were the fundamental aspects of the struggle, which doesn't mean that there didn't arise differences on questions which, without denying that they were matters of interest, can be categorized as secondary...

In all of the organisms created from the beginning of the armed struggle, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo accepted the parity of representation of the UGT, a fact of unquestionable importance in bearing witness to the understanding and solidarity of Cenetismo, if one takes account of the fact that, Oviedo having fallen ... Gijón – with absolute libertarian predominance, was converted into the administrative, political and military center of Asturias and León.

Alvarez cited a speech by the UGT leader Inocencio Burgos at a joint CNT-UGT meeting on May Day 1937 as indicating the coincidence of views of the Asturian CNT and UGT. Burgos said, 'We shall be respectful towards all, we shall concede to all the rights which are theirs; but no one can attempt to take from the people that which it is conquering with its blood. The working class was sure that the revolution initiated in October must triumph. Now that we have gotten the opportunity for this, we shall not lose it.'³

The Revolutionary Regime in Asturias

With the outbreak of the Civil War, and the suppression of the revolt in most of Asturias except in Oviedo, local revolutionary committees with representatives of all of the groups loyal to the Republic, were set up throughout the region. Most of these *de facto* local governments expressed their adherence to the Provincial Committee of Asturias.⁴

Although César Lorenzo has said that this Comité Provincial del Frente Popular, to give it its correct name, was established 'at the end of July or the beginning of August 1936',⁵ Antonio Masíp has indicated that 'it appears evident that the Comité Provincial would correspond exactly to that which was formed in the Civil Government

to advise the new Governor at the time of the uprising of Franco in Africa. From a consultative organ it became, with the declaration of war of Aranda and the detention of Liarte Lausín, the representative in Asturias of the Government of the Republic.⁶ (Liarte Lausín was the civil governor of Asturias, arrested by Rebel Colonel Aranda.)

In the beginning, according to Masíp, the Comité Provincial was made up of Socialist Party, UGT and Left Republican Party members. However, on July 22, the Communist leader Juan Ambou also became part of the *comité*, and by July 24 two CNT leaders from the Duro steel plant in La Felguera, Rufiño Cuarte and Eladio Fanjúl, were likewise incorporated into the *comité*.

According to Antonio Masíp: 'The sessions of the *comité*, in the beginning were permanent and informal. The organizations were represented, but the functions varied with the chain of events. The direction of the front of war, health, supply, land, public order were improvised...' No minutes were kept of its meetings. Belarmino Tomás of the UGT and Socialist Part quickly became the presiding officer of the *comité*.⁷

In Gijón, on the other hand, a committee of war, presided over by CNT leader Segundo Blanco, was installed. Its jurisdiction extended from Aviles in the west to Villaviciosa in the east.⁸ At its inception, it was composed of Avelino G. Entrialgo of the FAI and Horacio Arguelles of the Communist Party, in charge of military mobilization; Ramón Alvares Palomo of the CNT, controlling communications; Eugenio Alonso de la Riva of the UGT as treasurer; Marcelino Corbato of the Socialist Party, in charge of health; Rafael Hernández of the UGT with the labor portfolio; José Gallardo of the Communist Party, in charge of security; Emilio Fernández of the Communist Party, controlling distribution; Alberto Lara of the Izquierda Republicana controlling housing. The post of secretary of the committee was shared by Carlos Diaz of the CNT and Rafael Hernández of the UGT. According to Antonio Masíp, Manuel Menéndez of the Socialist Party, Eduardo Vázquez of the FAI, Manuel Iglesias y Sanjines of the Izquierda Republicana or the Partido Federal also 'belonged to the Committee', while the mayor of Gijón, Jaime Valdes of the Izquierda Republicana 'collaborated with the new organization'.

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Antonio Masíp has noted: 'Both in Sama and Gijón, all of the initiative was with elements of the labor organizations, except in the military field, which was shared with technicians who were Republican or simply loyal to the legal Government.'⁹

One of the most urgent tasks of the committee of war in Gijón was to organize a supply system to feed both the civilian population and the militiamen who were besieging the Simancas barracks for more than a month after the War began. According to Ramón Alvarez, 'One of the services which functioned admirably in Gijón from the first days, thanks to the competence of the Sindicato Unico del Ramo de la Alimentación, was that of supply, local committees being created to take care of the bulk of the civil population, to take care of feeding the militias in the improvised barracks and of feeding in public restaurants installed in the Economic Kitchen, Hotel Comercio, Mercedes Restaurant, Orueta factory, etc.'¹⁰

Another major task of the committee of war was the maintenance of public order, and to the degree possible, to limit terrorism and personal revenge against supporters of the Rebellion and others. To this end, CNT leader Ramón Alvarez, in the name of the local union federation of the CNT made a radio speech on September 25 1936, in which 'he denounced and condemned the crimes committed in zones outside the urban centers by people who tried to dishonor our cause'. The issue became particularly acute after Rebel forces bombed Gijón from the air in August, at which point a mob demanded the murder of prisoners held by the committee of war. The members of the committee successfully resisted those demands.¹¹

With the transfer of the provincial committee of Sama de Langreo to Gijón on September 5, there were two regional bodies functioning in the same city, a situation which continued until after the entry of the CNT into the Republican government of Francisco Largo Caballero early in November. However, César Lorenzo has written: 'This double power was not the source of any conflict; the two organisms maintained excellent relations'. He also noted that with the transfer of the Provincial Committee to Gijón the number of anarchists in its membership was raised from two to four. These were

Eduardo Vázquez, Eladio Fanjúl, José Tourman and Francisco González Berinace in charge of fishing, social affairs, industry and communications, respectively.¹²

A popular tribunal of Asturias was established in Gijón, with its jury composed of representatives of the political parties, the UGT, the JSU, CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth. César Lorenzo has noted: 'It imposed prison terms, and numerous death sentences on rebel military men, Falangistas and reactionary elements ... In any case, the revolutionary power sought to restrain the violence and contain the overflow of passion among the populace.'¹³

Sometime in the first fortnight of November 1936 the committee of war of Gijón decided to dissolve itself. At the same time, new municipal councils were established in the various municipalities over which the committee had had authority, and some of the attributes of the committee were devolved to those councils.¹⁴

In Gijón, the closest allies of the anarchists in municipal affairs appear to have been two small republican parties, the Partido de Izquierda Federal and the Partido Republicano Democrático Federal. According to Juan Carlos García Miranda, 'Both defended the federal structure of the state ... as a union of "municipal republics" and they saw in the CNT and in the FAI forces capable of bringing about such a federation on the basis of a republic of workers in which the *sindicatos* were the basic and transforming elements ...'¹⁵

In San Martín del Rey Aurelio, the mayor was also an anarchist, José Varela of the FAI.¹⁶ Although information on the subject is incomplete, there were also probably a number of other municipalities presided over by CNTistas or FAIistas. Juan Carlos García Miranda has noted that according to the original instructions of the Comité Provincial for the organization of new municipal administrations in the region, there were supposed to be representatives of the CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth, as well as of the various political parties in these local governments.¹⁷

The First Political Crisis in the Asturian Regime

In the middle of December 1936, the first political crisis arose within

the Asturian provincial committee. This crisis was provoked by the Federación Anarquista Ibérica and the CNT. Javier R. Muñoz has noted that the crisis 'was inaugurated in the traditional manner of democratic governments. Between the 19th and 23rd of that month, the parties put forth in the press their programs, and the president, Belarmino Tomás, carried out consultations with the representatives of the various parties.'¹⁸

The major subject of dispute was the control of the military portfolio by the Communist Party, in the person of Juan Ambou. The anarchists insisted that the Communists were using the post to try to gain control of the armed forces for their party.

In their presentation of their position, the CNT and FAI argued: 'We want to avoid, and to that end we shall do whatever we can, that he who goes to war uses the authority of command to carry on a political campaign; we do not consent to military chiefs dedicating themselves to political activities, believing that military men should not have any political affiliation.'

As Juan Carlos García Miranda wrote, 'The solution, therefore is to be found in the exit of the Communists from the Department of War, and their substitution by "really impartial persons who treat everyone equally"'. They demanded also that Military Supply be run by civilians...' García Miranda noted also that 'There was much truth in the accusation of the anarchists (proselytism, party use, etc.)' but added 'the moment was not very opportune to provoke a crisis nor was the work of the Department of War the most censurable one in the context of republican Asturias...'¹⁹

On the way the crisis was resolved, García Miranda said, 'With the negative vote of the Communists, the crisis was resolved on December 23, with the Governor and President of the Council, Belarmino Tomás, getting the Department of War, which Juan Ambou left, to take over Public Instruction.'

Other changes in the Asturian regime resulted from this December 1936 crisis. In the reorganization resulting from the crisis, both the Unión General de Trabajadores and the Libertarian Youth received posts for the first time, the latter reportedly as a partial offset to the two representatives of the United Socialist Youth who were carried over from the pre-crisis government.²⁰ The regime also took a new

name, the Interprovincial Council of Asturias and León. It was quickly recognized by the Republican government as the legal authority of that government in Asturias, and its presiding officer, Belarmino Tomás, was named governor-general of Asturias and León.

After more than half a century, it is not entirely clear how this crisis of December 1936 shifted the general political balance in the Asturias region, particularly that between the anarchists and the Communists. The fact that the Communists were the only ones to vote against the reorganization of the regime would seem to indicate that they felt that had lost ground as a result of it.

It is clear that the Communists lost the key war portfolio, which was transferred to Socialist hands. It is also clear that the anarchists made certain gains as the result of the crisis. Segundo Blanco became first vice-president of the new council, with the Communist Gonzálo López as second vice-president. Also a representative of the Libertarian Youth augmented the anarchist representation in the government; a fact which was somewhat offset by the fact that the new UGT representative Aquilino Fernández Rocés was a member of the Communist Party.²¹

Particularly interesting in this crisis and subsequently was the role of the United Socialist Youth, which elsewhere in Republican Spain had quickly come under Communist Party control. According to Javier R. Munóz, 'The JSU, in spite of agreeing with the PCE on many questions, did not support it then.'²²

In fact, one of Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (JSU) members of the government before and after the December reorganization, who was secretary-general of the Asturian JSU, was taking the lead in denouncing the association of the national JSU leaders with the Communist Party.²³

According to Juan Carlos García Miranda, 'In Asturias ... the phenomenon so extensive in other parts of the country of absorption or slow integration of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas in the Communist Party is not so noticeable and, at least on the level of the leadership was very limited. Of the members of the Provincial Executive, only Emilio Bayón and Lucio Losa went over to the Communist Party after the war was over ... Rafael Fernández was

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provincial secretary of the PSOE during the whole war.²⁴ Fernández also refused a position on the national committee of the JSU to which he had been named by Santiago Carrillo and other Communist or pro-Communist leaders of the organization, on the grounds that his nomination had not been the result of consultation with the Asturias branch of the JSU.²⁵

José Barreiro, who was a leader of the JSU in Asturias during the War, claimed that by the end of the War in the Asturias region, the Socialist and Communist youth had again virtually broken into two different organizations.²⁶ Stanley Payne has noted that in March 1937 Rafael Fernández 'resigned from the JSU's national committee in protest against the Popular Front line, then promptly signed an agreement with the Asturian anarchist youth to create a joint Socialist-anarchist Revolutionary Youth Front in Asturias.'²⁷

In any case, the influence of the Communists in Asturias during the Civil War was minimal, compared to other parts of Republican Spain. Enrique Castro Delgado recounted an incident, apparently in May 1937, when he visited Gijón at the urgent request of the local Communists. Socialist and anarchist militia were at that point surrounding Communist Party headquarters throughout the Asturias region, and were threatening to storm them. According to Castro Delgado, he was able to calm the situation down and to prevent the total annihilation of the Party in the region.²⁸

During much of the period of the Comité Interprovincial, the CNT was able to carry on more or less regular conduct of its internal activities. Thus, the CNT Regional Confederation of Asturias, León and Palencia was able to hold a congress, which opened on May 31 1937. It was reported that 234 unions, in 31 sectors, with 74,326 members, were represented by delegates to the congress. The largest organizations present were those of peasants, 'general workers', miners, metal workers, fishermen, construction and food workers. After hearing a long report by secretary Silverio Tunón on the CNT activities since the last such meeting in 1932, the congress adopted a series of resolutions dealing with economic planning of the region, education, health problems, and the question of collectives and socialization of the regional economy.²⁹

The Junta Delegada del Norte

With the fall of most of the Basque territory into the hands of the Franco forces, on August 6 1937, the president of the Republic proclaimed the establishment of a Junta Delegada del Norte, headed by the commanding general of the Republican forces in Santander and Asturias, General Gamir Ulibarri, and having as its members Guillermo Torrijos of the Basque regime, Ramón Ruíz Rebollo, Socialist deputy for Santander, and Juan José Manso, a Communist deputy from Asturias. Somewhat vague in defining the powers of the *junta*, the decree called upon the governments of Asturias and Santander to carry out the decisions of the *junta*. According to Juan Carlos García Miranda, it 'appeared to put it above those governments'.

The CNT was excluded from the Junta Delegada, and it strongly opposed the new body. It proclaimed: 'That was not the organization which the North required, first because the presidency was given to a military man, and second, because it excludes the most important forces of the North, that is, the CNT and the UGT.'

The Asturian Socialists also opposed the Junta Delegada. Their newspaper in Gijón, *Avance*, announced 'our conformity with the fraternal colleague CNT in judging it an error, a grave error, that the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo is not represented in the Junta Delegada del Gobierno ... The *junta* appeared defective to us.'

However, as might have been expected, the Communists strongly supported the establishment of the Junta Delegada. They reasoned that the exclusion of the CNT from that body was logical, in view of the fact that the anarchists had recently left the Republican government, and the Junta Delegada was, in fact, an organ of the Valencia regime.³⁰

Anarchists and the Sovereign Council of Asturias and León

In any case the life of the Junta Delegada proved to be a short one.

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This was because of the rapid defeat of the Republican forces in Santander, leaving Asturias standing alone on the northern front. Javier Rodríguez Muñoz noted: ‘With the general order to occupy the province of Santander being issued on August 8, the Nationalists fulfilled its provisions within less than two weeks . . . “In maneuvers it would not have been possible to go more rapidly,” commented Colonel Prada to Azaña after the loss of the North.’³¹

The city of Santander fell on August 24. At midnight that same day, the Interprovincial Council of Asturias and León proclaimed itself ‘sovereign’. Its decree, after a rather long preamble provided:

Article 1. The Interprovincial Council of Asturias and León, as of the date and hour of this decree, constitutes itself the Sovereign Council of Government in all the territory within its jurisdiction and there are submitted to it all the civil and military jurisdictions and organisms which function from here on in in that territory. Article 2. The Sovereign Council, in the light of favorable developments which are produced during the war, will determine when to dispense with the sovereign functions which it today assumes. Article 3. The Government of the Republic will be informed of this decree for its validation; but without prejudice to its absolute application, imposed by the circumstances, from the very moment of its promulgation.³²

Reportedly the idea of the sovereignty decree originated with Amador Fernández, a Socialist leader and close friend of Indalecio Prieto. Within the Interprovincial Council, and in the Asturias region generally, it had the strong support of the Socialists and the anarchists, and somewhat more halting backing from the Izquierda Republicana.

Although in Asturias the declaration of ‘sovereignty’ was not intended to be a defiance of the Republic, but rather as a means of concentrating the defense of what was left of the northern segment of the Republic, all political leaders of the rest of Loyalist Spain did not see it that way. President Manuel Azaña wrote in his memoirs that it was ‘rebellion against the Government’.³³

The declaration of sovereignty was strongly opposed in Asturias

by the Communist Party and the United Socialist Youth. In the vote in the council on the decree, only the two Communist councillors, Juan Ambou and Gonzálo López, the JSU members Rafael Fernández and Luis Roca de Albornóz and the UGT representative Aquilino Fernández Rocas (who was a Communist Party member) voted against it.

The debate over the decree was 'tense, with many confrontations'.³⁴ One Socialist source has claimed that the Communists went so far as to threaten to rebel against the newly 'sovereign' council, but when the anarchists, Socialists and Republicans made it clear that such an uprising would be quickly quashed, the Communists backed down.³⁵ Subsequently, the Communists – as well as the JSU representatives – continued to participate in the activities of the Junta Soberana.

There were several reasons for the proclamation of sovereignty. The decree itself offered two: 'The difficulty, if not impossibility of consulting with the supreme political power of the country', and 'the unpostponable urgency of resolving things minute by minute'.³⁶ Another reported reason was the fact that a number of regular army officers, who had fled to Asturias from the Basque country and Santander, refused to accept orders from the council of Asturias and León 'until they received instructions from Valencia'. If the Asturians were 'sovereign' without objection from the Republican government, it was argued, those officers would automatically be subject to the orders of the Sovereign Council of Asturias and León.³⁷

Belarmino Tomás made it clear in telegrams to the Valencia government that the declaration of sovereignty did not mean secession from the Republic. One of these said: 'The Government can be assured that we shall be the most loyal servants for whatever is ordered. I am your delegate and if we take any step before you are notified, you may be assured that that will have been done for the good of the war and because of our great distance from the Government, but always communicate with us about it for a final decision.'³⁸

The anarchists strongly supported the 'sovereignty' move. Their Gijón daily *CNT* announced: 'We are with the Council of Asturias

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and León. Its resolution is the only one which could be taken to deal with the exigency of the circumstances . . . The military situation and the experiences of the hard battle which the North is living through require measures such as this. We need a strong Power. Strong in action, in conduct. Strong, above all, in its civil, social and military jurisdiction. That Power could not be other than that which now assumes all responsibility for the war and for the political-economic organization of the province³⁹

The membership of the council remained the same as before the proclamation of sovereignty, although some portfolios were changed. Also, the various 'ministries' were grouped together into five commissions. According to Juan Carlos García Miranda, 'Special mention must be made of the work of the Military Commission, perhaps the only one that functioned according to the guidelines of administrative reorganization resulting from the declaration of sovereignty. Made up of Juan Ambou, Onofre García, Segundo Blanco, Belarmino Tomás and Adolfo Prada, it was going to be of great help to the military command, which it will support in all of the initiatives it took.'⁴⁰ Two of the five members of this commission – Onofre García and Segundo Blanco were CNTers; Ambou was the principal Communist leader, Belarmino Tomás the Socialist president of the council, and Adolfo Prada the regular army colonel named by the council to command the Asturian armed forces.

Under the Sovereign Council there was established a Council of Industries of Asturias. Its principal jobs were to try to rationalize the organization of the numerous factories and other enterprises which had been taken over by the unions, and to try to plan to some degree the economic activity of the region. It was headed by Segundo Blanco, and was largely dominated by the anarchists.⁴¹

Under the Sovereign Council, the municipal administrations were reorganized in all of the urban areas of Asturias, although in essence they remained much as they had been since late in 1936. In many of these, the anarchists continued to have a major if not dominant part. In Gijón, the municipal regime continued to be headed by Avelino G. Mallada, one of the major CNT leaders of the region, who had been publisher of *CNT*, the daily newspaper founded in Madrid by the anarchists soon after the establishment of the Republic. The Mallada

administration undertook a process of remodeling the city, creating parks, straightening and widening streets, and beginning construction of a circular road around the city, to divert traffic which did not have to go into the center of Gijón.⁴²

The Sovereign Council of Asturias and León was to remain the government of the Republican parts of the region from August 24 until October 21 1937. It was to organize and preside over the heroic and desperate resistance of the ever-diminishing and badly armed Republican forces of the region which continued for almost two months.

The sovereign council sent a delegation to Valencia, headed by CNT leader Segundo Blanco, seeking military aid for the last remaining Loyalist region in the north. Although the Republican government formally agreed to all of the requests made by Blanco and his colleagues, the promised aid only arrived a day before the fall of Gijón, too late to be of any use in the struggle for the Asturias region.⁴³

Shortly before the fall of Gijón, Prime Minister Negrín sent a message to Belarmino Tomás urging that there be 'a miracle like that of the defense of Madrid'. Tomás sent back a message that they would produce such a miracle if Negrín would provide a 150-kilometer road to Valencia like the one linking that city with Madrid, if Negrín would supply the arms they had had in Madrid, and if he would supply an International Brigade such as participated in the defense of Madrid.⁴⁴

On October 21 1937, the Franco forces entered Gijón, ending the formal military struggle. Most of the principal political and trade union leaders were able to escape in fishing smacks and other small craft. However, a guerrilla struggle by several thousand militiamen continued in the mountains of Asturias for several months.⁴⁵

Anarchists in the Interprovincial Council of Santander–Burgos–Palencia

To the east of Asturias is the Santander region. With relative ease, the

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forces loyal to the Republic won control of that area, as well as some border areas of neighboring Burgos and Palencia, at the outbreak of the Civil War.

The UGT was larger than the CNT in the Santander region, although there were numerous anarchists who were active in the UGT, and there was a strong sentiment on both sides in favor of eventual trade union unity between the Socialist and anarchist labor groups. Another curiosity about the trade union situation in the region was the fact that after the Republican government decree of October 11 1936, providing for the compulsory unionization of all workers in either the CNT or the UGT, most of the workers of Santander who were associated with the Federal Party and Unión Republicana, the two principal Republican parties in the region, joined the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.⁴⁶ The two strongest unions in the city of Santander were the port workers led by CNTer Jesús González Malo, and the trolley-car workers, who were affiliated with the UGT.⁴⁷

With the suppression of the Rebellion in the Santander region, power was at first assumed by the committee of the Popular Front, enlarged to include representatives of the CNT and the FAI. However, soon after the CNT entered the Republican government, there was established the Interprovincial Council of Santander–Burgos–Palencia, which was legalized by the Republican government in the decree of December 23 1936. It was headed by the civil governor, a Socialist, Juan Ruíz Olazarán, and contained nine Socialists, two Communists, three Republicans and three anarchists. Timoteo Chaperó Fernández of the CNT held the portfolio of social affairs; Vicente del Solar, also of the CNT, that of popular credit; while Teodoro Quijano, representing the FAI, had the propaganda post. The interprovincial council underwent no changes of personnel between January and August 4 1937, when the city of Santander was overrun by the Franco troops.

The anarchists also held other key posts in the administration of the Santander region. They participated in most of the municipal administrations set up there. Also, Jesús González Malo, an anarchist, succeeded Bruno Alonso as general commissar of militia of Santander, when the latter was named general commissar of the fleet in Cartagena.⁴⁸

the Exclusion of Anarchists From the Basque Republican Government

The autonomous Basque Republic was the only government in the northern sector in which the anarchists did not have representation. This was true in spite of the fact that the anarchists had participated in the *de facto* provincial authorities established during the first weeks of the war, before the founding of the Basque Republic.

There is no doubt that the situation in the Basque region was unique in Republican Spain. The region consisted of three provinces, those of Alava, Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya. The single most influential political group in all three provinces was the Basque Nationalist Party, a socially conservative Catholic party, whose principal reason for existence was the establishment of an autonomous (if not independent) state in the region.

Because of its proximity to Navarre, where the influence of the Carlists or Traditionalists was overwhelming, the province of Alava fell almost immediately to the Rebel forces led by General Emilio Mola. In that province the Basque Nationalists supported the Rebels, and sought to influence their party colleagues in the other two Basque provinces to do the same thing.⁴⁹

However, in Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya, popular sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of the Republic. César Lorenzo, son of the Basque CNT leader Horacio Prieto, has noted that the Basque priests 'remained loyal to the Republic'.⁵⁰ Also, the Basque Nationalists in those two provinces participated in the *de facto* regimes which were set up in them to organize the civil administration and the military conflict against the Rebels.

In Vizcaya, the committee of the Popular Front, headed by the civil governor, José Echeverría Novoa, a Left Republican, took the lead in organizing the new regime. Near the end of July the Commissariat for the Defense of Vizcaya was established, in which both the CNT and the Basque Nationalist Party, neither of which had belonged to the Popular Front, were represented. Horacio Prieto, still secretary of the national committee of the CNT, became the commissioner of health.⁵¹

Soon afterwards the commissariat for defense and the committee

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of the Popular Front were dissolved, and the *junta* of Defense of Vizcaya took their place. Still headed by José Echeverría Novoa, it had two representatives of the Left Republicans, one of Unión Republicana, one of the Socialist Party, one Communist, three members of the Basque Nationalist Party, one of the more leftist Acción Nacionalista Vasca, and Pablo Valle of the CNT, in charge of social affairs. This government remained in place until the formal establishment of the Basque Republic on October 7 1936.⁵²

Meanwhile, in Guipuzcoa where, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, CNTers had given crucial leadership to defeat of the Rebels in both Irun and San Sebastian, a somewhat similar political process took place. The committee of the Popular Front, headed by the civil governor, Jesús de Ariola, a Left Republican, assumed authority on July 19. A few days later, the *junta* of Defense of Guipuzcoa, headed by Miguel de Amilibia, was established, again with the participation of the Basque Nationalists and the CNT. Miguel González Inestal of the CNT became commissioner of communications and transport, while the commissariat of labor, although presided over by a Socialist, also had in it representatives of the CNT and of the Basque Nationalists' trade union group, Solidaridad de Obreros Vascos.⁵³

In spite of participating in the *de facto* provincial governments in Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa, the support of the Basque Nationalists remained somewhat equivocal until the establishment of the Basque Republic. Thus, for instance, although Francisco Largo Caballero offered them a post in his cabinet when he took office on September 4, it was not until September 25 that they finally allowed Manuel de Irujo to take a ministry without portfolio.⁵⁴

When the Cortes met on October 1, to formally confirm the Largo Caballero government in office, it also passed the Basque Autonomy Statute, establishing the Basque Republic, as the regional authority, ostensibly for the three Basque provinces, although its *de facto* jurisdiction was limited to the province of Vizcaya, Alava had fallen immediately to the Rebels, and due to pressure of the Basque Nationalists, who (according to César Lorenzo) feared anarchist influence in both Irun and Santander, no effective defense was provided by Republican forces in Guipuzcoa, which by the end of September had fallen to the Rebels.⁵⁵

After dramatically taking his oath of office in the traditional Basque capital of Guénica, the president of the new Basque Republic, José Antonio Aguirre, appointed his cabinet. It included members of his own Basque Nationalist Party as well as Socialists, one Communist, and members of the Left Republicans, Unión Republicana and Acción Nacionalista Vasca. However, it included no anarchists.⁵⁶

During the months that followed, the anarchists, both in the Basque area and elsewhere in Republican Spain, continued to agitate for their admission to the Basque Republican government. This was particularly the case after the CNT entered the cabinet of Francisco Largo Caballero, at which point Aguirre explained that the Basque government contained only representatives of political parties, so he would not accept the CNT. However, he did offer a portfolio to the FAI, which he said he regarded as a political organization, with a role in the CNT similar to that of the Socialist Party in the UGT.

According to César Lorenzo, anarchists in other parts of the Republican territory were unhappy about the refusal of the FAI of the Basque region to participate in the Basque government. The national committee of the CNT sent Antonio Moreno Toledano to confer with Aguirre, and he reported in *Solidaridad Obrera* of Barcelona, on November 20 1936: 'The government of Euzkadi, Aguirre told us, has carefully studied whether it was convenient to accept collaboration of the workers' organizations, but, considering that its membership was based on political parties and not social classes, he had not thought it opportune to permit the entrance of the CNT. He indicated that if the FAI had wished, he would have seen no difficulty in collaborating with it.'⁵⁷

In spite of his refusal to accept CNT representation in his government, Basque President Aguirre used the CNT on various occasions as intermediaries with the Largo Caballero government. One of the most important issues was the demand of the Valencia government that the Basque regime turn over to the Republican regime that part of the Bank of Spain's gold which was in Bilbao. The CNT ministers convinced the Basque government to leave the gold in the Basque country, for use to acquire war material needed by that part of the Republic.⁵⁸

However, CNT pressure continued to mount on Aguirre to admit

the CNT to his government. Fearful of disaffection among the CNT troops defending the Bilbao front, he finally agreed to name a CNT minister. However, in a conference in May 1937 between Aguirre and regional CNT leaders, including one of the anarchist military commanders, one of the latter, Rivera, suddenly adopted a dogmatic anarchist stance that the CNT should not belong to any government. Before it was possible to renew the negotiations, the Rebel offensive against Bilbao began, as a result of which the anarchists never entered the Basque Republic's government.⁵⁹

Anarchists in Regional and Local Governments in the Levante

As in much of the rest of Spain which remained loyal to the Republic, *de facto* governments were established with the outbreak of the Civil War in the localities of the five provinces which constituted the Levante (Castellón, Valencia, Alicante, Murcia and Albacete), by the various parties and trade union groups. For almost two weeks, the situation in the region was complicated by the 'neutrality' of the garrison of Valencia.

On July 20 a revolutionary committee was established in Valencia by the parties of the Popular Front. On the next day, a joint CNT-UGT general strike committee was set up which undertook to organize supply for the civilian population, and the organization of militia to confront the 'neutral' soldiers. Shortly afterward, the two committees were merged to form the Popular Executive Committee of the Levante.

However, the situation was complicated by the fact that the Madrid government named a delegated *junta*, headed by Diego Martínez Barrio, to assume control of the government in the Levante and negotiate with the 'neutral' military officers. The Popular Executive Committee refused to recognize the authority of Martínez Barrio and his colleagues. As a consequence, when the military were finally forced to surrender on July 31, the Popular Executive Committee was the only effective authority in the Valencia area. Its head was finally named civil governor of Valencia.

The Popular Executive Committee came to be composed of Juan López and Juan Ripoll of the CNT and Evangelista Campos of the FAI, as well as two representatives of the UGT, and one each of the Socialist Party, Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, Communist Party, Left Republicans, Unión Republicana, Valencian Left, Valencianist Party and Partido Sindicalista. It was presided over by Colonel Arin.⁶⁰

Luis Portela, the principal leader of the POUM in the Valencia region during the Civil War, has noted that within the Popular Executive Committee there was from the beginning a Left–Right alignment. On the Right were the Communists, Left Republicans, Valencianist Party and Unión General de Trabajadores. On the Left were the CNT, the FAI, the Valencian Left, the Sindicalist Party and the Unión Republicana of Diego Martínez Barrio, which in Valencia was considerably to the Left of where it was in the rest of Spain. The POUM also joined the Left forces, although in the beginning at least, the Socialists and Communists sought to get the POUM to ally with them, on the grounds that they were all ‘Marxists’.⁶¹

In the first weeks of the War, revolutionary authorities were established in each of the localities of the Levante. In each case, their membership reflected the relative local strength of the CNT, Socialists, Communists, Republicans and other elements supporting the Republic.⁶²

However, the overall authority of the Popular Executive Committee tended to expand over all the Levante region. On November 2 1936, the committee decided to establish a council of the economy, ‘charged with planning production throughout the Levante zone’. It was composed only of representatives of the CNT and the UGT.⁶³

The regional autonomy of the Levante, and particularly of Valencia, was severely curtailed as a result of the transfer of the Republican capital to Valencia early in November 1936. By early December, the Popular Executive Committee disappeared, and in its place provincial councils were established in Castellón, Valencia, Alicante, Murcia and Albacete. In each of these, there were representatives of the CNT and the FAI.

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New municipal governments were established in Valencia and other cities of the region. The government of Valencia was headed by CNT leader Domingo Torres, and César Lorenzo has noted that the number of CNT and FAI members of the council was 'considerable'. The anarchists were also strongly represented in other municipal councils of the region.⁶⁴

The province of Murcia was something of a special case in the Levante. Even at the height of its powers, the writ of the Popular Executive Committee did not run in that province. There were two principal urban centers in the province, the port city of Cartagena, with a substantial number of workers in the port itself, shipbuilding and repair facilities and other installations and factories; and the city of Murcia, largely a commercial center for the surrounding rural area.

The anarchists were dominant in Cartagena and nearby smaller cities and towns. They had mayors and municipal councillors, although other Republican elements were also represented. In contrast, in the city of Murcia, Socialist influence was predominant. The anarchists in that city exercised their influence principally through their minority trade unions and through support of the Federal Party, second in influence to the Socialists, and many of whose members were apparently affiliated with the CNT. As we have noted in early chapters, the social and economic revolution was extensive in both the urban and rural parts of Murcia.⁶⁵

Anarchists in the Governments of Andalusia

A considerable part of Andalusia was overrun by the Rebel troops of 'the radio general' Gonzalo Queipo de Llano during the first weeks of the Civil War. This included most of the provinces of Cádiz and Seville, as well as the city of Granada. However, the provinces of Málaga, Almería and Jaén, as well as much of the province of Granada outside of the provincial capital, remained in Republican hands.

No revolutionary authority emerged in Andalusia, in contrast to most of the rest of Republican Spain. César Lorenzo has written:

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'Each village became independent, no centralization, no coordinated action was possible. In contrast to the other large regions of Spain, no organism was formed which subjugated, or at least tried to subjugate the innumerable local powers. For example, it was not until the end of November 1936 that, in the province of Granada there was constituted the Antifascist Popular Front, a central organism under the presidency of the civil governor Antonio de Gracia, and made up of all the ideological sectors. Only then did the new municipal councils, with participation of the CNT appear and the omnipotent committees disappear.'⁶⁶

Perhaps typical of many of the local regimes in Andalusia was the case of Ronda la Vieja in the province of Málaga. The exiled anarchist paper *CNT* on February 14–21 1954 described what the situation there had been: 'The unions took responsibility for administering and directing the economic and social life of the various localities . . . there was the first general assembly of the people who *unanimously* opted for total collectivization of wealth . . . It was also in a general assembly that the norms and rules of work were established. Money was abolished. Everyone took what he needed so long as products were not lacking. Those things which were not abundant were divided equitably. At the same time a system of exchange was organized between neighboring collectives, which permitted each to get along more or less.'⁶⁷

The city of Málaga had for long been an anarchist stronghold. However, in the period before the outbreak of the Civil War, the influence of the CNT had been declining and that of the UGT, and of the Socialists, had been growing. The Socialists had the largest representation in the pre-war city council. Also of some significance in the city before July 19 1936, was the Communist Party, where the election of 1933, they had succeeded in electing their first member of the *Córtes* from Málaga.⁶⁸

However, with the outbreak of the Civil War, anarchist influence was again predominant in Málaga, because the CNT organized most of the militia and controlled the economy. The revolutionary authority was in the hands of a Committee of Public Health, which included four anarchists (two for the CNT, one each for the FAI and Libertarian Youth), as well as one each from the Federal Party,

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Unión Republicana, Republican Left, Juventud Socialista Unificada and two each from the Communist and Socialist parties and the UGT.

Although the Committee of Public Health in Málaga sought to extend its control throughout the province, in fact its writ did not run much beyond the city of Málaga. To the east, a permanent central committee of Motril did not cede its authority, nor did the defense committee of Ronda, to the west of the provincial capital.⁶⁹

The extent of anarchist control of Málaga clearly irked the leaders of the Republican government in Madrid and then Valencia. That annoyance certainly is part of the explanation for the adamant refusal of the Republican authorities to provide the arms and other support necessary to defend Málaga (which we have noted in an earlier chapter) when the Franco troops decided to attack the province in February 1937.

Anarchists in the Governments of Extremadura

Extremadura consisted of two provinces, those of Cáceres and Badajóz. The former, where Right-wing elements had traditionally been strong, fell almost immediately to the Rebels. On August 14, the city of Badajóz also fell to the troops of Colonel Yague, as did that of Mérida. However, throughout the remainder of the War, about one third of the province of Badajóz remained within the Loyalist lines.

Although the Socialists and UGT had been the dominant elements in the province of Badajóz before July 19 1936, their position was quickly undermined by both the anarchists and the Communists. César Lorenzo has described this process: 'In numerous villages, the *casas del pueblo* (Socialist centers) went over totally to the CNT, while the Communists seized the leadership groups of the UGT. Within days, the Socialist retreat was accentuated further to the benefit of the Far Left: on the one hand, the initiatives of the libertarians in the economic sphere (collectivization of the means of production) enthused the peasants and workers affiliated with the UGT who, going beyond the moderate slogans of their officials, associated themselves with the revolutionary efforts; on the other

hand, the military efficacy of the Stalinists permitted them to assume the leadership of the larger part of the militia.⁷⁰

Political power in various parts of the province also came to be divided between the anarchists and the Communists. In Mérida and its vicinity, the CNT constituted the defense committee which ran the city until its conquest by the Rebels. In contrast, in Badajóz itself, and several other towns, where the UGT (under Stalinist control) remained dominant, the anarchists were given no posts in the new revolutionary administrations.⁷¹

Once the Extremadura front was stabilized, a more formal authority was established for that part of the province of Badajóz which remained in Republican hands. This was the Provincial Council of Badajóz, set up in November 1936. It was headed by the Socialist, Casado, who was civil governor, and on it were representatives of the CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth, as well as those of other parties supporting the Republic. At the same time, new municipal councils were established, in each of which the anarchists participated.⁷²

Anarchists in the Governing of Madrid

César Lorenzo has noted that after the surrender of the Rebels in Madrid in July, the capital city became the scene of 'an indescribable disorder'. He went on, 'Each ideological sector formed a State within the State, each with its militia, its tribunals, its *chekas*, its prisons, its private properties, its deposits of food and munitions, each carried on the war in its own way, taking care only of its own needs.'

Out of this situation, which the government was unable to deal with, the Communists emerged by the end of September as the dominant force, in large part due to their strictly disciplined Fifth Regiment which was based in the city. However, in the face of that situation, the anarchists reacted strongly. As Lorenzo noted, 'The Defense Committee of the CNT of the Center ... which remained in existence until 1939, succeeded in centralizing confederal action and administration, to issue orders to subaltern committees, to maintain discipline and to follow a policy capable of checking the indefinite

progress of communism. It became a kind of revolutionary general staff, all-powerful within the CNT...'⁷³

As a consequence of the actions of the Defense Committee, the CNT became the rallying point for all those in the capital who were opposed to Stalinist domination – whether Left-wing Socialists, Republicans or those without party. The CNT was thus able to prevent complete Communist domination of the capital.⁷⁴

When the government abandoned Madrid, the civil government of the capital was turned over to the *junta* of Defense of Madrid, under General Miaja. Most of the political and trade union groups supporting the Republic were represented in the *junta*. The only significant party left out was the POUM, a fact which the party's Barcelona newspaper *La Batalla* attributed to the intervention of the Soviet ambassador. The publication of this fact provoked a public denunciation of the newspaper by Soviet consul Antonov-Ovsenko, in a press release which he asked all the Barcelona papers to publish.⁷⁵ This denunciation presaged Antonov-Ovsenko's subsequent demand that the POUM be excluded from the Catalan government.

Of the *junta*'s ten members, two were anarchists, one representing the CNT, the other the Libertarian Youth. The FAI was not represented as such. Although being reorganized several times the *junta* remained in control – in spite of the grave doubts which Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero had about the refusal of General Miaja and the *junta* to follow the instructions of the Valencia government – until April 21 1937. A group of British parliamentarians who visited Madrid while the first phase of the battle of Madrid was taking place commented: 'The Civil Government seems to be largely in the hands of young men, sometimes barely of age. They are enthusiastic working-class lads mostly, who appear to be honestly and energetically trying to do their best.'⁷⁶

The struggle between the Communists and the CNTers continued during the existence of the Junta de Defensa. It often involved violence, and sometimes issues of the conflict came before the *junta* itself. One such occasion occurred soon after the *junta* was established. It had issued an order that no one should leave Madrid, and when the UGT member of the *junta* started to do so, he was arrested by CNT militiamen. Thereupon, Santiago, Carrillo, the JSU leader who

was councillor of public order, had the militiamen arrested and, at the next meeting of the *junta*, demanded that it constitute itself a tribunal to try the militiamen on the spot. The Libertarian Youth member of the *junta* got a two-hour recess, discovered what had happened, and sent some CNT militiamen to the jail to free their colleagues, which they did. When the *junta* meeting resumed, the Libertarian Youth member not only argued against an executive body such as the *junta* converting itself into a court, but won the support of all but the JSU and Communist members. Santiago Carrillo thereupon threatened to resign, and in fact, when the rest of the *junta* members held firm, he did resign, and was succeeded by another representative of the United Socialist Youth.

On another occasion, early in January 1937, five CNT people turned up dead in the streets, with their membership cards in their mouths. The next night the CNTers killed 12 Communists, and left their bodies in the street – with their party cards in their mouths. When the regional secretary of the Communist Party then called up the Libertarian Youth to suggest ‘common action against the 5th Column’, he was informed that if any other CNTer was killed by the Communists, ten Communists (starting with the regional secretary) would be killed for every one anarchist. For the time being, at least, the murder of anarchists by Communists ceased.

At one point, the JSU *junta* member in charge of public order issued a decree that all militiamen had to have a permit signed by him in order to carry arms. Soon afterwards, between 40 and 50 CNT militiamen were disarmed, whereupon the CNT action squads disarmed the same number of Assault Guards. When the issue was brought before the *junta*, the anarchists challenged the JSU representative’s jurisdiction, claiming that the disarmed CNT militiamen all had credentials from the CNT’s defense committee. The *junta* upheld the anarchists on this issue.⁷⁷

José Cazorla, who succeeded Santiago Carrillo as the *junta* member in charge of public order, was particularly disliked by the anarchists and other non-Stalinist members of the *junta*. Ronald Fraser has noted the incident which brought about his downfall, and as it turned out, the end of the Junta de Defensa de Madrid: ‘Finally, in April 1937, Mechor Rodríguez, the anarchist prison director in

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Madrid, published precise details of torture carried on in unauthorized communist prisons in the capital, and blamed José Cazorla...’ This generated a major scandal.⁷⁸

Francisco Largo Caballero, who had been displeased with the behavior of General Miaja and the Junta de Defensa virtually from the beginning, used the Cazorla incident to do away with the *junta*. On April 21 1937, after the battle of Madrid had definitively been won, he decreed its abolition. In its place, there was a new municipal council of 31 members, five of whom represented the CNT, one the FAI and another the Libertarian Youth.⁷⁹

Conclusion

In all parts of Republican Spain – with the sole exception of the Basque Republic – the anarchists participated in the regional, provincial and municipal governments which were organized after the outbreak of the Civil War. In many cases, these new authorities were revolutionary committees, which in a number of instances were more or less dominated by the anarchists. Even in the Basque area the CNT was represented in these before the Basque Republic was organized. As ‘order’ began to be restored, and a more regular administrative hierarchy established, with some degree of legalization by the government of the Republic, the anarchists were in most cases represented in the new regional, provincial and municipal regimes.

There was variation with regard to just which parts of the libertarian movement were given representation. Although frequently all three organizations – the CNT, the FAI and the Libertarian Youth – participated, this was by no means always the case.

In most instances, the CNT was in the anomalous situation of a trade union organization which was carrying out essentially the functions of a political party. Often, this peculiarity was not confined to the CNT, when the UGT was also included as such in the various governments.

Of course, there was another anomaly as well. Throughout the Civil War, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, was technically an ‘illegal’ organization. It was not an officially recognized political

party, but rather an organization which, at least until the outbreak of the Civil War, had been largely secret. However, it would seem to be clear that for the non-anarchists – and increasingly for the libertarians themselves – the FAI was seen to be in the same relationship to the CNT (that is to say, its controlling political force) as the Socialist Party was to the Unión General de Trabajadores.

Basque President José Antonio Aguirre made this relationship explicit when he offered to take the FAI into his government, since he regarded it as the equivalent of a political party, but refused to admit the CNT, which he said had no right as a trade union group to play the role of a political party by participating in a cabinet. Although, at the time, the anarchists rejected out of hand the kind of definition of the FAI which President Aguirre had chosen to give it, that did not end the issue as far as the anarchists were concerned. Subsequently, serious suggestions were put forward within the movement to convert the FAI into a political party, and the issue had not been definitively resolved by the time the Civil War ended.

In any case, it is clear that during the Civil War, the anarchists were faced throughout Republican Spain with having political power and government participation almost forced upon them by events. They were certainly not prepared for that, and it challenged a basic tenet of their ideological faith. Anti-Statist though they were in principle, they had to deal with the problem of organizing a state, or at least participating in its organization, on all levels of the society and polity of Republican Spain.

Anarchist Participation in the Largo Caballero Government

Perhaps the way in which the Spanish anarchists diverged most drastically from their traditional philosophy and practice during the Civil War was their participation in the cabinet of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero between November 1936 and May 1937. In the case of their participation in the Generalidad of Catalonia, there was at least a 'fig-leaf' covering their action, in the form of a rechristening of the regional cabinet as a *consejo*, thus vaguely suggesting that it was a continuation of the Consejo Central de Milicias of Catalonia. However, in the case of the anarchists' participation in the Republican government there was not even that degree of subterfuge. Four leading members of the CNT were 'ministers' in the cabinet of Largo Caballero.

The correctness of their entering the Republican government was debated within anarchist ranks at the time, although it seems clear that the majority of the rank and file supported the idea. It continued to be a subject of debate within anarchist ranks for more than a generation after the experience was over.

Negotiations for the Anarchists' Entry into the Republican Government

From the moment he became prime minister on September 4 1936,

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Francisco Largo Caballero, leader of the Socialist Party left wing and head of the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), made it clear that he wanted to include the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo in his administration. However, it took two months of negotiation before that came to pass.

Apparently, the first public indication that the anarchists might be willing, in one form or another, to participate in the Republican government was an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* on August 28. It called for establishment of a national Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas, patterned after the one in Catalonia, in which the CNT would be a part.

Steps were already being taken to bring to an end the government of Prime Minister José Giral, who had been in office since July 20. The national committee of the CNT and the executive commission of the UGT met and decided that it was necessary to replace Giral, and there was some discussion, apparently inconclusive, about the CNT participating in the new administration.¹

Largo Caballero was chosen to be the new prime minister. According to his own testimony, he was backed principally by the UGT, CNT and Communists, whereas the Republican parties (and presumably the Right-wing Socialists) would have preferred Indalecio Prieto, Largo Caballero's main rival within the Socialist Party.

Largo Caballero reported: 'I accepted the task, conscious of how difficult it was, but with the condition that the Government would not have any single political orientation, and that in it would be represented the elements which were fighting at the fronts defending the Republic, without prejudice against any political or social tendency.'² At that point, he offered the CNT a single cabinet post, without any specific portfolio. Although the national committee of the CNT at first accepted this proposal, and named Antonio Moreno Toledo for the post, acting National Secretary David Antona successfully insisted that the question be submitted to a plenum of the regional organizations of the CNT.³

The regional plenum met in Madrid on September 3. According to César Lorenzo, the offer of one minister without portfolio was 'radically rejected' by the plenum: 'The principle of intervention was approved ... and finally, for the moment, the CNT contented itself

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with presenting to public opinion a project for rearrangement of the structure of the government and of the State. The resolution adopted had three fundamental points: 1. Total support of the CNT for the new government. 2. Creation in each Ministry of an auxiliary commission formed by representatives of the CNT, the UGT, the Popular Front, and a delegate of the government. 3. Non-intervention of the State in the enterprises collectivized by the workers.⁴

The Largo Caballero government took office on September 4, and on the next day, Antonio Moreno, Federica Montseny and one other CNT leader presented the plenum's resolution to the new prime minister, who promised to study it and consult with the Popular Front parties about it. On September 8, he notified Acting National Secretary David Antona that the CNT's proposals had been rejected.⁵

Meanwhile, National Secretary Horacio Prieto had returned from the Basque region, where he had been caught at the outbreak of the War. He met with a group of CNT leaders of the Levante, and in preparation for a further plenum of regionals scheduled to meet in Madrid on September 15, drew up a document for submission to that meeting. According to César Lorenzo, Horacio Prieto's son, Prieto was the principal author of that proposed resolution, which 'contained a whole political program, including militarization of the militia, a unified command, judicial reform, foreign relations, etc. But above all, it proposed the creation of a National Council of Economy, made up of representatives of the CNT and the UGT, to plan production according to democratic norms.'⁶

However, the document coming out of the September 15 plenum was much different from that of Prieto's, which had been approved the day before by the plenum of the CNT of the Levante. According to César Lorenzo, there were three currents in that Madrid meeting. Those from the Levante wanted to enter the Largo Caballero government immediately, those from Catalonia (Francisco Isgleas, Federica Montseny and Mariano Vázquez) strongly opposed the idea, while the delegation from Asturias took an indecisive position.⁷

As a consequence of this situation, what was conceived of as a compromise was adopted at the September 15 plenum. A long

resolution, signed by Juan López for the Levante, Federica Montseny for Catalonia, and Aurelio Alvarez for Asturias, proposed, 'The constitution in Madrid of a National Council of Defense, composed of elements of all of the political sectors struggling against fascism, and in these proportions: five delegates of the UGT (Marxists), five of the CNT and four republicans. President of the National Council of Defense, Largo Caballero. The constitution of this National Council presupposes the continuation of the Presidency of the Republic in the person of the man now occupying it...'

The resolution also urged establishment of similar defense councils in all of the regions, and establishment of 'local, provincial, regional and national federalism'. It proposed converting the ministries into departments, the creation of a 'Unitary Popular Militia', and 'control of the Milicias by Councils of Workers and Militiamen, named by Mixed Commissions formed by the UGT and the CNT'. It likewise called for establishing a single popular tribunal and subsidiary popular courts under it.

Finally, the resolution proposed socialization of 'banking, of the possessions of the Church, landlords, large industry, large commerce, transport in general ... use rights for the workers' unions in the means of production and exchange which will be socialized...'⁸

The CNT organized mass meetings in Valencia, Madrid, Málaga and Barcelona to popularize the concept of a council of defense.⁹ José Peirats, who at the time opposed CNT participation in the Republican government, wrote many years later: 'The National Council of Defense, even though not being basically anything other than a government with another name, and perhaps precisely because it was that, fell of its own weight. The CNT wanted to participate in the Government, but to mitigate the effect of its fulminating change of principles. This reality certainly did not escape the politicians and the parties. The trial balloon could not deceive Largo Caballero.'⁹

National Secretary Horacio Prieto had not participated in the September 15 plenum, being 'held in Valencia by a certain amount of unfinished business'. But he was unhappy with the resolution that had been adopted in Madrid, and when the next plenum of regional federations – which had been provided for by the September 15

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meeting – met on September 25, Prieto fought hard to get it to go on record in favor of straightforward entry into the Largo Caballero government. However, at that point he was unsuccessful, and another somewhat indecisive motion was adopted.¹⁰

Horacio Prieto was still determined to obtain the CNT's entry. To that end, he summoned still another plenum of regional CNT federations on October 18. According to Prieto's son, 'This time, he succeeded in getting the triumph of his point of view, ministerial collaboration was approved. Only the Catalans expressed reservations and did not fully support the decision of the majority. In any case, the Plenum gave full powers to the secretary general to conduct the negotiations necessary for the entry of the CNT in the government.'

According to César Lorenzo, however, the only public statements of the results of the October 18 plenum made at the time was a statement by Domingo Torres, a leader of the Levante regional CNT, the next day: 'At the last Plenum of the CNT collaboration was already decided upon. We abandoned our desire to form a National Defense Junta and we accepted the name of government ... We do not make our collaboration a question of name.'¹¹

The Reasons for the Anarchists' Entry into the Republican Government

Many years later, Federica Montseny told me the reasons that had finally convinced the anarchist leaders that the CNT should enter the government. She noted that Largo Caballero, in rejecting the anarchist proposal to establish a *junta* of national defense in place of the regular cabinet, argued that such a *junta* sounded too much like the *junta militar* with which Franco was then ruling his part of Spain, and that its establishment would alienate public opinion in the democratic countries, to which the Loyalists were looking for possible aid. The anarchist leaders became convinced that these arguments made considerable sense.

La Montseny added that the CNT leaders were also conscious of the fact that any posts that the CNT left vacant anywhere in Loyalist

Spain, whether in the government, in the industrial and agrarian collectives or anywhere else, including the armed forces, would probably be taken by the Communists. They were aware very early, she said, of the danger that the Communists would try to get all power for themselves, and would use blackmail of the aid from Russia, the only country which had begun to give effective help, to get this power.

Finally, Federica Montseny said that although the anarchist leaders did not think that the Revolution could be made from the government, they did feel that what had already been accomplished might be better protected from positions within the government. It would be harder for the Communists, and others opposed to the Revolution, to attack a group which was in the government than one which was outside it.¹²

How the Decision to Enter the Government Was Taken

There is little evidence that there was, at the time, any widespread opposition within the anarchist ranks to the entry of the CNT into the Largo Caballero government. However, one argument of those who then opposed it, or who in retrospect came to the conclusion that CNT participation in the Republican government had been a mistake, centered on the way the decision to enter the cabinet was taken.

This argument was summed up in an editorial in the organ of the 'hard' faction of the CNT-in-exile in June 1948:

The participation of the CNT in the affairs of State was more or less effective; but in all truth, one cannot say that that participation was carried out in accordance with the majority system. Against the most elemental practices of the Confederación, ignoring the federalist essence of the Confederación, ministerial collaboration was decided by the Committees and not by the *sindicatos*. The transgression of principles was imposed from above, from the top downwards, which should make us ashamed rather than offering a basis of argument for anyone. It is

enough, apart from noble idealism, to confess that we were not equal to the circumstances, or that we allowed ourselves to be won over by a sentimentalism which the politicians, at that point in the minority, knew well how to exploit.¹³

The CNT's Ministries and Ministers

Once the decision had been taken by the CNT to enter the government with regular ministers, the question resolved itself into how many ministries the anarchists should have, and who should occupy them. According to Largo Caballero's account, 'the discussion turned on whether they should have six or four ministers in the Government'.¹⁴ 'The haggling with the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo terminated with them conceding. There would be four ministers...'¹⁵

The versions of these negotiations given by Largo Caballero and by the son of Horacio Prieto differed substantially. According to Prieto's son (César Lorenzo), Largo Caballero continued to insist that the anarchists accept having one minister without portfolio. Prieto then went to Barcelona, where President Manuel Azaña was residing, to push the case for more adequate CNT representation in the government. He and three other CNT leaders met with Manuel Irujo, the Basque Nationalist minister without portfolio, and José Giral, ex-prime minister and also a minister without portfolio in Largo Caballero's cabinet. These two had been deputed by Azaña to deal with Prieto and his colleagues.

In these discussions, Irujo reportedly did not favor the entry of the CNT in the cabinet at all. But José Giral, who was a person close to Azaña politically and personally, recognized the justice of what Prieto was arguing, and finally assured the CNTers that he would arrange with Azaña for the anarchists to have four ministries. After Azaña had given such assurances, Prieto returned to Madrid.

According to César Lorenzo, in a new discussion with Largo Caballero, 'Prieto asked the Prime Minister not to persist any longer with the idea that the CNT should be content with a minister without portfolio, since the President of the Republic was in agreement for

the Confederation to collaborate in a dignified way.' Lorenzo added: 'Largo Caballero, at first stunned, declared himself well satisfied and agreed to rearrange his cabinet...'¹⁶

Largo Caballero's version of President Azaña's intervention in the final negotiations with the CNT varied markedly from that of César Lorenzo (and presumably of Horacio Prieto). Largo Caballero wrote:

The president refused to sign the decrees because it was repugnant for him to have four anarchists in the Government... Any ruler would see the political and historical importance of this event; Azaña only saw that don Manuel Azaña authorized with his signature the naming of four persons whose ideas were condemned by him and by many people... but he did not see the rectification which this political act signified and the importance for the future of the conversion of Spanish anarchism from terrorism and direct action to collaboration and sharing the responsibilities of Power, forming part of a Government in which were represented all the political tendencies – I announced my resignation if he did not sign the decrees and, although with reservations, he signed them. The event was consummated. Spanish anarchism ceased to be antipolitical and renounced direct action.¹⁷

Still another version of these negotiations between Largo Caballero and President Azaña is that of Rodolfo Llopis, who was secretary-general of the government under Largo Caballero. He reported that Azaña particularly objected to García Oliver, because of his criminal record, and to Federica Montseny for other reasons. However, Largo Caballero insisted that he had left it up to the CNT to choose its representatives in the government, and he supported their choice. According to Llopis, only a threat by Largo Caballero to resign brought the president to sign the decrees appointing the anarchist ministers.¹⁸

Whatever the nature of these negotiations it is clear that President Azaña was strongly opposed to the idea. In his memoirs, he wrote: '...not only against my opinion, but with my most vocal protest,

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there was imposed the ministerial modification of November, with the entry of the CNT and the anarchists, deemed to be advisable, inevitable and useful by the Republicans themselves.¹⁹

To some degree, Largo Caballero's concessions to the anarchists were more apparent than real. Juan García Oliver explained this. He wrote that, in his discussions with Horacio Prieto about being one of the ministers, he told Prieto, 'This is a typically Socialist operation. Also a typically Socialist operation is the choice of four ministries which have been given you, of which only that of Justice is really a ministry; the other three are General Directorates. None of those four ministries has secret funds which can be used without giving accounts to anyone. All the ministries with secret funds are occupied by honorable members of the PSOE (Socialist Party).'²⁰

García Oliver was to a considerable degree correct. Only the ministry of justice was a fully fledged cabinet position before the anarchists entered the government. The pre-existing ministry of industry and commerce was divided into two separate ministries and the directorate general of health was converted into the ministry of health and social assistance.²¹ These were the posts which Largo Caballero offered Prieto and which he accepted on behalf of the CNT.

Once the ministries which the anarchists were to occupy were decided upon, the next question was which CNT leaders should occupy them. According to his son, it was Horacio Prieto who chose them, although his decision was ratified by the national committee of the CNT. Lorenzo wrote: 'He proposed the names of García Oliver, Federica Montseny, Juan Peiró and Juan López. He maintained, in effect, that the two tendencies of anarcho-syndicalism, the revolutionary and the reformist, must be represented, so that the new responsibilities would be assumed by all. He sought, he said, to name leading personalities of both sectors, hence Juan López (Pestaña not being possible) and Juan Peiró, former Treintistas, on the one hand; García Oliver and Federica Montseny, members of the FAI ... on the other.'²²

Once the names had been agreed upon by the national committee, it was Horacio Prieto's task to get their consent to assume the ministerial posts. He had little problem with Juan López and Juan

Peiró, who accepted immediately. The FAIistas were more difficult. César Lorenzo noted that Federica Montseny 'refused radically. She, the daughter of Federico Urales and of Soledad Gustavo, she who from infancy had been impregnated with the anarchist ideal, she who only belonged to the FAI, she would never deny her past and her convictions.' Thereupon, Prieto said that he would then have to find some other woman anarchist who would be willing to serve. At that point, La Montseny 'changed her opinion. A female minister in Spain, what an event! And an anarchist at that! Federica Montseny, much aroused, asked a delay to reflect. Horacio Prieto gave her twenty-four hours. The next day she agreed, her father (Federico Urales) had strongly advised her to enter the government.'²³

García Oliver was even harder to convince. He was reported to have said that his only qualification for being minister of justice was the frequency with which he had been in jail.²⁴

According to his own testimony, García Oliver said to Prieto:

I will give you three serious objections. The first is that in forming part of the government of Madrid, the CNT completes the total renunciation of its principles and the objectives of social revolution; the second, that it shows an absolute ignorance of what the CNT is, a federative group of Regional organizations, to send into the government four Catalan ministers, with impardonable bypassing of the Central Regional Federation; third, to take me from the general secretariat of the Councillorship of Defense of Catalonia is to break the antifascist equilibrium in Catalonia. With me out of here, all restraints will be broken and it won't be long until Catalonia will become chaotic.

However, Prieto argued strongly for García Oliver's presence in the new government. García Oliver recounted that Prieto told him: 'I think that without your entry into the government, it will be a failure. Only you can deal with the parliamentary sharks.'²⁵

Apparently the arguments of his comrades of the Catalan regional committee of the CNT were more persuasive than those of Prieto, who had gone from García Oliver's office to that of the regional committee. There, Prieto had convinced the Catalan CNT leadership

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of the importance of García Oliver's being one of the new Republican ministers, and the regional committee had arranged for Juan Molina to be his successor in the secretariat of defense. Mariano Vázquez, then secretary of the Catalan CNT, communicated with García Oliver, telling him the decisions of the regional leadership, and García Oliver finally conceded to become a minister.²⁶

As a consequence of the negotiations of Horacio Prieto with Largo Caballero, and with the four people designated to represent the CNT in Largo Caballero's cabinet, the anarchists formally entered the Republican government on November 5 1936. Many years later, Juan López, one of the four anarchist cabinet ministers, told me that the CNTers did not see themselves as participating in a regularly constituted Republican government, but rather as taking the Revolution into that government.²⁷ However, it did not take them long to realize that the more conservative majority in the government had little intention of allowing the anarchist ministers to use their presence in the cabinet to legalize the Revolution which had taken place on a *de facto* basis in the period following July 19.

The Decision For the Government to Leave Madrid

Several important decisions bearing upon the future of the War and the Revolution had been taken before the CNT entered the government. One of these was the agreement to send most of the country's gold supply 'for safekeeping' to the Soviet Union. That decision had been made shortly before the entry of the four CNTers into the cabinet, and Finance Minister Juan Negrín missed several of the first few sessions of the cabinet in which the anarchists participated, being away taking care of the loading of the gold on ships destined for the USSR.²⁸ This is borne out by the testimony of Admiral N. Kuznetsov, a Soviet adviser to the Spanish Republican fleet, who helped in the process of loading the Spanish gold for shipment to the USSR. He noted that that process began in the second fortnight of October 1936, and that Juan Negrín supervised it.²⁹

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However, at the first meeting of the new government in Madrid, the anarchist ministers were faced with participating in a fundamental and drastic decision – to move the capital of the Republic from Madrid to Valencia. Franco's troops were reaching the suburbs of Madrid, and the future of the city was in grave doubt. The question of changing the capital was thus one of great urgency.

However, this was not the first time that the issue of moving the Republican capital out of Madrid had been brought up. César Lorenzo has recorded that on September 17 or 18 his father, Horacio Prieto, had been summoned to the ministry of war, in his capacity as national secretary of the CNT. Present also were representatives of the various elements of the Popular Front.

The purpose of the meeting was soon explained by Minister of War and Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero. According to César Lorenzo, Largo Caballero explained: '...that the war was turning bad, that the enemy had gained advantage at numerous points, but that that was perfectly normal given the effect of surprise, and that the situation was soon going to change. Meanwhile, since Madrid was in danger and in fact did not have any strategic or economic importance (Madrid, he said, was only a stomach) the government was proposing to evacuate the capital. They would proceed calmly to evacuate children, old people, the sick and the women, then transferring the organizations and the government itself to another region so as to avoid dangerous surprises or precipitate measures.'

The prime minister then asked the opinion of each of those present, starting from the politically farthest right and ending with Horacio Prieto of the CNT. All those preceding Prieto had expressed approval of the proposed move. However, when it came his turn, Prieto said, 'I am very happy to be among you and to see such pretty unanimity ... but I shall give my personal opinion here. I am opposed to the evacuation of Madrid because of the psychological shock that that measure will cause among the population, the doubt, pessimism, the disarray that will take the place of the enthusiasm which reigns today, with very negative results, and will be more prejudicial than all the military and economic results that the abandonment of Madrid might have ...'

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Largo Caballero was exceedingly annoyed by Prieto's position, and replied by casting aspersions on the fighting qualities of anarchist troops in Aragón. Prieto did not reply but, after the meeting had broken up, representatives of the UGT and of the Partido Sindicalista came up to him to tell him that his position was correct. 'And no one spoke more of the evacuation of Madrid,' according to Lorenzo.³⁰

However, by the time the anarchists entered the government at the beginning of November, the situation of Madrid had become desperate, and to many appeared hopeless. Franco's armies were on the outskirts of the city, which was being bombarded both from the air and by artillery, while Fifth Columnists were engaging in sniper fire in various parts of the capital.

Right after the fall of Toledo to Franco's forces, the CNT Defense Committee of the Center was informed that Russian advisers had suggested that the government should abandon the capital.³¹

At the first meeting of the new cabinet, with the presence of the four anarchist ministers, the only order of business was the question of the government's evacuating the capital. Largo Caballero wrote years later about the anarchist ministers' position on the issue:

In the first Council which they attended, there was dealt with and agreed to the exist from Madrid, and the matter was not agreeable. They and the two Communists opposed it in the first moments, fearing that that would greatly dishearten the people and might give rise to some disturbance. What they feared might have happened, but it was more grave that the President of the Republic and the Government could fall in the power of the Rebels, since that would end the war, which, on the other hand, was not going on only in Madrid but in all of Spain. From another capital, it would be possible to take care of the needs of the various fronts. Finally, they were convinced and the agreement was unanimous.³²

It is perhaps interesting to note that the Communist history of the Civil War makes no mention of opposition to transfer of the capital on the part of the two Communist ministers.³³

García Oliver's memory of the train of events leading up to the decision for the government to leave Madrid differed substantially from that of the former prime minister. Although a little confused as to dates, the anarchist ex-minister said that there were two meetings of the cabinet before the decision was finally taken.

At the first meeting, which must have been on November 5, Horacio Prieto presented the anarchist ministers to Prime Minister Largo Caballero, who subsequently introduced them to the other members of the cabinet. Largo Caballero then presented the proposal to abandon Madrid and, according to García Oliver, all of the non-CNT ministers agreed with the prime minister's proposal. When it came the anarchists' turn to speak, García Oliver asked for a recess so that they could discuss the situation for a few minutes. The four CNT ministers agreed that, even if it might provoke a crisis in the government, and force them to resign, they would vote against the move of the government out of Madrid.

García Oliver spoke for them, expressing their opposition. At that point, instead of provoking a crisis, Largo Caballero adjourned the meeting, saying that he would call them to a further extraordinary meeting of the cabinet to reach a final decision.³⁴

The four CNT ministers then went to the anarchist headquarters to confer with Horacio Prieto. When they asked him whether they should provoke a cabinet crisis in order to oppose the government's leaving Madrid, he told them not to do so, but to hold out as long as possible, short of causing a cabinet crisis.³⁵

The emergency meeting was called on the afternoon of November 6 (although García Oliver says it was on November 7), at four o'clock. Again, Largo Caballero stressed the urgency of the government's leaving Madrid, that same evening, adding that he proposed to leave a *junta* under General Miaja to govern the city. Again, also, all of the ministers aside from the four anarchists, accepted the prime minister's proposal. Then, at the request of the four anarchists, the meeting adjourned for half an hour, to enable them to make a final decision on where they stood.

According to García Oliver, the four anarchists sought to make telephone contact with Horacio Prieto, to get final instructions from him as to whether to make the issue a question on which to provoke

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a cabinet crisis. Unable to get in touch with him, they conferred among themselves.

As García Oliver told the story, he said to the rest of them: 'This is the crisis, and we are not authorized to provoke it. I have the impression that all of the other ministers have their bags packed. We also will have to flee and abandon the city, like them. My opinion is that we must accept the responsibility to agree with them on the exit of the government. The coming hours have to be faced by the fighters in arms, rather than for the city to be defended by four ex-ministers of the CNT. But decide yourselves if you think differently.'

One after another, the other three expressed their agreement with García Oliver's position, and they named him to speak to the rest of the cabinet on behalf of all of them. When the cabinet meeting resumed, García Oliver announced their agreement to make the decision to abandon Madrid unanimous. The cabinet then adjourned to meet again at an unspecified time in Valencia.³⁶

Horacio Prieto's version of how this decision was taken differed substantially from that of García Oliver, according to César Lorenzo, who wrote that 'The four libertarian ministers accepted this transfer without consulting the National Committee or its secretary, without warning them even by a telephone call, facing the CNT with a fait accompli. Horacio Prieto could not under the tragic circumstances demand the destitution of the four ministers for their misbehavior and thus provoke the ministerial crisis.'

Many of the anarchist leaders came to the conclusion that the CNT had been brought into the cabinet when they were to give 'cover' to the government's abandoning Madrid. Thus, García Oliver, in his speech reporting to the CNT membership on his activity as minister of justice, given shortly after the anarchists left the government, said: '...The CNT was called upon, apart from reasons of governmental and political importance, so that the Government could abandon Madrid. If the Government of that time had abandoned Madrid, without having the CNT share in this responsibility, it would have been a dead Government.'

García Oliver then justified the decision: 'It is necessary to say, to affirm, that the fact that the Government abandoned Madrid, aside from the fact that it should have done so a month earlier, was an act

of good Government, because the Government in Madrid was not a Government; it was one more social gathering obsessed by the problem of the war, of the Madrid front, with absolute abandonment of the problem of the war in all of Spain, of the general problems of the country ... that Government, prisoner of the circumstances, submitted to the pressure of bombardment, of confused news, did not order, did not organize the army, did not organize health services, or social assistance, or supply. It was only a small civil government of the remote province of Madrid.³⁷

However, as César Lorenzo noted, 'The departure of the government for Valencia, which also involved the National Committee, provoked the anger of the militants of the CNT. They held Horacio Prieto responsible, accusing him of laxity and calling him a "liquidator". In the face of this, after the decision to leave Madrid had been taken in spite of him, Horacio Prieto resigned his post as secretary of the NC.'³⁸

Anarchist Ministers' Participation in Re-establishing Government Power

Burnett Bolloten has emphasized the important role the anarchist ministers, as responsible members of the Largo Caballero cabinet, had in re-establishing the authority of the State, which had been largely swept aside in the Revolution that accompanied the beginning of the Civil War.

The Giral government had taken some steps to try to revive governmental authority. It had decreed the purging of the civil service, the police forces and the diplomatic corps of Rebel sympathizers. It had authorized the establishment of 'popular tribunals', which already existed, *de facto*. It decreed that holders of bank accounts could not withdraw more than 1,000 pesetas a month, and officially seized industries abandoned by Rebel sympathizers. It also authorized workers' committees which had taken over firms abandoned by their owners to withdraw funds from those firms' bank accounts for paying wages and other purposes.³⁹

However, these measures were at the time either more symbolic

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than real, or were governmental adaptations to the Revolution which had occurred after July 19. Power on a local and regional level in Loyalist Spain still remained in the hands of those who had seized it after the collapse of the Rebellion in those areas; control of both the urban and rural economy remained mainly in the hands of the workers and peasants who had taken it over with the outbreak with the War.

It remained to the Largo Caballero government to re-establish the power of the State. One aspect of this process involved replacing the innumerable committees which had been established by the parties and unions on an *ad hoc* basis throughout most of Loyalist Spain during the first days and weeks of the War, and which were mainly controlled by the anarchists and their left-wing Socialist and POUM allies. According to Bolloten:

...The government, with the acquiescence of the CNT members, approved decrees that, far from giving legal validity to the committees as the CNT had hoped on entering the cabinet, provided for their dissolution and replacement by regular provincial and municipal councils, in which all the parties adhering to the Popular Front as well as the trade-union organizations were to be represented. In addition, a decree was published providing for the suppression of all controls on highways and at the entrance to villages set up by local committees and by parties or trade-union organizations and for the taking over of their functions by the police forces under the ministry of the interior. All of these measures, of course, threatened the predominant position of the anarchosindicalists in numberless towns and villages and threw the more extreme spirits into a position of antagonism to the leadership of the CNT and FAI...⁴⁰

Because of the cleavage in the libertarian movement on the question of dissolving the committees, it was a far cry from the promulgation of the decrees to their actual implementation, and in a large number of localities, where the anarchosindicalists were in undisputed ascendancy and even in some where the less radical UGT was dominant, the committees subsisted in the teeth of government opposition.⁴¹

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Bolloten cited a letter to him from Federica Montseny, in which she explained the process by which the anarchist ministers were led to help in undermining the authority of the revolutionary institutions and substituting more orthodox governmental ones for them. La Montseny wrote:

The arguments of the Communists, Socialists, and republicans were always the same: It was essential to give an appearance of legality to the Spanish Republic to calm the fears of the British, French and Americans. As a consequence, the state recovered the position it had lost, while we revolutionaries, who formed part of the state, helped it to do so. That was why we were brought into the government. Although we did not enter it with that intention, we were in it, and therefore had no alternative but to remain imprisoned in the vicious circle. But I can state positively that, although we lost in the end, we defended our ground inch by inch and never voted for anything that curbed the conquests of the Revolution without first being authorized by the national committee of the CNT, on which there was a permanent representative of the FAI.⁴²

A second phase in re-establishing the power of the State was the rebuilding of regular police forces in the Republic during the Largo Caballero administration in which the anarchist ministers were participating, to replace the militia police which had been created at the outbreak of the Civil War, and a substantial proportion of which were under CNT-FAI control. Bolloten has noted the reorganization and expansion of the Guardia Civil (rechristened the Guardia Nacional Republicana) and the Assault Guards. He also underscored the importance of the expansion of the *carabineros*, traditionally the border patrol unit, by Minister of Finance Juan Negrín, which is discussed more extensively elsewhere in this volume.

The Largo Caballero government also sought to bring the militia police under the control of the regular police forces. All of the militiamen on police duty were made part of a new vigilance militia under the ministry of interior. According to Bolloten, 'The decree

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soon proved to be but a preparatory step towards the incorporation of the squads and patrols of the working-class organizations into the armed forces of the state.' Whereas Communists, Socialists and republicans quickly joined the new group, 'the anarchosyndicalists held back and in many places clung tenaciously to their own police squads and patrols in defiance of the government,'⁴³ for which they were to pay heavily afterwards.

'While the reorganization of the regular police corps was gradually taking place, Burnett Bolloten continued, 'The Communists were making full use of their skill in proselytizing, defamation, and infiltration to secure for themselves a position of predominance. Among the posts the Communists soon obtained were those of Chief of Police of Madrid, Chief and Subchief of the intelligence department of the Ministry of Interior, and Commissar General of the Department of Security, in charge of the appointment, transfer and discipline of the police.' Bolloten considered particularly important the fact that a Communist became head of the training school of the new secret police force.

On this new force, Bolloten commented: 'From the time of its creation this corps, ultimately more important than any of the uniformed forces of public order, became a mere arm of the Soviet secret police, which, because of the paramount position Spain now occupied in Soviet diplomacy, had established itself in the left camp quite early in the war.'⁴⁴

The Soviet secret police, the OGPU, operated quite independently of the police forces established by the Spanish Republican government. Walter Krivitsky, then chief of Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe, visited Barcelona late in 1936, and wrote several years later: 'The Ogpu had done a brilliant bit of work. Already in December, 1936, the terror was sweeping Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. The Ogpu had its own special prisons. Its units carried out assassinations and kidnappings. It filled hidden dungeons and made flying raids. It functioned, of course, independently of the Loyalist government. The Ministry of Justice had no authority over the Ogpu, which was an empire within an empire. It was a power before which even some of the highest officers in the Caballero government trembled.'⁴⁵

The CNT Ministers and the CNT National Leadership

The four CNT ministers in the Largo Caballero government worked closely with the national leadership of their organization. They met regularly, usually about once a week, with the plenum of the national committee of the CNT, to explain what they were doing and what was going on in the government, as well as to reply to criticisms from some of their comrades. There were sometimes rather strong debates in these meetings.

One wartime member of the national committee said many years later that the task of the ministers had been to dampen the revolutionary ardor of some of the CNTistas, to make them see that if the War was lost the Revolution was lost too, and that the essential thing was to win the War. The ministers and the national committee, he said, were in perfect agreement on this. Sometimes there was bitter criticism from the lower echelons and they were accused of being 'firemen', putting out the fires of the Revolution.⁴⁶

García Oliver as Minister of Justice

Certainly, Juan García Oliver was the most successful of the four anarchist ministers who served in Largo Caballero's cabinet. This was not only because his was the only really fully fledged ministry which they controlled, but also because of his dynamism, and because he developed the closest relations of all of them with the prime minister.

In his memoirs, García Oliver set forth his objectives and policy as minister of justice:

I would demonstrate that to be an anarchist and a minister was not incompatible ... Without ceasing to be a convinced anarchosyndicalist ... I would try to leave firm evidence in the history of revolutions of the service of an anarchosyndicalist as Minister of Justice, commonly regarded as the ministry of chains, bars and prisons, but without forgetting that it is also the source of Law, and that in the end, all high conceptions of

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socialism, whether anarchist or Marxist, can only be expressed through the Law...

To carry out a task which would have profound results, it was necessary that I effectively be the minister, without being compromised or intimidated by pressures or complexes... In so far as possible, I would carry forward what had not been done until then. But I must start by making it clear that it was in fact I who directed justice. And not permit that outside of our Organization there be applied during the night a speedy justice, carried out with the greatest impunity by those who during the day appeared before Spain and international opinion as Innocence itself, allowing the libel to be circulated that 'with an anarchist as Minister of Justice there is nothing surprising that it is his private agents who on their nightly rounds leave unburied those whom they convict'.⁴⁷

García Oliver was the only one of the anarchist ministers who had at least some participation in the general direction of the War. We have noted in an earlier chapter his role in organizing the officer training schools for the new Popular Army, not only to provide adequate leadership for the Republican armed forces, but also to keep the Communists from monopolizing power and authority within the military.

However, in addition, García Oliver participated in the Consejo Superior de Guerra, an organization established by the council of ministers on his initiative. Before the first cabinet meeting in Valencia, the four anarchist ministers met with Horacio Prieto, who was then still national secretary of the CNT, and it was agreed that if possible they should seek the establishment of an inner war council on which they would be represented.

As a consequence, at the November 13 1936 meeting of the council of ministers, García Oliver put forward the idea of a superior war council, consisting of the minister of war/prime minister, the minister of marine and air (Indalecio Prieto), the general political commissar (Julio Alvarez del Vayo), the minister of justice (because of his experience as chief of the Catalan armed forces), representatives of the autonomous Catalan and Basque governments, and

a representative of the Communist Party. Largo Caballero immediately supported the idea but, when there were some objections, he gave the ministers 48 hours to consult with their party leaderships. Two days later, the cabinet decided to form the Consejo Superior de Guerra.⁴⁸

The Superior War Council apparently continued to meet with certain regularity throughout the rest of the Largo Caballero government. It discussed such issues as the appointment of key military personnel, strategic military planning and other similar subjects, although its role was apparently more one of providing advice to the minister of war, Largo Caballero, than of having executive authority.

García Oliver was the most capable politician of the four anarchist ministers. He was much more successful than the others in obtaining approval of the cabinet as a whole for the various projects that he brought before them.

In his memoirs, García Oliver recounted his reply to Federica Montseny on his success in getting favorable consideration for his initiatives in the council of ministers, when she had even been hesitant about presenting proposals which might be of interest to her. He told La Montseny: 'It is easy. I took into account that most of the ministers didn't pay attention to what we were doing ... Knowing that they didn't read any of the projected decrees which were sent to them, when it came my turn to present matters to the Council, I took out the proposals one by one and gave them to the president, saying, "I passed this projected decree to all of the ministers, and I suppose that they have read it. So I don't need to read it or point out its contents." Then, so as not to have to confess that none of them had read it, there was silence, which the president took advantage of to ask: "Is it approved? It is approved..."'⁴⁹ (The 'president' in this case was the president of the council, Prime Minister Largo Caballero.)

One of García Oliver's first efforts as minister of justice was to put an end to the kind of lynch-mob justice which was still being carried out in various parts of the Republic three and a half months after the outbreak of the Civil War and Revolution, known popularly as *paseos*. Even before the government left Madrid, he had an interview with Margarita Neiken, a pro-Communist Socialist Party deputy,

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who 'at the head of a committee of United Socialist Youth is the one who assumed the executive functions of justice in Madrid'.⁵⁰ He told her that 'I come to ask you to separate yourself from everything having to do with the enforcement of justice. From today onwards, I will have those responsibilities. But only with my own people.'⁵¹ Deputy Neiken apparently conformed to his request.

García Oliver faced the same problem in Valencia. There, as he wrote in his memoirs, 'There met every night on the top floor of the territorial court a so-called "Tribunal of Blood". Its components – about twenty members – belonged to the juridical, police and political apparatus of all the parties and anti-fascist organizations of the city ... Every night it took the mission of carrying out arrests of suspects of fascism. They judged those, and if it sentenced them to death, it executed them. Everything was done that same night. The bodies of the executed appeared outside the city, in the fields and the gardens.'

García Oliver met with the members of the Tribunal of Blood. He told them: 'I have called you together to ask that you not meet again as the so-called Tribunal of Blood. You must allow the Popular Tribunals to act.' There were objections, and one of those present said, only half-jokingly, that they might have to try the minister of justice himself. To this, García Oliver replied, 'Comrades, you know who I am. I will answer you willingly, but I could do it with a submachine-gun in hand. I will pretend I didn't hear what you said, on the condition that you don't act any longer as the Tribunal of Blood.'⁵²

A particularly grave aspect of the *paseos* in the early months of the War was the action of political groups, particularly the Communists, in going to prisons, demanding certain prisoners, and then taking them out and shooting them. There had even been cases of local prison directors who had been beaten or killed trying to protect prisoners from such seizures. That procedure was no longer permitted once the ministry of justice was headed by an anarchist.⁵³

García Oliver reported in his speech on his sojourn as minister of justice delivered right after leaving office, on his success in suppressing the *paseos*: 'I can tell you that, if we entered the 5th of November with the Government in a calamitous state, and a chaotic legal life in

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our country, a month and a half afterwards, the first of January 1937, the popular justice was organized in all of Spain and the *paseo* had terminated, and the Administration of Justice of leach zone was a reality.⁵⁴

One of his first acts as minister of justice was to order the destruction of all of the original records in the ministry in Madrid. When the ministry was hit by enemy bombardment, and he was told that many of the records had been dislodged and strewn at random by the attack, he ordered that those that remained be burned.⁵⁵

Some time later, García Oliver supplemented this destruction of criminal records by getting the cabinet to approve a general amnesty for all crimes committed before July 15 1936. He explained this measure, after leaving office, by saying that 'it weighs as a stigma to have penal antecedents in this and all countries of the world ... and with this Decree we wash away all kinds of prejudices of the bourgeois society and we place all of those who formerly had been delinquent in the same conditions as the rest of the citizens ... so that they could be dignified citizens, and could reconstruct their life in society...'⁵⁶

On the suggestion of Horacio Prieto, García Oliver named a lawyer and a CNT sympathizer, Mariano Sánchez Roca, to be the sub-secretary of justice.⁵⁷ He also established a juridical advisory commission to work on drawing up legislation which he wanted to present to the cabinet. Presided over by Sánchez Roca, the group was composed of a Republican member of the supreme court, López de Goicoechea; a Federal Party president of a regional court, Abel Velilla, Partido Sindicalista deputy Benito Pavón, and a Communist lawyer, Cayetano Bolívar.⁵⁸

García Oliver enacted several significant changes in the way the ministry of justice, and the courts dependent on it, functioned. One of these was to end the system whereby court employees did not receive regular salaries, but instead were paid on the basis of how much paperwork they handled. This system had tended to increase greatly the bureaucratic process and to augment the time necessary for a case to be heard and settled. García Oliver provided for regular payment of salaries to all court employees.⁵⁹

Another significant change he made in the ministry was to decree

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that its employees were free to join unions of either the CNT or the UGT. This measure brought a protest from some of the ministers at the next cabinet meeting, but the anarchist minister had the strong support in this case of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, himself the secretary-general of the UGT.⁶⁰

After leaving the ministry, García Oliver insisted that he had never used his post to try to force those under him to join the CNT: 'Absolutely no one, no judge of Spain, no district attorney of Spain, no President of a Court of Spain can say that he has received from the Minister of Justice the suggestion to join the CNT or the FAI in order to obtain a position of honors.' He noted that at the beginning of the War, the CNT had voluntarily forsworn taking the absolute power it might have seized, and asked 'were we going to want to make the CNT strong by corrupting the judges, corrupting the district attorneys or corrupting the presiding judges, removing them from one place and sending them to another one? No.'⁶¹

With the assistance of his juridical advisory commission, García Oliver presented a number of significant laws for approval by the cabinet. One of the first was a measure to allow those brought to court to defend themselves, without the necessity of having a lawyer, if they did not want one: 'When there is a trial, it is always better that a defendant be able to defend himself, well or poorly, and be able to renounce his defence on his own initiative, than for him to be forced to have the defense by a lawyer who doesn't have his confidence...'⁶²

A decree-law of February 4 1937 granted full civil rights to women: 'Think of the contrast and absurdity of a situation in which a married woman, who can be elected mayor, deputy, Minister, can make laws, but on the other hand cannot dispose of her self or her possessions. She cannot leave the house to go elsewhere without her husband's permission. If she wants to travel, she cannot do so. If she wants to get a passport, she cannot do so. She was in fact a slave, even though the Republic had given her the right to vote and to be elected...'⁶³

An April 1937 decree-law provided for the right for children to be legally adopted by people who were not blood relatives. Another one, issued the same day, legalized common law marriages of

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militiamen and soldiers, thus making their widows eligible for benefits as heirs of soldiers killed in action.⁶⁴

The final decree-law proposed by García Oliver and passed by the cabinet only a few days before its fall provided for the extension of the jurisdiction of the civil courts, the *Tribunales Populares*, to military personnel except for 'crimes committed only and exclusively by military men in acts of service. All other cases pass to a single jurisdiction, civil jurisdiction'.⁶⁵

The *Tribunales Populares* had been established right after the beginning of the Civil War. They were made up of both career judges and laymen, and had developed somewhat differently in different parts of the Republican territory. However, a decree-law sponsored by García Oliver, and ratified by the cabinet on May 7 1937, consisting of 130 articles, had codified these new institutions.⁶⁶

As minister of justice, García Oliver had ideas of his own about the nature of the penal system, in its treatment both of those convicted of political crimes against the Republic in connection with the Civil War, and of common criminals. He was only able to make a small start in revising the system dealing with political prisoners, and his concepts of changing the treatment of common criminals remained mere aspirations.

For handling political prisoners he proposed the substitution of work camps for incarceration in prisons or penitentiaries. He argued that those guilty of attempting to overthrow the Republic, and thus helping to provoke the Civil War, should make some contribution towards reconstruction of the country by working during their period of incarceration. However, he also proposed that those in work camps should be paid small amounts for each day's work, and that each week served without infraction of the rules should count as one day in terms of reduction of the prisoner's sentence. In addition, if the prisoner had shown good behavior for a year, that should result in a further one year's reduction of sentence.

García Oliver recognized the possible parallels between the work camps he proposed and the concentration camps of the fascist powers. However, he claimed that such parallels were unjustified, given the possibilities of reducing one's sentence through good behavior, and due to the absolute prohibition of the infliction of any

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bodily harm on those held prisoners in the camps.⁶⁷ One such camp was actually put into operation during the time that García Oliver was minister of justice.⁶⁸

The minister of justice put forth his ideas on how places of incarceration for common criminals should be changed in a speech he made at the Opening of the Judicial Year, a ceremony attended by all members of the Supreme Court, as well as by members of the government and of the diplomatic corps. There he expounded on his idea for the establishment of 'penitentiary cities'. He started by asking, 'Punishments? We will not impose punishments. They will have their tribunal, they will learn to be judges, they will learn to govern themselves.'

'They will have a corporative regime, and for each branch of work there will be named a delegate; there will be formed the Council of the Penitentiary City; they will make their laws, they will make their Codes; they will carry out their own justice; they will make their decisions and dispositions . . . What more can we ask? Does anyone think it bad that a man be efficaciously re-educated so that he can be reintegrated in society?'⁶⁹ But the anarchist minister of justice did not get a chance to establish any penitentiary cities.

Juan Peiró as Minister of Industry

One might perhaps have supposed that Juan Peiró as Minister of Industry would have been the most powerful anarchist minister of all, in view of the fact that a large proportion of the industries in Republican Spain had been taken over by the CNT. However, such did not prove to be the case.

The introduction to the pamphlet containing Peiró's speech about his tenure as minister of industry, given shortly after leaving the post (and published by the CNT), summed up the nature of his frustration in that position: 'The description of the ministerial experience of Peiró, in Industry, cannot be anything but the narration of a series of failures. He could do nothing, or almost nothing. He was denied the money, they denied him the decrees, which constantly ran up against the closed block of opposition of Republicans, Communists and

Right-wing Socialists. Only occasionally something passed, thanks to long debates and the pressure exerted by the favorable attitude of the president, who felt the responsibility of a revolutionary.⁷⁰ (The 'president' is Largo Caballero.)

In his public report on his experience as minister of industry, delivered in Valencia shortly after he left the government, Juan Peiró recounted what he had sought to do and his frustrations in attempting to achieve his objectives. His concerns were particularly with the war industries, mining and the electrical industry, and his achievements in all of those fields were scarce indeed.

Peiró's first proposal with regard to the manufacturing sector, and the war industries in particular, was that the cabinet pass a decree 'collectivizing' those firms which were Spanish-owned and intervening those which belonged to foreign firms. Intervention amounted to the government's assuming control of them on an interim basis. Collectivization meant legalization of workers' control.

Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero rejected this idea. He argued that such a decree-law would very much complicate the Spanish Republican government's relations with Great Britain, France, Belgium and other democratic countries, whose citizens had appreciable investments in Spain. Largo Caballero and Peiró agreed on a compromise decree, which would provide for *incautación* or 'attachment' of industries by the government, and Peiró submitted a draft decree to the cabinet.⁷¹

Peiró reported: 'I must say that the draft decree sought a clearly collectivist objective. It covered all the industries, tried to establish that the prosperous industries would cover with their surpluses what was needed by the needy industries. This, clearly, would require, would have had to lead to, the creation of an Industrial Bank ... which would carry out the necessary functions, imposed by the tragic economic, industrial, or political and social circumstances through which Spain was living...'⁷²

However, Peiró was not to get his way with this decree. As he said later, when he submitted it to the cabinet 'the calvary began'. Opponents of the measure insisted that it be submitted to the consideration of an interministerial committee including, among others, the minister of finance, Juan Negrín, and the Communist

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minister of agriculture, Vicente Uribe. When emerging from that group, as Peiró commented, 'it remains only an indecent skeleton'.⁷³

Although Peiró was able to incorporate more of his ideas in the 'regulations' of the decree issued by him after the decree was adopted, his troubles on the subject were by no means over. The decree was of little use unless funds were made available to finance its major provisions. One clause of the decree had provided that a credit of 30 million pesetas would be made available to the ministry of industry, 'For the application of these 30 millions of pesetas, the Ministry of Finance and that of Industry, in agreement, will establish the norms.'⁷⁴

The minister of finance, of course, was the Right-wing Socialist, Juan Negrín, and he at first refused to meet with Peiró to discuss this appropriation, and then sent him a project by which some 24 million pesetas, not 30 million, would be made available by the existing Bank of Industrial Credit, but as a loan, carrying 6 percent interest, and asked Peiró for his comments on that proposal. Peiró rejected this suggestion, but Negrín procrastinated in reaching an agreement with Peiró, while accusing the anarchist minister of being responsible for the failure to implement the February decree.

At the last meeting of the Largo Caballero cabinet, where the cabinet crisis occurred, Peiró answered Negrín's charges:

No Comrade Negrín. It is not the fault of the Minister of Industry. What was agreed to was that the norms had to be drawn up by you and me in common accord. Then came the draft that you yourself had to confess had been drawn up by the Bank of industrial Credit, about which I have nothing to say, but while I wanted for you to indicate the day and hour when we would meet, for the purpose of drawing up the norms, a few hours ago you told me: Do it yourself, make a project for the regulations and then I will see them, and if I am in agreement, I shall sign them. And the crisis came exactly at the moment in which the norms for the use of the 30 million pesetas were being drawn up...⁷⁵

Although Peiró did not say so explicitly, it seems clear that Negrín

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did his utmost, successfully, to thwart the project of the anarchist minister.

Peiró concluded that the purpose of Negrín and others who sought to block this measure was to prevent the workers who had taken over much of the nation's industry from learning how to run it efficiently. After admitting that many of the worker-controlled firms were badly run, he noted:

In the decree of attachment and intervention of industries, it is tacitly expressed that the Ministry of Industries is not to impose on the Committees of Control and the enterprise Councils, but is to assist them to carry out the social task which they have in hand, and it is evident that, in a short time, if those workers who are today disoriented had at their side someone to orient them, to put them on the path which they have to follow in the administration and direction of the industries ... the workers would have been in condition to dispense with the tutelage not only of capitalism, but also of the State. And that is what they have tried to prevent, in my judgment.⁷⁶

Peiró's experience with the mining sector was equally discouraging and frustrating. In the case of the Penarroja mining complex, Peiró obtained written proof of the complicity of the foreign managers with elements of the same concern who were operating mines in the Franco territory, to thwart production in the Loyalist areas. He thereupon attached the firm's holdings in the Republican territory, only to see Dr Negrín reverse his action as soon as the Largo Caballero government had fallen.⁷⁷

In another instance, potassium salt mines in Catalonia, which the workers had taken over when their managers abandoned them after July 19, the Catalan government at first sought to handle the export of the mines' products, only to have them seized through court actions in the countries to which they were shipped. The workers then turned to Peiró as the Republic's minister of industry. On the advice of Largo Caballero, rather than presenting a decree to the cabinet for seizure of the mines; and for the Republic to undertake

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the export of the potassium salts, he issued a ministerial order to that effect. Once again, as soon as the Largo Caballero government fell, that measure was cancelled.⁷⁸

In the case of the lead-mining industry, where a private consortium had been manipulating prices, Peiró got from the cabinet a decree establishing a national lead commission, 'in which were represented all the interests of lead mining, and in which all the workers had participation', to handle the sale of lead both in the country and abroad. However, in spite of cabinet approval, Peiró was unable to get the commission into operation, because minister Juan Negrín refused to discuss with Peiró the financing of the work of the commission, as had been provided for in the decree.⁷⁹

Finally, Peiró had problems of another sort, when it came to the electric-power industry. As he reported in his Valencia speech after leaving office:

These, from the beginning had been intervened by the Ministry of Industry, but in such a platonic manner that we can assure you that the intervention didn't resolve anything. The direction and administration of this industrial wealth has always been in the hands of the trade union organizations, but since these industries are one of the few prosperous industries left in Spain, that same prosperity has been precisely what has drawn the attention not only of the municipalities, but of the civil governors – the CNT has no Civil Governor – who wished to provincialize, who wished to municipalize industries which, if anything should be done to them, should be nationalized.

For this reason, to avoid a conflict which was brewing, between the trade union organizations and the Municipal Councils and Civil Governors, I had to issue, in the last days of my being a Minister, an order which provided that those electrical industries would continue in the hands of the trade union organizations, since so far, these had given evidence of sufficient capacity to administer and direct these industries. What I was going to do now was precisely to nationalize the electric industry; to nationalize it in the only form which we workers can accept.⁸⁰

Peiró summed up his experience as minister: 'I can tell you that every initiative presented by the Minister of Industry was met with very cordial sabotage, very friendly, but sabotage none the less. Many things remained to be carried out, because we did not have the means necessary to realize them.'⁸¹

Juan López as Minister of Commerce

If Juan Negrín was the nemesis of Juan Peiró as minister of industry, he was similarly the principal handicap to Juan López, in trying to carry out his role as minister of commerce. As the introduction in the pamphlet containing López's speech on his experience as minister delivered shortly after leaving office noted, 'Our comrade was charged with ... the effort to orient the reconstruction of the foreign commerce of Spain ... but his activities were subordinated entirely to the Finances of the Republic. And the Ministry of Finance, controlled by a Socialist of the right wing of the party – Dr Negrín, the present head of the Government – provided absolutely no facilities to reconstruct the commerce of our country in accordance with the new orientations in the life of Spain.'⁸²

In his speech, López sketched what it was that he sought to do about the country's foreign commerce: 'We, interpreting the spirit of the Spanish revolution ... wanted to establish the monopoly of foreign trade setting up, through the state organization, through the State, necessary control to guarantee that that policy of monopoly of foreign commerce would not be carried out for the exclusive benefit of one sector of the working class. But we at the same time defended the point of view that if it was true that the State had to supervise all that organization, the workers' unions should have control of the functioning of the monopoly, it should be in the hands of those who had in their power the instruments and direction of all of the apparatus of production ...'

However, López made it clear that he did not succeed in the objective the CNT had set with regard to foreign trade: 'In spite of our willingness to compromise it was not possible for the criterion brought forward by us to become a basis for the unification of the

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Spanish economy, to win out in the Government . . . The opposition to all of the projects, to all the advances which could have been realized in the economy, was closed and systematic on the part of those elements which represented interests contrary to the working class and which put themselves at the service of the high interests of capitalism.⁸³

Later in his speech he pinpointed, although without naming them, the Communists as particularly responsible for the frustration of the work of the anarchist ministers: 'There is in Spain a party that is not autochthonous, which is a delegation of another country, and that Party is the agent, which in an active way lends itself to serving interests contrary to those of the working class.'⁸⁴

In at least one case, López was able to give informal support to the trade unions' international economic activities. This was with regard to the agency which the CNT and UGT had organized in the Levante area to export citrus fruits from the region. During the 1936-7 harvest season it operated as principal exporter of those products from the region, with the backing of López's ministry. However, when he sought to get the cabinet officially to grant it a monopoly of that part of Spain's foreign commerce, he encountered strong resistance from the more conservative elements in the government, and as a consequence withdrew his proposed decree for 'further study'. However, that 'study' had not been completed by the time the Largo Caballero government was ousted.

But all of Juan López's problems as minister of commerce did not come from the CNT's opponents in the Largo Caballero government. Some of the most serious ones came from the autonomous governments of the Basque region and Catalonia. As López told me many years later, there were in various Spanish embassies individuals representing those areas, and frequently he found that they would be competing with the representatives of the national government. This was particularly the case with imports, where they would in some cases be trying to get many of the same things that the national government was trying to obtain.

Catalonia, of which López was a native, was a particularly serious problem for him. It traded virtually as an independent country during the 1936-7 period. The Catalan government had seized the

reserves in Catalonia of the Bank of Spain and was using these funds to buy what they needed. López tried to coordinate the Catalan activities with those of the rest of Spain, but he ran into a great deal of difficulty.

Another of López's tasks was to work out trade agreements with the country's principal trading partners. He succeeded in getting some kind of agreements with the French and the British. However, his efforts with the Russians were less successful. He started negotiations with the Russian commercial attaché, who was in fact a leading figure in the GPU, the Soviet secret police. Those negotiations bore little fruit, the Soviet official using the occasion to carry on a tirade against the Spaniards, saying that they were taking advantage of the Russians, and arguing that the Russians were selling a great deal more to Spain than the Spaniards had to sell to Russia. Of course, the fact was that the Russians by then had control of most of the Spanish gold reserves, arranged between the Soviet commercial attaché and the minister of finance, Juan Negrín.⁸⁵

Federica Montseny a Minister of Health and Social Welfare

The fourth of the CNT members of Francisco Largo Caballero's cabinet, Federica Montseny, presided over a ministry 'which had not existed'. As she noted in her speech reporting on her ministerial experience, soon after leaving office, 'it was made up of remnants, a piece from labor, another from Interior ... The question is that a Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was made which had not existed.'⁸⁶

She was one of the ministers who was stopped on the way to Valencia by CNT militiamen after the cabinet's decision to leave Madrid. Perhaps for this reason, she returned to Madrid almost as soon as she got to Valencia, and spent about two weeks there before going back to the provisional capital to organize her ministry.

Montseny's experience was, if anything, only a little less frustrating than that of the other CNT ministers. For one thing, her ministry

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included within its scope a number of quite heterogeneous responsibilities, which involved her in keeping track of innumerable small details rather than (for the most part) broad policy. Among the questions with which she dealt were orphanages; hospices for reformed prostitutes; making a census of refugees from the parts of Spain occupied by the Franco forces, and trying to organize their resettlement; organization of rehabilitation centers for people wounded in battle or at work; the establishment of rest homes for shell-shocked troops; the accumulation and storing of adequate supplies of drugs and pharmaceuticals; prevention of epidemics and the administration of existing civilian hospitals.

Montseny organized the work of her ministry under two councils, those of health, and social welfare, composed in each case of one representative each of the CNT and the UGT, and a secretary-general. In February 1937, what had formerly been a refugee council was merged into her council of social welfare. She tried to reduce the bureaucratic structure of the ministry to only what was absolutely required, and noted: 'I suppressed almost all of the high posts.'⁸⁷

Minister Montseny apparently presented less proposals for the approval of the cabinet than did the other CNT ministers. She recorded that one of the few projects for which she was able to get cabinet approval was one incorporating within the council of social welfare all existing private charitable and welfare organizations in the Republic.⁸⁸

Like the other CNT ministers, she ran into strong resistance from other elements in the government: 'I did not have Decrees to propose; I had many things to do, things which were not political, things that didn't damage interests, things that did not transform the concept of the economy, things that did not revolutionize the laws or the jurisprudence of Spain. And, in spite of that, the obstaculization was systematic. Where they could take away a building, they took it from me; where they could deny me a right, they denied it; where they could impede me, they impeded me. It was systematic and permanent opposition.'⁸⁹

Like her CNT colleagues, she had particular problems with Minister of Finance Juan Negrín, who refused her adequate funds. For instance, he would make available only 5,000,000 pesetas to

take care of 1,500,000 refugees: 'With these five million we had to house them, feed them, build an organization that did not exist, we had to incorporate them in local and provincial life...'⁹⁰ Negrín refused to make available even the 25,000 French francs needed by two delegates of her ministry who were keeping track of installations for Spanish refugee children who had been evacuated to France.⁹¹

She also had problems with other unfriendly ministers. Thus, Minister of Education Jesús Hernández, a Communist, refused to provide schools for groups of children's homes that she had organized for orphans.⁹²

Many years later, Federica Montseny told me that although she had not been able to do a great deal as minister, she thought that she had accomplished something. She particularly mentioned the incorporation of her ministry with that of defense in building hospitals for wounded soldiers, her reorganization of the orphanage system, and the establishment of homes for mendicants and prostitutes, where they were trained for useful work and were helped in acquiring it.⁹³

The CNT Ministers and Largo Caballero

One of the most significant aspects of the anarchists' participation in the cabinet of Largo Caballero was the growing alliance of the four CNT cabinet members and the prime minister and the few Socialist cabinet ministers and sub-ministers loyal to him. By the early months of 1937 there was a clear division within the government between the anarchists and Largo Caballero Socialists on the one hand and the Communists, Right-wing Socialists, and Republicans on the other.

From a historical viewpoint, the CNT-Caballerista alliance might appear strange. Virtually since 1917, Largo Caballero had been a bitter opponent of the CNT. During the Primo de Rivera dictatorship he had served on the Council of State while the CNT was driven deeply underground. During the first two years of the Republic, Largo Caballero had used his position of minister of labor strongly to favor his own Unión General de Trabajadores against the CNT. In the months preceding the Civil War he had seemed to be the favorite of the Communists, who dubbed him 'the Spanish Lenin'.

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However, the gravitation of Largo Caballero towards the CNT ministers is probably principally explained by his growing revulsion against both the role of the Spanish Communist Party, and of Russian military, diplomatic and other officials after the beginning of substantial Soviet military aid early in his administration. As we shall see in a later chapter, that revulsion also sealed his doom as prime minister.

Juan García Oliver, in his memoirs, touched on the growing rapprochement between the CNTers and Francisco Largo Caballero. Although there had been specific issues earlier on which the prime minister had supported CNT positions, García Oliver reported that he first sensed a general shift in Largo Caballero's position at a meeting between the two men, which must have taken place right at the beginning of 1937, to discuss the problem of the presence of political commissars in the officers' training schools which García Oliver had organized, the details of which I have outlined in an earlier chapter. García Oliver wrote of this incident:

We said good bye with an affection which had not existed before. I experienced a sudden excitement, I thought that Largo Caballero had initiated with me a notable change, expression of a wish to move closer to the anarchosyndicalists, which presumed his separation from the Communists and Soviets.

Under this impression I went to the National Committee. I told Marianet what had occurred. We agreed that, confidentially he would draw up a memorandum on the motives of the approach to us of Largo Caballero and the UGT and their separation from the Communist Party and the Soviets. Because if this progressed we might achieve an effective trade union entente to assure that Spanish interests would prevail over foreign interference.⁹⁴

At about the same time, Juan López was developing good relations with other pro-Caballero Socialist leaders. García Oliver noted that by February 1937, 'Juan López, by his contacts with Baraibar and other Caballerista Socialists converged with the work of approximation with Largo Caballero in which I was engaged.'⁹⁵

Juan López himself told me that soon after becoming sub-secretary of defense, Carlos de Baraibar had approached him to try to reach some agreement between the Caballeristas and the CNTers. The two men worked out the basis for a CNT–UGT pact, which would have gone far towards unifying the two groups. Furthermore, this proposed CNT–UGT agreement was designed to counteract an accord recently reached between Right-wing elements in the Socialist Party and the leaders of the Communist Party looking to the eventual unification of the Socialist and Communist parties. However, the details of the CNT–UGT agreement had not been settled before the May Events of 1937 which precipitated the fall of the Largo Caballero government.⁹⁶

In February 1937, the anarchist leaders became aware of a meeting of Largo Caballero with a number of his Socialist supporters, including Angel Galarza, the minister of interior; Rodolfo Llopi, secretary to the prime minister; and Carlos de Baraibar, sub-secretary of war, among others. They met to discuss ‘the iron ring of the Communist Party and the Soviets’. According to García Oliver, Largo Caballero even suggested the possibility that he resign and that García Oliver succeed him, as ‘the man capable of controlling the Communists, International Brigades, Commissariat...’ However, whether or not Largo Caballero seriously considered the possibility of him and his followers supporting the anarchist leader to take his place, García Oliver observed that ‘they didn’t dare to act against the other sectors of the PSOE and the UGT’.⁹⁷

In any case, it is clear that during the last four and a half months of the government of Largo Caballero, the prime minister’s strongest allies, aside from the shrinking Caballerista faction within the Socialist Party and the PSOE, were the anarchists. After the fall of his government, his presence at the public speech of Federica Montseny recounting her experiences in his cabinet was symbolic evidence of the alliance.

Russian Overtures to Anarchist Ministers

During their tenure, the four anarchist ministers were frequently

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approached by the Soviet representatives, seeking to influence their behavior and perhaps even their ideas. Many years later, Federica Montseny wrote to Burnett Bolloten:

The advice they gave us was always the same: it was necessary to establish in Spain a 'controlled democracy' (euphemistic term for a dictatorship); it was not advisable to create the impression that a profound revolution was being carried out; we should avoid awakening the suspicion of the democratic powers.

I never heard them utter a threatening word . . . When I went to Geneva in January and February of 1937 to attend the Congress of Hygiene, Rosenberg the Soviet ambassador urged me to go to Russia, saying, 'Comrade Stalin would be very happy to meet you. Go there, Federica! You will be received like a little queen.' The Russians never made any concrete offer that would have forced me to break relations with them. They were too subtle for that. But on various occasions, Rosenberg suggested that I send my daughter to Valencia to live with his wife and children in a villa they occupied on the outskirts. When I heard these suggestions the blood froze in my veins.⁹⁹

Ambassador Rosenberg was particularly assiduous in seeking out the friendship of Juan García Oliver, entertaining him alone at dinner on at least four occasions. The subject of their conversations was a good deal more serious than those with Federica Montseny, as I will indicate in a later chapter. The last of these dinner conversations took place the night before Rosenberg was to return home to Moscow, and to his death as a victim of Stalin's Great Purge. García Oliver sensed that Rosenberg felt that he was doomed.¹⁰⁰

Stalinist Attacks on the Anarchists

Whatever overtures the Russians may have made to the anarchist ministers, these did not prevent a growing campaign of the Stalinists against the anarchists. Certainly, one of the reasons for the anarchist entry into the Largo Caballero government had been to better protect

themselves against the Communists and their allies, but clearly this was at best only partly successful.

An article in *Solidaridad Obrera* of April 30 1937 made this clear.

Why does the Confederal Press arouse such hostility? What is happening to the Anarchist and confederal press is inexplicable. It is persecuted and constantly abused just like in the good times of the monarchy. Incredible but true. At the moment, two of our dailies are suspended and we don't even know the real motive for this. The papers are the *CNT of the North* in Bilbao, and *Nosotros* of Valencia. What are they trying to achieve by these suspensions? ... We are forced to the conclusion that it arouses hostility precisely because it is revolutionary.

At a Communist meeting they spoke of the chaos of the Catalan economy produced solely and exclusively by premature attempts at socialization; these words, spoken by one of the leading members of the Party which organized the meeting, are counter-revolutionary and aid the enemy who lies in wait...

The article went on to defend the collectives.¹⁰¹

Clearly, although not yet ready for an all-out confrontation with the anarchists, the Stalinists and their allies, even when the anarchists were still in the Republican government, were preparing the ground for attacks which would be launched after the Barcelona May Days.

the Balance of CNT Participation in the Largo Caballero Regime

At the time and for decades afterwards there was debate within the CNT and outside it on the advisability and efficacy of the anarchist participation in the Republican government. Soon after leaving the cabinet, Juan López said that the CNTers had had three basic objectives in entering it: to bring about the establishment of 'a Popular Army' capable of confronting Franco's forces; 'to bring about economic unity absolutely at the service of the war, to win it, so that the revolutionary conquests of the working class would not

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be frustrated.' He said that the CNT ministers had achieved the first two objectives, but that they could not be satisfied 'in so far as the unity of the Spanish economy to put it at the service of the war and as a guarantee of the revolutionary conquests made by the proletariat was concerned.'¹⁰²

Even Federica Montseny, who in exile headed the hard or more extremist faction of the Spanish anarchists, felt that the CNT participation in the government had been positive. She told me many years later that although she sometimes had thought that participation was a mistake, on balance she concluded that it was justified. She said that the CNT policy of being everywhere – in the army, in the economic organizations, in the government, certainly helped to prolong the War, helped to keep the faith of the people in it.¹⁰³

From outside the ranks of the anarchists, Rodolfo Llopis, the Socialist who served as secretary-general of the government under Largo Caballero, told me many years later that the anarchist ministers 'behaved very well'. He said that they were loyal to Largo Caballero, conscientious, 'very much ministers' and 'quite conservative'. To explain this last comment, Llopis said that it was the four anarchist ministers who first suggested to Largo Caballero the need to 'militarize' the militia, recognizing that the militia columns could not successfully fight the kind of war with which the Republic was faced.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the best assessment of what the anarchists accomplished in the Republican government is that of Horacio Prieto's son, César Lorenzo:

Just as the Republicans, Communists and right-wing Socialists, frustrated the CNT, the libertarians frustrated the Republicans, Communists and right-wing Socialists; they prevented their putting into effect reactionary laws and decrees. And it was just that work of obstruction which was really positive. Even if they could not do major things in their respective departments, their weight was immense in the Council of Ministers. They systematically protected the revolutionary conquests of the proletariat; they repelled all measures to restore their property to the former financiers and industrialists, they did not permit any

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attacks on the agrarian collectives and on the power of the unions, against social democracy and workers' self management...¹⁰⁵

The May Days in Barcelona

A civil war within the Spanish Civil War took place in Barcelona and other Catalan cities during the first week of May 1937. These May Days were the culmination of the first phase of the efforts of the Stalinists – including those of Spain, the Comintern and various parts of the Soviet State apparatus – to gain control over the Spanish Republic.

The Spanish anarchist writer Manuel Cruells was certainly correct when he wrote: ‘The May events in Barcelona represent a violent and bloody showdown between two different proletarian ideological concepts: Communism and Anarchism. All of the other elements which participated, in spite of propagandistic appearances, were simply supporting actors, or secondary elements in that struggle...’¹

The results of the events of that first week of May were extremely far reaching. There is no doubt about the fact that they seriously undermined the power, prestige and unity of the anarchists. It is also clear that they provided an opportunity for the Republican government to subvert the autonomy of the Catalan Generalidad. Even more significantly, the May Events provided the Communists with the excuse and opportunity to carry out their long-held plans to remove Francisco Largo Caballero as prime minister and minister of defense, and to replace him with a loyal fellow-traveller whose subservience to them would continue until the end of the war and even beyond.

In the same process, the Communists succeeded in removing not

only the anarchists but all other elements which stood in the way of their control of the governments of both the Republic and Catalonia. Finally, the Communists also were able to capitalize on the May Days to bring about the outlawing of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM), and to mount a massive campaign of intimidation, censorship, persecution, and even murder of the anarchists, Caballero Socialists, and all other elements which stood in the way of their complete domination of Republican Spain.

However, as we shall see in other chapters, for all their resources and their efforts, the Stalinists were never able to eliminate the anarchists as the single most popular and most numerous element in Loyalist Spain, or to completely end anarchist control of a large part of the economy and of key elements in the armed forces. Indeed, the May Days may have served as a warning to the Communists of the dangers of an open confrontation with the CNT-FAI, something which they did not attempt again until a few days before the end of the Spanish Civil War.

The events of the May Days have been hotly debated ever since. However, what actually transpired seems relatively clear. Less apparent are the exact motives of the various actors in the drama of those days, and what each group involved thought that it was trying to achieve.

The May Days in the Streets of Barcelona²

The anarchist writer Manuel Cruells has noted the degree of tension which preceded the May Days. 'On the 1st and 2nd of May, in Barcelona all the political and trade union organizations "stood at arms", as if they were in the first line of fire, each group behind its own trench, waiting the order to attack. Special care was taken in their respective headquarters and all reinforced their guards. All mutually controlled the movements of the others, and possible concentrations of men and material...'³

George Orwell, who was on a rest leave in Barcelona after spending several months on the Aragón front with the POUM's 29th

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Division, reported later on how he saw the beginning of the May Days:

About midday on 3 May a friend crossing the lounge of the hotel said casually: 'There's been some kind of trouble at the Telephone Exchange, I hear.' For some reason I paid no attention to it at the time... That afternoon, between three and four, I was halfway down the Ramblas when I heard several rifle-shots behind me. I turned round and saw some youths, with rifles in their hands and the red and black handkerchiefs of the Anarchists round their throats, edging up a side-street that ran off of the Ramblas northward. They were evidently exchanging shots with someone in a tall octagonal tower – a church, I think – that commanded the side-street. I thought instantly: 'It's started!' But I thought it without any very great feeling of surprise – for days past everyone had been expecting 'it' to start at any moment.⁴

George Orwell's 'it' had in fact begun 'about three o'clock in the afternoon' when three truckloads of police under the command of Eusebio Rodríguez Salas, the director of public security of Catalonia, and a member of the Stalinist Partido Socialista Unificado de Catalunya (PSUC), arrived in front of the Telephone Building on the Plaza de Cataluña in the middle of the city. He presented an order signed by Artemio Aiguade, Catalan councillor of the interior, and a fellow-travelling member of the Catalan Left Party, ordering the workers to turn over control of the Telephone Building to Rodríguez Salas and the police.

Like all of the other public utilities of the city and region, the telephone company had been under workers' control since July 19 1936. At the time the May Days began, it was being run by a workers' control committee, with a majority of CNT members (reflecting the CNT's strength among the workers) and a minority of UGT members, and presided over by a representative of the Catalan government, organized in conformity with the Catalan collectivization decree. Therefore, Rodríguez Salas's order that the workers surrender the main telephone exchange of the region to him was quite out of the ordinary.

Without hesitation, Rodríguez Salas ordered his men to enter the building and to disarm all of the workers in it. There, as in all of the public and public utility buildings in the city, there had been a certain number of arms kept, 'to protect against the fascists'. The police succeeded in disarming the workers on the ground floor of La Telefónica.

However, as soon as the workers in the upper floors of the building realized what was happening down below, they resisted, opening fire on the police on the first floor. Since their armament included at least one machine-gun, the workers were soon able to make their point, and the police ceased their efforts to gain control of the upper floors of the Telephone Building, which continued to remain in the hands of the workers for some days.⁵

According to Rudolf Rocker's account of these events, the attack on La Telefónica was almost immediately followed 'in the streets adjacent to the Telefónica' by 'the eruption of armed forces of the PSUC which began quickly to raise barricades'.⁶ Although no one else I have consulted offers that information, all sources agree that the attack on La Telefónica and the resultant shooting in the building were the spark which lit a flame of popular reaction throughout the city.

Augustine Souchy has described what happened as the news of the attack on the Telephone Building spread throughout Barcelona:

Workers and police ran about excitedly in every section of the city. The union headquarters were full of people. Everybody wanted arms. Everybody wanted to be ready to defend other buildings from similar assaults... It was impossible to stem the indignation of the masses.

A few hours later, the entire city of Barcelona was in arms. The workers occupied a number of houses near Plaza Catalonia, but retired soon after. The police were concentrated near the police prefecture. The Catalan Minister of Interior, Artemio Aiguade, was with the police and behind the whole action. With him were the masses of the armed Catalan Nationalists (*Estat Catalá*), and the militants of the PSUC...

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Meanwhile, rank and file local anarchist groups in various parts of the city went into action. Augustine Souchy, wrote soon after the events: 'From the dungeons of dictatorship until today, the CNT and the FAI have always had their defense committees. These committees began to function at once, their members taking up arms.'⁷ However, Manuel Cruells has noted that most of the arms involved were small arms and hand grenades and that in spite of Stalinist propaganda to the effect that the CNT had been hoarding rifles, relatively few were in evidence when the May Events began.⁸

Diego Abad de Santillán described the situation within a few hours of the commencement of the popular outburst: 'The libertarian popular forces dominated the outlying areas, and the centers of resistance of the Communists and Esquerra were reduced to a center on Claris Street and the Diagonal, to various buildings on the Paseo de Gracia and the Plaza de Cataluña, to the Puerta del Angel and the headquarters of the Catalan Government.'⁹

The Communists also continued to hold the Carlos Marx Barracks. The man, who at the time was secretary of the Libertarian Youth in Catalonia and who participated in the siege of those barracks, said many years later that the anarchists manned barricades around the Communist stronghold, and that the Communists had only shotguns, whereas the CNTers had a machine-gun and even a cannon at their disposal. He insisted that the anarchists could easily have seized the Carlos Marx Barracks, but that they had been under orders from their leaders not to shoot at the Communist troops – who did not reciprocate, but fired at the barricades from time to time. Finally, also on orders of their leaders, the anarchists withdrew from their barricades several days later.¹⁰

Augustine Souchy described what happened in the working-class wards surrounding the center of the city:

In Saria some hundreds of workers armed themselves, constructing a barricade and disarming the civil guards with their consent. No blood was spilled. The workers were masters of the situation.

In the Sans ward ... the workers met, particularly the

Libertarian Youth, in their Ateneo, and established emergency refuges in the interior of their buildings. But there was no fighting. In the Hostafranchs ward the workers constructed barricades on the night of May 3–4. The civil guard were disarmed, also without a fight. The bull ring which was nearby was occupied by the militiamen who were on vacation in Barcelona. On L rida Street, 300 civil guards turned over their arms to the workers.¹¹

No fighting took place in the outer districts of the city, partly because the police were on the side of the workers, and partly because the workers were in such absolute majority that resistance seemed futile.¹²

The POUM maintained that it was not only the workers of the CNT who arose in protest. In a pamphlet published in 1938 the POUM said: ‘Many workers of the UGT were behind the barricades of May together with the other workers... The strike was unanimously supported and it didn’t occur to any organization to break it.’¹³

However, the eruption was not confined to outlying or even nearby working-class districts. There were also large parts of the center of the city where arms were distributed and barricades were constructed, to protect buildings from an attempt by the police to seize them.

George Orwell described the situation in the late afternoon and evening of May 3 on the Ramblas, the wide street running down from the Plaza de Catalu na towards the port area. He noted that, as he walked down the Ramblas towards the Hotel Falc n, ‘a sort of boarding-house maintained by the POUM and used chiefly by militiamen on leave ... a lorry raced past us from the opposite direction. It was full of Anarchists with rifles in their hands. In front a ragged youth was lying on a pile of mattresses behind a light machine-gun. When we got to the Hotel Falc n, which was at the bottom of the Ramblas, a crowd of people was seething in the entrance-hall; there was great confusion, nobody seemed to know what we were expected to do, and nobody was armed except the handful of Shock Troopers who usually acted as guards for the building.’

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Orwell went across the street to the headquarters of the local committee of the POUM. 'Upstairs in the room where militiamen normally went to draw their pay, another crowd was seething. A tall, pale, rather handsome man of about thirty, in civilian clothes, was trying to restore order and handing out belts and cartridge boxes from a pile in the corner. There seemed to be no rifles yet... Presently, from an inner office, the tall man and some others began bringing out armfuls of rifles and handing them around...'¹⁴

A few hours later, after Orwell returned from finding supper, he found: 'They had placed armed guards at most of the windows, and in the street below a little group of Shock Troopers were stopping and questioning the few passers-by. An Anarchist patrol car drove up, bristling with weapons...'¹⁵

There can be little doubt about the spontaneity of the reaction of rank-and-file anarchists and POUMists throughout Barcelona to the attack on La Telefónica. If any other evidence were needed to demonstrate that the movement was not something planned by the leaders of the POUM and CNT, there was the fact that both *La Batalla*, the POUM newspaper, and *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT daily, were located in areas which were not controlled by the revolting workers, and nothing had been done in either case either to afford armed protection for them, or to move the periodicals before the outbreak occurred.¹⁶

However, Juan García Oliver raised the question in his autobiography many years later, as to whether during the first day at least, the CNTistas at the various barricades and other resistance centers were not receiving encouragement and perhaps direction from Julian Merino, a leader of the CNT port workers' union. García Oliver noted that soon after his arrival in Barcelona on May 4, when he tried to use the public phone in the CNT-FAI regional headquarters, it was tied up by Merino, who was having a long series of conversations with different people. However, García Oliver was told by officials of the regional organization that Merino had not been given any assignment in the situation and that CNT-FAI headquarters had so far not been able to establish any continuing contact with the various anarchist barricades and other centers.¹⁷

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One thing that is clear is that elements of the Libertarian Youth were particularly involved in the popular anarchist reaction against the attempted seizure of La Telefónica. Many years later, Fidel Miró, who in May 1937 was head of the Libertarian Youth, said that they were 'the core' of the anarchist resistance in most of Barcelona. He noted that teenage members of the Youth were particularly prominent in patrolling parts of the city with home-made bombs around their belts, and were very effective in confronting the PSUC elements and police associated with them.¹⁸

Starting a few hours after the outbreak of the conflict, negotiations began between both regional and national leaders of the CNT-FAI on the one hand, and the Catalan government and PSUC on the other. Within hours, the CNT-FAI leaders were calling for their followers to 'Lay Down Your Arms!' However, the conflict ebbed and flowed for more than three days before it finally was halted.

Augustine Souchy noted that on May 4, 'During the early hours of the morning the shooting started in the center of the city. The Palace of Justice was occupied by the police. Fighting centers sprang up everywhere. A few headquarters of the CNT were seized by the police.'¹⁹ Also, according to Souchy, 'At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, an exceptionally cruel and bloody incident occurred on Via Durruti, not far from Casa CNT-FAI, headquarters of the Regional Committee of these two organizations. Two cars were coming up the street from the direction of the docks to get to the Regional Committee. Some 300 meters away from the Casa, a barricade of Catalan city guards and members of the PSUC, with red bands tied around their arms, was located. As the cars approached this barricade, they were ordered to stop and surrender their weapons. As they were descending from their cars to carry out the order, they were shot down by volleys of rifle fire...'²⁰

The CNT-FAI regional headquarters was actually located right in the middle of the area, running from the Plaza de Cataluña to the Plaza del Angel, which was the principal stronghold of the police and PSUC forces. It was clear that it was a likely target of attack by those forces. Thus, Souchy commented: 'As it became apparent that the police not only did not intend to stop the hostilities, but were

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actually preparing to attack the headquarters of the Regional Committee itself, the Defense Committee decided to order two armored cars from the arms factories for the defense of the Casa and its inmates. They arrived during the evening, and for the duration of hostilities, were held ready for defense.²¹

George Orwell also described the events of May 4, the second day of the fighting, in the Ramblas area, where he was stationed. He noted that next to the POUM headquarters, 20 to 30 civil guards had seized control of the Café Moka and barricaded themselves inside it. After some random shooting, a kind of *modus vivendi* was worked out between them and the POUMistas.²²

Soon afterwards, Georges Kopp, a Belgian militiaman from the POUM division who, like Orwell himself, was on leave from the front, 'took me upstairs again and explained the situation. We had got to defend the POUM buildings if they were attacked, but the POUM leaders had sent instructions that we were to stand on the defensive and not open fire if we could possibly avoid it.'²³

Kopp also explained that the POUMists had occupied a theater across the street from the Café Moka, the Poliorama, with 'a small observatory with twin domes. The domes commanded the street, and a few men posted there with rifles could prevent any attack on the POUM buildings... As for the Civil Guards in the Café Moka, there would be no trouble with them; they did not want to fight and would be only too glad to live and let live.' Orwell added: 'The next three days and nights I spent continuously on the roof of the Poliorama, except for brief intervals when I slipped across to the hotel for meals...'²⁴

Orwell also had a graphic general description of the situation in the center of the city, not only on May 4 but until the fighting finally ended:

The whole huge town of a million people was locked in a sort of violent inertia, a nightmare of noise without movement. The sunlit streets were quite empty. Nothing was happening except the streaming of bullets from barricades and sand-bagged windows. Not a vehicle was stirring in the streets; here and

there along the Ramblas the trams stood motionless where their drivers had jumped out of them when the fighting started. And all the while the devilish noise, echoing from thousands of stone buildings, went on and on and on, like a tropical rainstorm. Crack-crack, rattle-rattle, roar – and sometimes it died away to a few shots, sometimes it quickened to a deafening fusillade, but it never stopped while the daylight lasted, and punctually next dawn it started again.²⁵

On May 5, in spite of continuing negotiations, the fighting continued. Augustine Souchy observed:

At 9.30 in the morning the assault guards offered a new provocation. They attacked the headquarters of the Medical Union at Santa Ana Square in the center of the city. At the same time they attacked, with greater fury, the headquarters of the Local Federation of the Libertarian Youth. The youth defended themselves heroically. Six young Anarchists were killed in defense of their House...

When, in the afternoon, the hostilities still continued, the Defense Committee decided to call for three more armored cars to defend the threatened Union Headquarters. They came within a few hours to the Casa CNT-FAI. They were put into action only to aid and support endangered unions and comrades...²⁶

On May 5 there also occurred one of the most notorious murders of anarchists to take place during the May Days. This was the assassination of Camilo Berneri and his colleague Barbieri. Berneri was at the time the best-known Italian anarchist, and had come to Spain after July 19, to help organize an international group as part of the CNT-FAI militia. He had established an Italian paper *Guerra di Classe* in Barcelona, and had strongly opposed CNT-FAI compromises with anarchist principles during the early months of the Civil War. He had also denounced what he saw of the political blackmail which the Russians were engaging in in return for their military aid to the Republic.²⁷

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Augustine Souchy described the circumstances of the 'arrest' of Berneri and Barbieri and their subsequent murder:

When the hostilities started, Berneri was in his house with his friend, Barbieri, also a well-known Anarchist. With them were the wife of Barbieri and Tosca Pantini, widow of an Italian militiaman, fallen on the Aragón front. The house of the Italians was encircled by Catalan city guards and members of the PSUC, wearing red arm bands with their party insignia on them. On the morning of Tuesday, May 4th, the Catalan and Communist guards came to the house and told the Italian Anarchists to be careful because there was a lot of shooting in the neighborhood. There was another visit in the afternoon for the purpose of registering the house and confiscating the arms, which belonged to Italian militiamen on leave in Barcelona. The next day, Wednesday, May 5th, at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, Berneri and Barbieri were taken away by 12 guards, half of them city police and the other half members of the PSUC, as evidenced by their red arm bands... Both men were shot during the following night, by machine guns, as the autopsy proved. It was cold-blooded murder, since both men were unarmed. The murder was committed near the Palace of the Generality. Soon after the bodies of the two Anarchists were delivered at the morgue of the Hospital Clinico. The lists show that the Red Cross found both bodies near the Generality.²⁸

Beneri's apartment was located only two or three blocks from the Generalidad, where their bodies were found.

The fighting continued on May 6. Two major events in the struggle took place that day, the evacuation of the Telephone Building by the CNTers who were there, and the attack by police and PSUC militiamen on the city's principal railroad station, until then in the hands of the anarchists.

In spite of an appeal by the local federations of both the CNT and UGT for their members to return to work, 'Work was not resumed any place. The police continued in their hostile attitude and fortified

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their positions further during the night with the obvious intention of extending the struggle... The streets presented a calmer picture on Thursday morning. The center of the old city was still like a fortress. Some horse carts were already making their appearance on the wider streets, and an occasional pedestrian could be seen. The tramlines, destroyed during the fighting, were being repaired.²⁹

However, peace had by no means returned. Augustine Souchy described the incident at La Telefónica:

The situation inside the Telephone Building had become rather strange. The workers in the upper storeys and the assault guards arranged an armistice. They allowed the workers to receive food, the first since Monday. The discussions among the workers, who belonged both to the CNT and the UGT, still continued. To end these discussions and to show their willingness to restore peace, the members of the CNT agreed to leave the building at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The Assault Guards were supposed to leave also. However, instead of leaving that part of the building which they had occupied earlier in the week, the Assault Guards proceeded to occupy the entire building, and brought in members of the UGT to take over the posts of the CNT workers. The members of the CNT saw that they had been betrayed and immediately informed the Regional Committee. The Regional Committee intervened with the government... Half an hour later the Generality replied; the *fait accompli* cannot be recalled...³⁰

Souchy has also described the attack on the railroad station, the Estacion de Francia. He noted that it began an hour after the CNTers had left La Telefónica and that the assault guards attacked from one side; the PSUC from the Karl Marx Barracks on the other. The workers could no longer depend on the telephone. The atmosphere in the center of the city became tense. Bombs exploded. Rifle and machine-gun fire broke the silence of the metropolis.³¹

However, George Orwell noticed one aspect of the situation by May 6 which may have been a major factor in finally bringing the fighting to a halt. This was the pressing shortage of food. Referring

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to the Hotel Continental, where his wife remained, and where he himself sometimes dined during the days of the crisis, he wrote: 'There was, however, practically nothing to eat. On that Thursday night the principal dish at dinner was *one* sardine each. The hotel had no bread for days and even the wine was running so low that we were drinking older and older wines at higher and higher prices. This shortage of food went on for several days after the fighting was over.'³²

The struggle ended on May 7. 'Barcelona had undergone an almost complete change. True to their agreement, the workers had left the barricades. In many places the barricades had already been torn down, They had withdrawn from the buildings. But they were keeping their arms.'³³

Orwell has also described what happened on May 7: 'The next day it did really look as though the fighting was coming to an end... By the afternoon the streets were almost normal, though the deserted barricades were still standing. The Ramblas was thronged with people, the shops nearly all open, and – most reassuring of all – the trams that had stood so long in frozen blocks jerked into motion and began running...'³⁴

The May Days in Other Parts of Catalonia

The May Days events were by no means restricted to Barcelona. As soon as news of the outbreak of hostilities reached some of the provincial cities, anarchists and POUMists took 'preventive' measures. In other cases, fighting broke out on the third day of the conflict, for somewhat the same reasons that it had commenced in Barcelona.

According to Víctor Alba: 'In the towns there was spontaneously created unity of action. Cenetista and Poumista militants, for example, preventatively occupied the headquarters of the PSUC and Estat Catalá of Tarragona and of Gerona. In Lérida, they controlled the city.'³⁵ He added that later, 'In Gerona and Lérida, where the POUM was dominant, nothing happened. The PSUCistas were nowhere to be seen and the police remained in their barracks.'³⁶

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In one curious case, on May 6, the regional committee of the CNT got news that the Catalan Nationalists and PSUC had taken over the village of San Juan, not far from Barcelona. Then, according to Augustine Souchy, 'The armed workers of the CNT and the FAI entered the village, disarmed the enemy and liberated their comrades. In the open village square they had to answer for their actions. They were warned not to take up arms again against the people. *Then the anarchists set their enemies free again.*'³⁷

In other provincial cities, the events of the May Days were much more serious from the point of view of the anarchists. According to Charles Semprun-Maura, 'The bloody combats of Tarragona and Tortosa had the same beginning as those of Barcelona. On May 5, at eight in the morning the police presented themselves at the buildings of La Telefónica of both cities which, as in Barcelona, were run by a CNT-UGT Committee of Control. The occupation of the buildings of the Telephone Company by the police were the signal for combat.' Having occupied the telephone building in Tarragona, the police disconnected the phones of the CNT and FAI.

Four hours after the seizure of the Tarragona telephone exchange, a representative of the telephone workers met with the local military commander, a lieutenant-colonel. It was agreed between them that the police would retire to the vestibule of the telephone building, leaving the rest of it to the workers – but this agreement was rejected by the local police commander. Meanwhile, the local headquarters of the Esquerra Catalana and the PSUC were handing out arms to their followers.

In the morning of May 6, the Tarragona headquarters of the Libertarian Youth were assaulted, but the attackers were driven off. Later, at 6 p.m. the Youth headquarters was again attacked, this time successfully.

Meanwhile, the local delegate of the central government, air force Captain Barbeta, demanded that the anarchists of Tarragona surrender all of their arms. After much argument, they finally did so. The next morning, at 3 a.m., the local office of the Catalan defense councillor was invaded by the police, after which there was a widespread roundup of anarchists, some 15 of them were murdered.

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All of these events were reported several days later in *Solidaridad Obrera*, although the article reporting them was severely censored.³⁸

In Tortosa, after the seizure of the telephone exchange, severe street fighting broke out. The anarchists were victorious in this, but soon afterwards, the column of Assault Guards sent by the central government to Barcelona, stopped long enough in Tortosa to 'restore order'. As a consequence, headquarters of the CNT and FAI were raided, a number of local anarchist leaders were arrested, and their bodies were later discovered on the highways.³⁹

Similar events occurred elsewhere. In La Cenia, in the province of Tortosa, 200 Assault Guards occupied the town. The headquarters of the CNT and the Libertarian Youth were sacked, and eight leaders were arrested. Thereafter, as a later official report of the CNT said, 'The collectivized firms were dissolved, their headquarters occupied by troops with aid of Republican-bourgeois elements and militants of the PSUC. The action was directed against the economic conquests of the proletariat.' Forty anarchists were arrested and taken to Tortosa. A number of these were picked up in raids, on their private homes.

In a number of other towns similar events transpired during the May Days. These towns included Ametlla del Mar, Villatalan, Amposta, Bejia and Vic.⁴⁰

The Role of Anarchist Leaders in May Days Events

Almost as soon as the outbreak in Barcelona began on the afternoon of May 3, the local and regional anarchist leaders sought negotiations with Catalan President Luis Companys and with leaders of the Catalan Left and PSUC to bring the conflict to an end. They were joined the next two days by national leaders of both CNT and FAI, and negotiations continued until the early hours of May 7, when an 'agreement' was finally reached. Meanwhile, the anarchist leaders made frequent appeals to their followers – as well as to those on the other side – to cease fire.

Apparently, the first move of the anarchist leaders was for the 'president of the police, Comrade Eroles, the general secretary of the

Patrols, Comrade Asens, and Comrade Díaz', to go to La Telefónica to try to convince the Assault Guards who had invaded the building to leave it. However, as Augustine Souchy noted, 'The effort of our three comrades came to naught.

Thereupon, Valerio Mass then secretary of the CNT regional committee, headed a delegation to confer with Premier José Tarradellas and the Councillor of the Interior, Artemio Aiguade, and requested that the police be withdrawn from the Telephone Building. According to Augustine Souchy, 'Tarradellas as well as Aiguade assured them that they knew nothing about the incident of the Telephone Building. But it was to be proven later that Aiguade had himself given the order for its occupation.'

Manuel Muñoz Díez, who was a member of this delegation, reported many years later: 'An agreement was reached between the CNT and the Catalan government: that the Libertarian movement would be left with the positions from which it had been attempted to dislodge them...' However, he added, 'Those interested in having the conflict continue paid no attention to the orders of the Generalidad, and the struggle was generalized throughout the city.'⁴¹

José Peirats noted that the anarchist members of the Catalan government demanded that Artemio Aiguder resign and Rodríguez Salas be dismissed for having acted illegally in trying to seize La Telefónica, but that President Companys stubbornly refused these demands. Manuel Cruell noted many years later that 'all my investigations confirmed that version of Peirats... If President Companys had at that moment taken an energetic attitude, as he had done on other occasions, and had dismissed his Councillor of Interior and Commissary General of Public Order, as he logically should have done, there would not have been that bloody week in Barcelona. Certainly the Communists, who had begun the affair, wanted a conflict, and pressured the President of the Generalidad, but possibly they would have obeyed the wishes of President Companys, evidently not willingly, but they would have obeyed him. At that moment it was not in their interest to oppose them.'⁴²

Soon after Valerio Mas's interview with Tarradellas and Aiguader, the regional committee of the CNT 'announced by radio that they would do everything possible to compel the police to withdraw from

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the building. The workers were asked to maintain their calm and dignity.⁴³

The next morning at nine o'clock, there was a meeting of the Republican cabinet in Valencia, to discuss the Barcelona conflict. It was reported to them that the CNT controlled most of the city, but information was lacking on whether 'the grave situation had spread to the fronts of Aragón'. García Oliver said in his memoirs that 'if this had happened, the collapse of the military defense, from the Pyrenees to Extremadura would not have to be awaited long, creating a situation of bloody chaos, which could give rise to foreign intervention.'

Two of the anarchist ministers, Federica Montseny and Juan Peiró, suggested that a 'strong delegation' of the CNT and UGT should be sent to Barcelona to try to calm the situation. There was general agreement, and it was finally decided that Juan García Oliver, minister of justice, and Mariano Vázquez (Marianet), national secretary of the CNT, would go for the CNT, and Pascual Tomás and Carlos Hernández Zancajo for the UGT national leadership.⁴⁴

This delegation reached the CNT-FAI headquarters in Barcelona at a little after 5 p.m.⁴⁵ When García Oliver and Marianet got to Barcelona, the regional committee of the CNT was in session. It was agreed that they and the UGT representatives who had come with them should go on the radio to urge their followers to stop the fighting. However, for this, they decided that it was necessary to broadcast from the radio station in the palace of the Generalidad. So, they called Luis Companys, and he, after some consultations with whoever was with him, invited them to come there.

Both in getting from the airport to the center of the city, and from the CNT-FAI headquarters to the palace of the Generalidad (although it was only a few blocks from the CNT headquarters), the Valencia government representatives came under strong fire, particularly from the PSUC headquarters, a block or two from the Generalidad.

When they got to the Generalidad, 'we were received very coldly by Companys, and were coldly treated by all who had to deal with us,' according to García Oliver. None the less, it was agreed finally that the four CNT and UGT delegates would speak over the radio to the combatants throughout the city.

García Oliver, in his autobiography, commented on how he felt about the role that he and the others had to play at that moment: 'It was History that we were making. It was History that we were living. We had to save the maximum possible quantity of human lives. The day might come when we ourselves might foment a movement, but not like the one we were now trying to end. When that would occur, the movement would be carefully planned by us, and the initiative would be ours. Not as in those moments, in which it had been planned against us by elements foreign to us.'⁴⁶

García Oliver's speech was directed to 'the Workers of Catalonia', After announcing that he was speaking from the palace of the Generalidad, and recalling an earlier speech he had given from there right after July 19, he said: 'There weighs upon us the Biblical malediction of Cain and Abel. I don't know who among us here is Cain and who is Abel ... but can you believe, comrades, that in the antifascist family, among the antifascist brothers there can be repeated that Biblical passage of Cain ...'

Then after expressing the shock he had felt in crossing the city in the midst of gunfire, he urged: 'Each of you, each nucleus in the neighborhood, the street, form an isolation belt around all provocations, cease fire, comrades ... Cease fire, then comrades.'

After noting that the problems which had provoked the upheaval would be resolved by negotiations, he pleaded with his audience. 'Don't cultivate, in these moments when it is necessary to cease fire, the cult of the dead. Don't allow the dead, the passion of the dead, of your brothers, of your fallen friend, to be what impedes the cease fire at this moment.'

Knowing that some of the anarchists would be shocked by his plea, and feel that he was speaking under duress, García Oliver said, 'You understand me, you know me well enough to know that in these moments I speak only because of the impulse of my free will, because you know me well enough to be convinced that never, before, now or in the future, will anyone be able to tear from my lips a declaration which I do not feel.'

García Oliver ended his plea with a message for which he was particularly criticized by his fellow anarchists later: 'All who have died today are my brothers, I bend before them and kiss them.'

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They are victims of the antifascist struggle, and I kiss them all equally.⁴⁷

Mariano Vázquez made a similar plea. He said, 'Comrades! Brothers! People of Barcelona and all of Catalonia! We must end what is happening here; we must end it so that our comrades at the front know that we understand the reality of the present moment. So that they can dedicate all their attention against the enemy, without fear that we will create more difficulties, more conflicts... Cease fire, comrades!'⁴⁸

Meanwhile, during the day of March 4, the CNT-FAI had broadcast several manifestos over their radio station. One was addressed to the police. It said: 'You know very well, and you have the proof of it, that the CNT-FAI is not against you, either as individuals or as a unit. Offer your arms to the people and place yourselves on their side as you did on the 19th of July. Neither the CNT nor the FAI want to establish a dictatorship. Nor will they ever tolerate dictatorship so long as a single one of their members is alive...'

Another radio appeal was made to the people of Barcelona by the regional committees of the CNT and FAI: 'The CNT and the FAI address you now to tell you that they do not want to shed the blood of fellow workers in the streets of Barcelona. But we cannot endure the provocations of those who, misusing their public offices, want to destroy the rights of the workers of the CNT and the UGT, as was the case yesterday when they tried to occupy the Telephone Building by force of arms.'

Shortly afterwards, another CNT manifesto to the workers of Barcelona said: 'We are not responsible for what is now taking place. We are not attacking. We are only defending ourselves. We did not start this, we did not provoke it... Workers of the CNT and the UGT! Remember the road we have travelled together... Put down your weapons! Embrace as brothers! We shall be victorious if we are united. If we fight amongst ourselves, we must go down to defeat. Consider! We extend our hand without weapons. You do the same and everything will be forgotten.'⁴⁹ Copies of this manifesto were distributed in many of the barricades.⁵⁰

Diego Abad de Santillán described the efforts which he and some other CNT-FAI leaders made during May 4-5, to try to bring the

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conflict to an end. While some spoke by radio to the population, calling unanimously for cease fire, we maintained contact with the neighborhood committees and with elements that we knew had influence among the combatants. In a few hours, the effect of our intervention began to be felt. We promised not to abandon our post day or night until everyone had put down their arms. And we remained in the Generalidad, at the telephones, two consecutive days and nights, until a new government was formed and firing was suspended.⁵¹

However, the anarchist leaders did not find a very receptive attitude on the part of President Companys and the Republican and PSUC leaders surrounding him. Santillán recounted that at one point, Companys threatened that if eight Catalan guards who had been captured by the anarchists were not well treated and released, 'he could not be responsible for the discipline' of the Catalan guards as a whole.

The anarchist leaders present in the Generalidad regarded this as a threat, and they responded forcefully to it. They answered a call from CNT coastal batteries on Montjuich, ordering, 'Don't fire; we are here. But call every ten minutes. If we do not respond to one of these calls, act as you wish.'

Santillán went on, 'We asked for an urgent meeting of Companys, Comorera, Vidiella, Tarradellas, Calvet, all ex-councillors of the Generalidad, to take a decision... We explained that the coastal batteries were aimed at the Generalidad, that a single shot from them would be enough for all to be buried in the building and that we were all condemned to the same fate... The aiming of the coastal batteries produced a marvelous sedating effect. While we were talking, the artilleryman called again, and we repeated the order. A new Government was forced...'⁵²

The new government consisted of four councillors, under President Luis Companys. These were: Carlos Martí Faced of the Esquerra Catalana, Valerio Mas, secretary of the CNT regional committee; Antonio Sese, secretary-general of the UGT and an old-line Stalinist, and Joaquín Pou of the Unió de Rabassaires.⁵³

Unfortunately, the new government was disrupted before it could meet, when Antonio Sese was shot and killed on his way to the

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Generalidad. As Burnett Bolloten has noted, 'Who was responsible was never known, although accusations were plentiful.'⁵⁴

In any case, the anarchists insisted that an immediate replacement for Sese be named. They suggested Rafael Vidiella, and his name was accepted and the new government was formally established⁵⁵ – although at the moment of its installation its effective control did not reach much further than a few blocks around the plaza on which the Generalidad was located.

At 5 p.m. on May 5, the regional committee of the CNT proposed hostilities to cease. Every party to keep its positions. The police and the civilians fighting on their side to be specifically asked to stop fighting. The responsible committees to be informed at once if the pact is broken anywhere. Solitary shots not to be answered. The defenders of the Union Quarters to remain passive and await further information.'

Augustine Souchy reported: 'The proposals for armistice were accepted by the government, but the armed forces supposedly acting in defense of said government, paid no attention to it. During the afternoon they tried to encircle the quarters of the Regional Committee, the Casa CNT-FAI.'⁵⁶

Meanwhile, also on May 5, García Oliver returned to Valencia. Mariano Vázquez remained in Barcelona, and during the day was joined by Federica Montseny. Many years later, Montseny told me that she was not sure whether it had been because the ardor of combat had been somewhat reduced by the time that she arrived, or that the anarchist workers had more faith in her than in many of the other leaders, but she was in time able to bring a cease fire.⁵⁷ It is to be doubted that La Montseny's influence had been as decisive as she saw it in retrospect, but it is clear that she played an important role, along with other CNT-FAI leaders, in bringing the conflict to a halt.

One of the first actions of Federica Montseny after reaching the Generalidad Palace and meeting with President Luis Companys was, in the name of the Republican government, to take control of the palace switchboard away from Companys. José Peirats explained: 'The telephone switchboard of the Generalidad, although controlled by him, had been left at the mercy of the belligerent Councillors, who

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from the telephones stirred up the firing and gave attack orders to the Marxist and Estat Catalá centers. The personal intervention by the minister to control these communications contributed greatly to calming the situation.⁵⁸

During the night of May 5–6, the CNT and UGT joined in a call to their members to go back to work. This appeal ended. ‘The local federations of the CNT and the UGT ask their members to refrain from all manifestations of hostile attitude. Mutual understanding and solidarity are the requirements of the hour. The union cards of both organizations must be respected by everyone, and it is the duty of the control committees to respect all workers without distinction. To work, comrades of the CNT and UGT!’ However, although this appeal went out over the radio and appeared in the papers, it was not heeded.⁵⁹

On May 6, the barricades remained in place and sporadic shooting continued throughout the day. At 6.45 p.m. the joint regional committees of the CNT and FAI ‘sent a new delegation to the government to find out what they intended doing’.⁶⁰ About three hours later, ‘the CNT and the FAI made new proposals to cease hostilities. These proposals ran as follows: All parties and groups to obligate themselves to remove their armed guards and patrols from the barricades. All prisoners from both sides are to be released immediately. No reprisals shall be taken. An answer was required within two hours.’⁶¹

Meanwhile, there had been teletypewriter consultations between Mariano Vázquez and Federica Montseny in Barcelona, on the one hand, and García Oliver and Minister of Interior Angel Galarza, a close associate of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, in Valencia, on the other. In this exchange, Vázquez and Montseny made it clear that the continued presence of Eusebio Rodríguez Salas as police commissioner, with the police under his control continuing to harass and even murder CNTistas, was a major stumbling block to ending the conflict. García Oliver got the agreement of Galarza, who, as minister of interior of the Republican government had the day before taken over ultimate responsibility for maintaining order in Catalonia, to order the immediate dismissal of Rodríguez Salas and his replacement by a professional policeman. Galarza confirmed this order in an exchange with Vázquez and Montseny.

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It was agreed, too, that in Barcelona they would first try to get at least a three hour truce from 6–9 a.m. the next day, Friday May 7. Montseny and Vázquez also agreed to try to get some of their followers to abandon the barricades even before the official truce deadline.⁶²

As Augustine Souchy reported later, the Catalan government finally indicated its acceptance at 5.15 a.m. on May 7, of the truce proposals made by the CNT the evening before. ‘They agree to the armistice. All parties shall leave the barricades. Patrols and guards retire to their headquarters, unions and fortified positions. Both parties to release their prisoners. The patrols to resume their functions.’⁶³

Burnett Bolloten has summed up the denouement of the May Days, particularly in so far as its effect on the relationship between the anarchist rank and file and their leaders: ‘In Barcelona, several hours before dawn on Friday, 7 May, there were signs that the ardor of the anarchosindicalists had finally spent itself. A feeling that it would be futile to continue the struggle against the will of their leaders had overwhelmed them, and disillusionment was widespread. Many withdrew from the barricades and disappeared into the darkness...’⁶⁴

The Role of Anarchist and POUMist Troops During the May Events

A crucial factor in determining the way in which the May Events would ultimately be brought to an end was the fact that the armed forces of Catalonia and Aragón did not participate in the fighting – with the exception of some soldiers from the Aragón front (such as George Orwell) who happened to be on leave in Barcelona. There were two aspects of the military situation that are worthy of note: the activity and attitudes of those troops stationed in Catalonia itself, and the behavior of the troops facing the enemy in Aragón.

Juan Manuel Molina (popularly known as Juanel), the CNT leader who was acting councillor of defense of Catalonia during the May Events, has described his actions after taking over the post from the

absent Francisco Isgleas, also an anarchist: 'I sat in the chair of the absent councillor and met all of the chiefs of the General Staff, among whom I seem to remember Colonels Aurelio Matilla, Vicente Guarner, Bosch and Majors Visiedo and Martínez Anglada, to whom I said in summary: "In the absence of the missing councillor, from this moment I take over the post of Councillor of Defense in my capacity as subsecretary of the Department, and consequently I hope that all of you will execute no other orders than mine."'

The members of the general staff all agreed, and he asked them then to put him in telephonic communication with the commanders and commissars of all the divisions at the front and in the barracks of Barcelona. These officers also pledged their obedience to Juanel's orders. As Molina wrote: 'With the military situation of Catalonia well in hand, the battle which the Communists had initiated was won by us.' He thereupon made contact with the superior authorities and the committees of the Libertarian Movement, 'offering myself for anything which was necessary.'⁶⁵

As to the general situation of the troops garrisoned in and near Barcelona, Molina wrote that, 'Those servicing and commanding the large mountain batteries at Monjuich were very difficult to contain, and pressed me to give orders to bombard objectives. The forces of all the barracks of Barcelona, except the Carlos Marx Barracks, besieged by the multitude, also awaited instructions to go out into the streets.'⁶⁶

When informed of the negotiations in the Generalidad between the anarchist leaders and President Companys and his associates, Molina made telephone contact with Pedro Herrera and Diego Abad de Santillán, both FAI leaders, and said to them: 'Paradoxically we have won the battle by sounding retreat. Among many other things, we have all the military forces of the region which await my instructions. You are in an advantageous situation to impose solutions which will be a guarantee for our organizations and for the people. Don't make a deal!'

'What the organization decided we now know. A cease fire and a semi-surrender,' Molina added. However as a disciplined CNTista, Molina went along with the decisions of the CNT-FAI leadership. Most crucially, after consulting the CNT national committee, he

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agreed not to have Catalan forces oppose the movement into the region of Assault Guards and *carabineros* being sent in by the Republican government in Valencia. In asking for instructions, he informed the CNT leaders that he was in a position to prevent those police units from crossing the Ebro river into Catalonia.⁶⁶ He was assured by the CNT leaders that the armed forces entering the region were 'friendly'.⁶⁸

Although the anarchists were later charged by their enemies with 'deserting the front', there is little truth to this. It is true, as Víctor Alba noted, that 'In Lérida some groups of CNTistas made preparations to go to reinforce their people in Barcelona. They didn't leave after they heard the speech of García Oliver.'

Alba went on to note: 'In Barbastro some contingents of the Rojo y Negro Column and of the 29th Division met to observe the movements of the 27th Division of the PSUC; they feared that that group would leave the front to fight against the CNT and POUM forces. But none of the front occupied by the CNTistas and POUMists was left unguarded, and contrary to what the Communists later affirmed, no force from the Aragón front went down to Barcelona.'⁶⁹

Rudolf Rocker, the German anarchist who was in Barcelona during much of the War, also commented on the role of the anarchist soldiers in Aragón during the May Days: 'When the CNT militia on the Aragón front got word of the events in Catalonia, without delay they sent one of their best fighters, Jover, to Barcelona. They were ready at once to go to the assistance of their basely betrayed brothers. The National Committee of the CNT prevented this...'⁷⁰

Juan Manuel Molina wrote about what was probably the most serious threat – that anarchist soldiers on the Aragón front might join in the fighting in Barcelona:

Some units at the front . . . disquieted by the events of Barcelona, prepared to send forces to the capital. Maximo Franco, chief of the 127 brigade, most nervous, had already passed Monzón, at the front of a battalion, with its corresponding material, some cannons and machine-guns. I gave instructions to the Organization

in Binefar to meet the column, and get Maximo Franco to call me on the telephone. He did, and on my assuring him that I continued at the head of the Councillorship of Defense and that in Barcelona we had enough and more than enough to dominate the Communists, he returned to the front with his unit. In spite of the fact that the chief of the Red and Black had distributed his forces on the front, leaving its defense assured, we could not give pretext to the enemies and to public opinion that a military unit had abandoned the front.⁷¹

Finally, Manuel Salas, who at the time of the May Events was a member of the 25th Division, told me many years later that when news of what was happening in Barcelona had reached the front, some companies of the 25th Division were chosen, given extensive armament and were sent towards Barcelona. But, he said, when these elements got to Lérida, there were orders awaiting them to the effect that they should return to the front lines, which they did.⁷²

The Role of the Friends of Durruti

From the point of view of the Spanish anarchist movement, one of the most disturbing aspects of the May Events was the emergence of an avowedly anarchist group which openly defied the leadership of the CNT and the FAI. Although from July 19 1936 on there had been elements which had expressed their doubts about policies of the anarchist leadership, and had opposed specific things the leadership undertook, the Friends of Durruti (*Amigos de Durruti*) was the first element to appear which openly called upon rank-and-file CNTers and FAIistas to refuse to conform to the policies of the leaders of their organizations.

On May 5 the existence of the Friends of Durruti became publicly known. A leaflet was widely distributed in the barricades and elsewhere, which was headed 'CNT-FAI: Group of the Friends of Durruti.' Its text said, at least in part: 'Workers, together with us demand: A revolutionary leadership, punishment of the guilty,

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disarming of all the armed groups which participated in the aggression; the dissolution of the political parties which have risen against the working class. We will not cede the streets: revolution above all.'

Subsequently, the Amigos de Durruti issued a second throwaway while the fighting was still in progress. It put forth two slogans: 'A revolutionary *junta*' and '*All power to the proletariat*'. As G. Munis, who at the time of the May Events was the head of the miniscule official Spanish Trotskyist group, wrote later, that this second leaflet 'corresponded entirely, although not in terminology, with another Trotskyist leaflet...'⁷³

Carlos Semprún-Maura has noted with regard to the Friends of Durruti that 'they put forth at the height of the battle the idea of forming a Revolutionary Junta the existence of which seems to have been purely theoretical. For them, this Junta should substitute for the Generalidad, since they favored carrying the struggle to its logical end, to the seizure of power by the revolutionary organizations. They demanded that "all elements responsible for the subversive attempt which manoeuvre under the protection of the Government should be shot. The POUM should be admitted to the Revolutionary *Junta*, because they have placed themselves on the side of the workers."⁷⁴

The Amigos de Durruti began to publish a clandestine newspaper, *The Friend of the People* (*El Amigo del Pueblo*), the title of which had obvious echoes of the French Revolution. It continued to appear for some time after the end of the May Events.⁷⁵

Certainly, the Amigos de Durruti had nothing to do with the May Events. Nor were they successful in their efforts to get the anarchists to stay on the barricades after 'agreement' had been reached between the CNT-FAI leadership and opposing groups. However, then and later, they received much attention as being typical of the anarchist 'uncontrollables', upon whom (together with the POUM), the Communists and others laid all the blame for what happened in the first week of May in Barcelona.⁷⁵ It is of some interest, therefore, to identify, in so far as possible, who the Amigos de Durruti were.

The most extensive identification of the three principal leaders of

the Friends of Durruti which we have encountered has been that of Juan García Oliver, admittedly an unfriendly source. His information does shed some light on the background of those who organized and headed the Amigos de Durruti during that organization's short existence.

The three people involved were men identified only as Carreño, Jaime Balius and Pablo Ruíz. Of them, García Oliver said, 'None of the three was a FAIsta. They did not belong to the FAI.'

Carreño was 'an anarchist from Argentina'. When Durruti had returned from Argentina at the beginning of the Republic, he had brought Carreño with him, and when Durruti formed his militia column in July 1936, he made Carreño head of the column's war committee. But García Oliver noted that when Durruti went to the Madrid front, he did not take Carreño with him.

Of Jaime Balius, García Oliver commented that he 'was neither anarchist nor syndicalist. He was a fanatical Catalan separatist, who broke with Macià and Companys when, abandoning the idea of establishing a Catalan State, they opted for the Generalidad de Catalonia.' García Oliver claimed that Balius was 'in a certain way' brought into the CNT by Libertad Callejas, 'who in his bohemian passage through Barcelona took up with the strangest, frequently suspicious, people.' When Callejas began to publish *CNT*, the organization's Madrid newspaper, he began to accept articles by Balius which García Oliver described as 'very radical, neither anarchist, nor syndicalist, nor separatist; only with madly radical content, almost nihilist'. Callejas had turned aside García Oliver's protests against the publication of those articles.

Of Pablo Ruíz, García Oliver commented: 'What was Pablo Ruíz apart from having always been looked upon with suspicion? I knew him since 1923. Then, he appeared in the afternoons in the headquarters of the Woodworkers' Union on Calle de San Pablo. In that headquarters, which had a café, there gathered the most notable of the action groups. Pablo Ruíz, who did not belong to any group, neither of action nor of affinity, always came with a packet of cut textile goods – he was a tailor by profession – and looked here and there. Finally, the day came when the comrades cut off the conversation when he appeared...'⁷⁷

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Whatever the backgrounds of these three leaders and other members of their organization, the leaflets of the Amigos de Durruti were immediately repudiated by the national committee of the CNT 'as provocations'. The Amigos de Durruti was subsequently formally expelled from the CNT.⁷⁸

The Role of the POUM in the May Events

Communist propaganda was later to accuse the POUM of primary responsibility for the May Events. However, Manuel Cruells was certainly correct when he said: 'It is evident that the POUM was not the principal cause, in spite of the fact that it was the principal victim. It is clear that the POUM did not initiate the May Events nor did that organization provoke them. The May Events, it is essential to note, were produced with the intention of separating the CNT from power and, if possible, to destroy it. That is undeniable.'⁷⁹

The leaders of the POUM were as surprised and shocked by the outbreak of massive fighting in the streets of Barcelona on May 3–4 as were the anarchist leaders. Indeed, in their May Day Manifesto they had warned their followers, 'Don't launch any sporadic and unpremeditated movement! Don't respond to any provocations! Be careful!'⁸⁰

The first reaction of the POUM leaders to the events of the afternoon of May 3 was to consult with the regional anarchist chiefs. Julian Gorkin has explained:

That same night, and on the initiative of the Executive Committee of the POUM, Andrés Nin, Pedro Bonet and I had a meeting with the full Regional Committee of the CNT, FAI and Libertarian Youth. We presented the problem with total clarity: 'Neither you nor we have sent the masses of the workers into this movement. It has been a spontaneous reaction in the face of the provocation of Stalinism... We suppose that you sense as we do the gravity of the moment, both for the destiny of the revolution and for the war itself. Either we put ourselves at the head of the

movement with the purpose of fulfilling clear and responsible objectives, so as to neutralize the internal enemy, or we condemn the movement to failure, and that enemy, encouraged, will take care of all of us. A decision must be made without losing a moment.

Gorkin went on to say that when the POUMists found the anarchist leaders 'reticent, indecisive', he made another suggestion: 'We should immediately send a delegation to Valencia to explain to Largo Caballero and his ministers that the movement was not directed against the Central Government, but against the Stalinist provocateurs. We had no success.'⁸¹ Many years later, Gorkin told me that the anarchist leaders, in rejecting the POUMista suggestions, argued that since they had members in the Catalan government, they would be able to handle the Communists without resort to any extreme measures.⁸²

Gorkin noted that after the first appeals by García Oliver, La Montseny and other anarchist leaders for a cease fire, 'The answer came from the neighborhood committees, moved principally by the Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti, organized in an intransigent fraction within the CNT, the POUM and its own Youth, asking the constitution of a CNT-FAI-POUM government. Those Committees constituted the power of the street, and it is certain that the proposal launched by them had nothing to do with our Executive Committee.'⁸²

On May 5, when word reached Barcelona that elements from the CNT divisions and the 29th Division of the POUM, at the Aragón front, had concentrated in Barbastro and were moving towards Barcelona, the POUM leaders, like those of the CNT, immediately moved to prevent that. Gorkin wrote: 'Without needing to reach an agreement, both the Committee of the CNT and that of the POUM sent emissaries to meet them, with the order to turn around and secure the fronts. This order was obeyed with total discipline.'

On the afternoon of May 6, the executive committee of the Catalan UGT held an extraordinary meeting, for the purposes of expelling from the organization those belonging to the POUM. Its

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resolution to that effect said: 'Considering that the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista has been the organization behind the counter revolution of these days ... and taking into account that the POUM has not placed itself on the side of the legitimate government of the Generalidad, nor has it repudiated participation of its militants in the subversive movement, the Committee of Catalonia of the UGT agrees, unanimously, that there be expelled immediately from the trade union organization all leaders of the POUM...'84

The POUM leadership certainly did nothing to try to make the conflict continue, once the anarchist leaders had reached what they thought was an agreement with their opponents. According to Julian Gorkin, 'Although supporting fully – and with all of its consequences – the popular movement, the POUM urged on the 6th, retirement, even while urging active vigilance of the working class, as well as the maintenance of the neighborhood committees and the safeguarding of arms.'85

The Role of Luis Companys and the Catalan Left

Anarchist opinion at the time and subsequently was much divided concerning the nature of the role which Catalan President Luis Companys and his closest associates played in the May Events. Some anarchist leaders, most notably Juan García Oliver, felt that he was part of a wide plot to deprive the anarchists of all participation in the government of Catalonia and perhaps to destroy them entirely as an important political force. Others, including José Juan Domenech, took a kindlier view of his role in the May Days.

Companys had had a long association with the anarchists. During the difficult period of 1919–23, he had been a lawyer for the CNT. With the proclamation of the Republic on April 14 1931, the anarchists had taken him to the seat of the civil government and proclaimed him the civil governor of Catalonia, a post in which he was subsequently confirmed by the new Republican government.⁸⁶ On the other hand, as president of Catalonia, he had often authorized the use of rough measures against CNT strikes and other activities.

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In his autobiography, García Oliver offered several reasons for his suspicion that Companys was a participant in a broad anti-anarchist cabal. The first incident he cites occurred when Valerio Mas, regional secretary of the CNT, called Companys at the Generalidad, telling him of García Oliver's arrival from Valencia, and of the urgent need to talk with him, to prepare for giving his radio appeal for a cease fire. García Oliver recounted: 'Companys was a bit late in answering. Certainly he was consulting. Who knows with whom!'⁸⁷

As described earlier, García Oliver's suspicions were intensified when he was received by Companys. 'We were received very coldly by Companys, and were dealt with coldly by all those who had to deal with us. It was clear that we were in the way there. Our mission of pacification was totally contrary to the role of inciters that Companys and his people had assumed. For them, the ideal would have been for forces to come from anywhere, from the sky or from hell, to aid them in depriving of life anyone who had a card of the CNT or the FAI...'⁸⁸

Finally, García Oliver recounted, with a certain preface, an incident on the night of May 4-5:

Coldly received. Grossly treated. That we were from our arrival in the Generalidad; 'The Prince' no longer had to be annoyed; the occasion had arrived to begin his vengeance. Small vengeance. Waiting to make contact with the development of events, in constant telephonic communication with the local and regional committees, we prepared to pass the night sprawled out in chairs and divans. In shadow, in darkness. Nothing was offered us. When someone asked for food, they brought grudgingly a little dried out bread with a bit of boiled ham. To drink, whoever asked for it received a glass of water...

We had to think that those poor folks, from the president of the Generalidad to the last policeman, had been surprised by the unexpected rebellion of the masses. Surprised without food. Under certain circumstances, I always had the bad custom of suspecting, of seeing and of touching. I rose, walked a few times around the darkened salon where we had been left, and seeming

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to have heard some strange sounds, I walked down a hall, and stopped at a door under which . . . there appeared a ray of light. I pushed the door, and saw a small illuminated room, with a long table, where, on a white table cloth sparkled glasses of the finest crystal, containing white and red wines. I can still photograph with my eyes the smiles of satisfaction of these I was able to see . . . Smiles which broke off when they saw me in the half-open door. There were Companys and his wife, Antonov-Ovsenko, Comorera, Vidiella, Tarradellas . . . I wasn't able to make out the rest.⁸⁹

José Juan Domenech, who had served as a CNT minister in Companys's government, saw the Catalan president's role in the May Events from a quite different perspective from that of García Oliver. Speaking about it almost a decade and a half later, he claimed that Companys was at the time the non-CNTer closest to the CNT, and had until then worked loyally with it. However, Companys was above all dedicated to the idea of self-government for Catalonia, conceiving it as going far beyond the Republic's Autonomy Statute of Catalonia, and embodying virtual independence within a Spanish federation, a vision rather similar to that of the anarchists.

Therefore, according to Domenech, Companys was above all jealous of anything he saw as a challenge to the authority of the Catalan Generalidad. From that point of view, the anarchist uprising which started on May 3 certainly appeared to be an uprising against the Catalan government, even though the anarchists themselves had representation in that government. Companys was also, according to Domenech, very preoccupied with the danger the situation in Barcelona represented for the overall Loyalist war effort. Therefore, according to Domenech, Companys felt that he had to stand aside and allow the 'chastisement' of the CNT, morally if not physically.⁹⁰

The anarchist writer Manuel Cruells, on the other hand, while saying that Luis Companys certainly did not want an armed showdown with the anarchists, argued that Artemio Aiguader, the councillor of interior, and a member of Companys's party, did want such

an event. He claimed that on the night of May 2–3, Aiguader and his close associates decided that the moment had come for such a showdown, and that an attack on the CNT-held telephone exchange was the way to provoke it.⁹¹

President Manuel Azaña apparently thought that Luis Companys was at least partly responsible for the May Days. In his memoirs, he wrote that ‘Companys spoke stupidly and crazily about battling the anarchists’.⁹² Azaña also noted that Prime Minister José Tarradellas, in talking with him ‘censored strongly Aiguader for launching a battle without preparing for it, and Companys for having talked so much about it, which alarmed the anarchists’.⁹³

Ironically, of course, whatever Companys wanted to happen, or was willing to allow to happen, to the anarchists, the May Events, and Companys’s own actions during them, resulted in a drastic limitation of the autonomy of Catalonia. Until May 1937, Catalonia had had in effect its own ministry of defense, and at least formally controlled all the forces in the region with the duty of maintaining law and order. It had also had extensive control of its own economic affairs. As a consequence of the May days, the government of the Generalidad was to be totally stripped of control over military and police affairs, and to see the way paved for grave weakening of its control over the economy of the region.

The sequence by which the Catalan regime lost its control over military and police affairs is recounted by Burnett Bolloten. It began shortly after 8.30 p.m. – on May 3, when Artemio Aiguader, asked Republican Minister of Interior Angel Galarza for ‘the urgent dispatch of 1,500 guards, indispensable for suppressing the movement’.⁹⁴

The next morning, Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero conferred with the CNT ministers, telling them that he wouldn’t send the 1,500 Assault Guards ‘because it would mean placing forces in the service of the person who may possibly have had something to do with the conflict. Before acceding, he would take over the administration of public order as provided in the Constitution’.⁹⁵ When the cabinet met shortly afterwards, Indalecio Prieto, anti-Caballero Socialist and minister of marine and aviation, together with the Left Republican and Communist ministers, urged that the Republican

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government immediately take over control of the Catalan military and police. Largo Caballero finally agreed to do so 'if the situation did not improve by evening'.⁹⁶

Largo Caballero then told Luis Companys of what the cabinet had decided, and added 'Tell me if you have any objection.' For his part, Companys after again urging the immediate dispatch of 1,500 Assault Guards, then conceded: 'In view of the danger ... the government of the Republic can adopt the measures it deems necessary.'⁹⁷

The Republican cabinet remained in session most of the day, May 4. Burnett Bolloten has noted: 'Inside the cabinet the debate assumed a rabid character.' He then cited an official report of the CNT which appeared a few days later in *Fragua Social*, to the effect that 'Comrade Federica Montseny led the opposition for four hours against the Communists and republicans who supported the taking over of public order and defense. It was a tumultuous debate, which we lost when the vote was taken.'⁹⁸

Largo Caballero still postponed announcement of the government's decision in the hope that its application might not be necessary if the efforts of García Oliver and Mariano Vázquez to calm the Barcelona situation proved a success. However, with the fighting continuing and even intensifying on the morning of May 5, there was another short cabinet meeting at noon, and shortly afterwards an official statement was made of the government's decision to take over control of Catalan military and police affairs. It noted also that Colonel Antonio Escobar of the National Republican Guard – ex-Civil Guard – had been named to control Catalan public order and General Sebastián Pozas was named to control the Loyalist armed forces in Catalonia and Aragón.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, on the afternoon of May 5 two Republican war vessels, the *Lepanto* and *Sanchez Barcaiztegui*, arrived in Barcelona harbor. Their commanders put themselves at the orders of President Companys. As Manuel Cruells has noted, 'In spite of that act of support of the autonomous Catalan Government, the entry of vessels in the port of Barcelona signified the beginning of the intervention of the Central Government in the conflict.'¹⁰⁰

We have noted in an earlier chapter how Juan Manuel Molina, the

acting councillor of defense of Catalonia, only turned over control of the military to General Pozas after receiving written orders to that effect from both President Companys and the CNT–FAI leaders. The process of transferring control of the Catalan public order forces to Republican authority proved even more difficult. Colonel Escobar, who had been named to take over control of public order was seriously wounded when he was shot at upon arrival in Barcelona. The Republican government then appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Alberto Arrando to replace Colonel Escobar.¹⁰¹

The Communist Explanation of the May Events

Understandably, the Communists had their own interpretation of what had transpired during the first week of May in Barcelona. Their explanation was so far from the truth that there would be little reason to take it seriously, were it not for the fact that it was widely accepted by non-Communists who should have known better, and to same degree at least remains to this day ‘the accepted wisdom’ on the subject.

While the fighting in Barcelona was still in progress, *Frente Rojo*, the Communists’ official evening paper in Valencia, already began to develop the Communists’ explanation of the affair. ‘For a long time we used to attribute anything that occurred to gangs euphemistically called uncontrollables’. Now we have seen that they are perfectly controlled – but by the enemy...’¹⁰²

George Orwell presented a number of examples of the explanation of the May Events developed by the Communists after the events were over. One will suffice. The London *Daily Worker*, on May 11 1937, carried an article which argued that ‘what was being prepared was a situation in which the German and Italian Governments could land troops or marines quite openly on the Catalan coasts, declaring that they were doing so “in order to preserve order” ... The instrument for all this lay ready to hand for the Germans and Italians in the shape of the Trotskyist organization known as the POUM. The POUM, acting in cooperation with well-known criminal elements, and with certain other deluded persons in the Anarchist

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organizations planned, organized and led the attack in the rear-guard, accurately timed to coincide with the attack on the front of Bilbao...¹⁰³

United States Communist leader Robert Minor claimed: 'The uprising was started by the Trotskyite POUM, and the "uncontrollables" among the Anarchists, under the direction of Franco's fifth column and Italian and Nazi secret agents... These people tried to deal a crushing blow to the government, to keep Catalonia from giving all its energies in the war...'¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately, all or part of the Stalinist line on the May Events was picked up and repeated by people who should have known better. One such case will be sufficient to note. It is Claude Bowers, who was then US ambassador to (Republican) Spain. Writing in his memoirs in 1954, long after the publication of George Orwell's account, Bowers was still repeating the Communist version of events with nuances of his own.

The dissentient elements in Franco's territory were more than matched by those in loyalist territory, where the anarchists were the worst offenders against solidarity and discipline. In early May, the Loyalist government moved against them with cold steel. A crisis had been provoked by the anarchists and the POUM (United Workers Marxist Party), which was composed of Trotsky communists. It was generally believed that many of these were Franco agents. In factories, they were urging the seizure of private property and strikes to slow down production in the midst of war. In Aragón, not a few anarchists in the army who had been fraternizing with the Fascists deserted and hurried to Barcelona to join the rising against the government...¹⁰⁵

The absurdity of those observations is clear.

A somewhat peculiar variant of the Communists' insistence that the uprising of the workers of Barcelona in May 1937 was of subversive origin, and one which may have had a certain currency among the Republicans, is that offered by Victoria Kent, a Radical Socialist Party member of the Spanish parliament. Speaking more

than 15 years later, she claimed that the anarchists were opposed to the war, were 'cowards at the front', and that their uprising in May 1937 was an effort to take Catalonia out of the war.¹⁰⁶

Was Seizure of La Telefónica Deliberate Provocation by the Stalinists?

It is obvious that from July 19 1936 on, the Stalinists tried by all means at their disposal – and these means were very great after Soviet military equipment and 'advisers' began to arrive – to undermine, and ultimately to destroy the power and influence which the anarchists had acquired with the onset of the Civil War and Revolution, and to establish their own dictatorship in Republican Spain. It is also clear that the May Events were intimately related to that Stalinist drive.

Finally, it is obvious that the seizure of La Telefónica on the afternoon of May 3 1937 was what touched off the May Events. What was debated then and afterwards was whether that seizure was a deliberate move by the Stalinists and their allies to provoke an uprising by the anarchists, so that they could be crushed once and for all.

Some credence is given to the idea that the attack on the Telephone Building was deliberately designed to provoke massive anarchist reaction by the subsequent account of Walter Krivitsky, at the time of the May Events the head of Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe. According to Krivitsky,

The one big obstacle in the way was Catalonia. The Catalonians were anti-Stalinist, and they were one of the main props of the Caballero government. To seize full control, Stalin had still to bring Catalonia under his rule and oust Caballero.

This was emphasized to me in a report by one of the leaders of the Russian anarchist group in Paris, who was a secret agent of the Ogpu. He had been dispatched to Barcelona, where as a prominent anarchist he enjoyed the confidence of the anarchosyndicalists in the local government. His mission was to act

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as an agent provocateur, to incite the Catalonians to rash acts that would justify calling in the army as if to suppress a revolt behind the front...¹⁰⁷

After indicating the wide acceptance of the claim that the May Days were caused 'by some uncontrollable elements who managed to get into the extreme wing of the anarchist movement, in order to provoke disturbances in favor of the enemies of the republic,' Krivitsky argued that 'the fact is that in Catalonia the great majority of the workers were fiercely anti-Stalinist. Stalin knew that a show-down was inevitable, but he also knew that the opposition forces were badly divided and could be crushed by swift bold action. The Ogpu fanned the flames and provoked syndicalists, anarchists and Socialists against one another. After five days of bloodshed, in which five hundred persons were killed and more than a thousand wounded, Catalonia was made the issue on which the Caballero government must stand or fall.'¹⁰⁸

Credence is lent to Krivitsky's analysis by statements of some of the Stalinist leaders at the time of the May Events. Juan Comorera, head of the PSUC, is known to have commented that 'before taking Zaragoza, it is necessary to take Barcelona.'¹⁰⁹ Also, Per Ribá, a PSUC member, and close ally of Juan Comorera, noted many years later that the decision to seize the Telefónica had been taken by the PSUC executive committee several days before it occurred.¹¹⁰

Certainly some of the most prominent anarchist leaders believed that the seizure of La Telefónica was a deliberate attempt to arouse the anarchists to revolt, so that they could be crushed. One of those who developed this plot theme most extensively was Juan García Oliver.

However, García Oliver felt that the plot involved not only the Catalan Communists Consul-General Antonov-Ovsenko and other Soviet agents then in Spain, but also elements among the Catalan Nationalists – of both *Esquerra Catalana* and *Estat Catalá* parties – probably including Luis Companys himself, as well as Basque Nationalists, and the Italian Fascist government. He even suggested the possibility of involvement of certain tertiary CNT elements in the conspiracy.

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García Oliver stated: 'In the events of May only the conspirators of Paris and those of the Soviet Embassy had a directing role. The rest, circumstantial actors, the agents of Rodríguez Salas, the provokers of the PSUC, the fascists camouflaged as Communists – there were thousands – served as puppets of the pim-pam-pum.'¹¹¹

The 'conspirators of Paris' to whom García Oliver refers were the Catalan politicians who early in the War had left Catalonia – some of them while serving as councillors in the government of President Companys – and had taken up self-imposed exile in the French capital. Of them, García Oliver said:

In Paris those who conspired against the Republic were very active. The conspiracy had ramifications in the governments of Catalonia, the Basque Country and the Republic. There were two centers of conspiracy. That of Paris, whose axis was the Catalan separatists, visibly directed by Centura Gassol, and the Basque Nationalists headed by Aguirre in Bilbao and which Manuel de Irujo, Minister Without Portfolio in the Republican government directed. They conspired with monarchists of all branches, but most intensively with the Alfonso supporters led from Portugal by Gil Robles. What did the conspirators seek? Reestablishment of the monarchy in Spain, putting an end to the civil war, and maintaining the Statutes of Catalonia and the Basque Country.¹¹²

A similar train of events was outlined in an official statement of the CNT on the May Events, dated June 1937.¹¹³ Although other anarchists leaders may not have believed in such a widespread conspiracy as that suggested by García Oliver, there were certainly many who felt that the uprising in Barcelona had been purposely provoked by the enemies of the anarchists. Diego Abad de Santillán wrote later that 'we had the impression, hour after hour, that the events had been ably provoked, and that certain sectors, and certain men were unhappy at our ability to dominate our masses.'¹¹⁴

Elsewhere, Santillán also wrote: 'A few weeks before the tragic events of Barcelona . . . the Spanish Ambassador to Belgium, Ossorio y Gallardo declared in a satisfied way before a small group of

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journalists in the Spanish Embassy in Brussels that the great danger which had menaced Spain, that is, the predominance of the CNT and of the FAI was on the point of being overcome. That ambassador gave assurances that we had been displaced from preponderance in Madrid and in Valencia, and that the way was being prepared to have the decisive battle with us in the very capital of Catalonia.¹¹⁵

Apparently Mariano Vázquez also was convinced at the time that the Communists sought purposely to provoke the anarchists. In a memorandum shortly after the events, he said:

We observe the preparation abroad. From the moment that the first shots were heard, throughout the world the press raised a violent campaign against Catalan anarchism. The propaganda had been so rapid and extensive that it is not possible that it arose from knowledge of the events. One deduces easily that it was prepared. . . . There is an important detail, that demonstrates that there existed a plot in the exterior. The Delegate of the National Committee intercepted in Barcelona a telegram directed by a distinguished member of the Esquerra and a separatist, to France in which it said textually: 'Estatic be, Tot marxa.' (I'm well. Everything is going ahead.) That telegram, was sent on Wednesday at noon when fighting was intensifying in the streets of Barcelona.¹¹⁵

In conversation with me, José Juan Domenech claimed that the Communists had 'very carefully provoked' the CNT, and 'more irresponsible elements' in the CNT had allowed themselves to be provoked.¹¹⁷ Also, in conversation with me Federica Montseny said that the anarchist ministers in the Republican government had gotten word of meetings in Bordeaux and Paris between leaders of the PSUC and Estat Catalá with Russians and other foreign elements and that the ministers feared that some provocation was being planned which would be used to justify suppression of the POUM and CNT, and warned the other leaders of the CNT.¹¹⁸

It remains unclear whether the Catalan Communists, with or without direction from Soviet officials, either by themselves or in conspiracy with other anti-anarchist elements in Catalonia, planned

the seizure of La Telefónica as a deliberate move to provoke an anarchist reaction. All that is clear is that that move *did* provoke such a reaction.

Should the Catalan Anarchists Have Seized Power?

Whether or not the Communists and their Left Catalan allies organized the seizure of the Telephone Building as a deliberate move to generate a violent reaction from the anarchists, they certainly did not expect the overwhelming nature of that reaction. They surely did not expect that within a few hours virtually all of Barcelona, as well as most of the provincial cities and towns of Catalonia, would be in the hands of the anarchists and the POUM.

We have stressed the spontaneity of the reaction of rank-and-file CNTers and POUMists. Clearly the events of May did not begin as a result of an effort of the anarchists leaders to seize power. Without exception, the CNT–FAI leaders bent all of their efforts during the days of May 3–7 to bring about a cease fire ‘without victors or vanquished’, as the saying was at the time. However, the question remained as to whether, once their followers in fact dominated Barcelona and most of the other cities and towns of Catalonia, they should have finished the job, ordering attacks, as they could have done, on the few remaining strongholds of the police, PSUC and Estat Catalá, and installing another government for the Catalan region.

In retrospect, a number of the anarchist leaders concluded that they should have done so. Juan Molina, writing 35 years later, after noting ‘It is not risky to affirm that in very few hours the domination of Catalonia by the CNT would have been complete,’ then opined on the attitude of the CNT leaders. ‘Sincerely I think that it was a great mistake, which was paid for dearly. In May there was the opportunity to liquidate the ignominious intervention of Stalin in Spain, with his agents, spies and executioners. If the Communists put the Republic in danger every day with their absorbing sectarian and criminal policy, the CNT should have done so once, to terminate that policy imposed on Spain by the USSR and the Communist Party.’¹¹⁹

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Diego Abad de Santillán also thought, in retrospect, that his own behavior and that of the other CNT–FAI leaders had been a mistake. At a meeting with Mariano Vázquez and García Oliver soon after the end of the May Events, Santillán, as he noted later, ‘gave our judgement of the events of May; they had been a provocation of international origin and our people were miserably dragged into struggle; but once in the streets, our error has been in bringing an end to the firing without having resolved the pending problems. For our part, we were sorry for what had happened...’¹²⁰

One of the more fantastic assessments of what had occurred, and of what the anarchist leaders should have done was that of the official Trotskyites. Felix Morrow of the Socialist Workers’ Party of the United States stated that position as well as anyone. ‘...The specific conjuncture in May 1937 was sufficiently favorable to enable a workers’ Spain to establish its internal regime and to prepare to resist imperialism by spreading the revolution to France and then wage revolutionary war against Germany and Italy, under conditions which would precipitate the revolution in the fascist countries.’¹²¹

Certainly none of the Spanish anarchist leaders shared such a view of the possibilities had they decided to seize power in Catalonia. They had rejected the idea of establishing a dictatorship of their own, right after July 19, and rejected it again early in May 1937, fearful of the possibility of launching another major civil war behind the Loyalist lines and thus paving the way for a quick Franco victory.

However, Manuel Cruells, who lived through the experience of the May Events, expressed doubt many years later whether the anarchists *could* have seized power: ‘The anarchist leaders tried to put a brake on the fighting on the basis of the good judgement that it was impossible to impose a total victory. Therefore, they had to save their organization, and avoid an extermination which would fatally have taken place.’¹²²

Conclusion

Burnett Bolloten presented a stark conclusion about the effect of the

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May Days on the Spanish anarchists: 'The power of the anarchosyn-dicalists in Catalonia, the citadel of the Spanish libertarian movement, had now been broken. What would have appeared inconceivable a few months earlier, in the heyday of the CNT and FAI, had now become a reality and the most portentous victory of the Communists since the beginning of the Revolution.'¹²³

It does not seem to me that the effect of the May Days on the anarchists was quite as catastrophic and conclusive as Bollothen presents it. However, it is certain that the events of the first week of May 1937 were a severe defeat for the anarchists, and paved the way for their elimination from both the Catalan and Republican governments, and the establishment of predominant Communist influence in both those regimes. From May 1937 on, the struggle of the Libertarian Movement in Loyalist Spain was purely a defensive one, to preserve against very strong odds as much as they could of the revolutionary conquests of the first weeks of the Civil War.

The Elimination of the Anarchists from the Republican and Catalan Governments

The May Events in Barcelona provided the opportunity to the Communists and their Right-wing Socialist and Republican allies to bring about the overthrow of Francisco Largo Caballero, and the removal of the anarchists from the Republican government. About a month later, the Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña and their Left Catalan friends likewise brought about the elimination of the CNT from the government of Catalonia. Together with the suppression of the Council of Aragón, which we have noted in an earlier chapter, that almost completed the experiment of anarchist participation in the national and regional governments of the Republic.

Early Moves to Oust Largo Caballero

The plans of the Russians, the Spanish Communists and their allies to dispense with Largo Caballero as head of the Republican government were long in the making. Shortly after he had taken office, his fall was already being prepared for. As the influence of the Soviet apparatus in Spain grew following the beginning of large scale

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military aid to the Republic, and as the size and bureaucratic penetration of the Spanish Communist Party and the PSUC in both civilian and military parts of the government expanded, the plans to get rid of the one-time 'Spanish Lenin' matured. The conflict in Catalonia at the beginning of May 1937 provided the excuse for the strange anti-Caballero coalition to move overtly to oust the prime minister.

Walter Krivitsky noted that as early as November 1936 he was told of Russian plans to have Largo Caballero replaced by Juan Negrín. His informant was Arthur Stashevsky, whom he described as 'Stalin's chief political commissar in Spain'.¹ 'In my conversations with Stashevsky in Barcelona in November, Stalin's next moves in Spain were already cropping out. Stashevsky made no secret to me of the fact that Juan Negrín would be the next head of the Madrid government. At that time, Caballero was universally regarded as the favorite of the Kremlin, but Stashevsky had already picked Negrín as his successor.'²

Franz Borkenau also bore witness to the Communists' early plans to get rid of Largo Caballero, and the role of the anarchists in thwarting the Communists' objectives at that time. On his second visit, in January–February 1937, he wrote:

The communists are decided that Caballero must go. They find it awkward and at critical moments almost intolerable, that the group which really directs affairs should not be formally and publicly at the helm. If a dramatic turn to the Right, away from social revolution is intended – as no doubt it is – it cannot possibly be done while Caballero is in the supreme office. Various names have been mentioned as candidates for the premiership, among them Martínez Barrio, Prieto, and Negrín, the socialist minister of finance. Since at least the last week of January well-informed people have been talking about the cabinet crisis...

So far nothing has come of it. And that mainly on account of anarchist resistance. A cabinet with Prieto as premier or in a dominating position, as war minister, would make their participation either impossible or transform it into a formal renunciation of their revolutionary faith.³

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Gerald Brenan has summed up this first major crisis in the Largo Caballero government thus: 'The first crisis came in January. Communist pressure on the government had become very great and for a moment it was thought that a *coup d'état* was imminent and that the International Brigade could march on Valencia. But there was a combination of all the other parties against them, and they gave way.'⁴

At about this same time, some of the anarchist leaders were quite aware of efforts by the Communists and their allies to remove Largo Caballero. Juan García Oliver, in his memoirs, noted a conversation which must have taken place late in January or early in February, in which he told Largo Caballero: 'Now they will do everything to get rid of us; that is, with you, the Caballeristas of the party and of the trade-union organization, and with us, the CNT and the anarchosindicalists. I don't know what methods they will use, nor the direction from which the blows will come. But it is likely that they will seek to use elements from our camp and yours, using them as provocateurs...'⁵

Shortly before the account of this conversation, García Oliver noted what had occurred at a dinner to which he had been invited by Soviet ambassador Marcel Rosenberg, shortly before Rosenberg was recalled home to be shot in Stalin's Great Purge, which adds a curious twist to the Communists' efforts to get rid of Largo Caballero. Apparently, after they had finished eating, Rosenberg blurted out to him, 'Don't you think that you could do much better than Largo Caballero as head of the government and in the Ministry of War?' To which García Oliver replied:

In talking to you I am also talking to Moscow. I ask you to transmit for me that if at this moment there was the change you suggest, antifascist unity would be broken like a crystal... The problem as I see it is not to seek someone to substitute for Largo Caballero, but to maintain antifascist unity. It is possible that a change in the heart of government might change the situation a little, but only carried out as a decision of all the sectors who now make it up... I think, however, that for that it is already late. If I had been brought to leadership when the CNT entered

the government, or even when the Republicans left its leadership, that might have been different. Now, no. Now it would open a catastrophic period.

García Oliver then speculated, 'Was my refusal his failure in something required by Moscow. Perhaps by Stalin himself? Would he and Antonov-Ovsenko go to jail and receive the shot in the back of the neck for having failed to win me over? Would that failure be added to the suspicion of their having been won over by Spanish anarcho-syndicalism?'⁶

The Largo Caballero-Stalin Correspondence

However, it was not only Stalin's official and unofficial representatives in Spain who intervened in the affairs of the Largo Caballero government. Stalin did so himself.

On December 21 1936, Stalin, Soviet Premier Molotov and Defense Minister Voroshilov sent a letter, through the Soviet embassy in Valencia to Prime Minister Largo Caballero, addressed 'To Comrade Caballero'. It suggested that there were important differences between the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the Spanish Revolution, adding, 'It is very possible that the parliamentary route is a more efficacious procedure for revolutionary development in Spain than in Russia.'

However, Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov then suggested: 'Overall, we feel that our experience, particularly the experience of our civil war, duly applied to the particular conditions of the Spanish revolutionary struggle, can have considerable value for Spain. In view of that and in the light of your insistent requests, which Comrade Rosenberg has forwarded to us, we agreed to put at your disposition a series of military specialists, whom we have instructed to give counsel in the military area to those Spanish officers whom you indicate.'

With considerable irony, in view of the way in which these advisers actually behaved, Stalin and his aides then commented, 'It was decisively indicated to them that they should not forget that ... the

Soviet specialist, being a foreigner in Spain, cannot really be useful except by adhering rigorously to the role of adviser and only an adviser.'

The three Soviet leaders then urged Largo Caballero to report to them on whether or not he was satisfied with the role the advisers were fulfilling. They made the same request with regard to Ambassador Marcel Rosenberg.

Stalin and his colleagues then gave the Spanish prime minister four pieces of 'friendly advice'. These were that he pay special attention to the problems of the peasants, that he do his utmost to attract the support of 'the urban petty and middle bourgeoisie', that he incorporate the Republican parties fully in the work of the government, and that 'the occasion be found to declare in the press that the Government of Spain will not tolerate any attempt against the property and legitimate interests of foreigners in Spain, of the citizens of the countries which are not supporting the rebels.'

Largo Caballero replied to this letter of counsel and advice in a letter of his own, addressed to 'Comrades Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov', and dated January 12 1937. In it, he first expressed his and his government's thanks for Soviet aid. He then professed great satisfaction with the behavior of both the Soviet military advisers and Ambassador Rosenberg. He then went on to say that the government was fully conscious of the importance of the peasantry in determining the outcome of the War. 'We have respected and constantly proclaimed the right to live and develop' of the petty bourgeoisie. As for the Republican parties, he professed himself to be 'absolutely in accord with the Soviet leaders' advice. Finally, 'the interests and property of foreigners, citizens of the countries which do not aid the Rebels ... have been respected and placed under the protection of the government.'⁷

The Fall of Málaga Used Against Largo Caballero

The Communists found in the fall of Málaga to the Rebels on February 8 1937 an excuse for mounting a strong, if still somewhat indirect, campaign against Francisco Largo Caballero. We have

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earlier noted their insistence that he dismiss his principal military adviser, General José Asensio. Enrique Castro Delgado, however, had indicated that the real targets of the Communist attack were Largo Caballero and the anarchists.

After observing the traumatic impact on Republican public opinion of the loss of Málaga and the tragic flight of refugees up the coast to Almería under bombardment from both sea and air, Castro Delgado noted:

In view of the people's agitated state, the Communist Party commenced its attack. Subtle as always. Without giving names but sketching the men. Speaking of the loss of Málaga not as the result of the enemy superiority, but of the incapacity of Largo Caballero and the betrayal of General Asensio. And accusing the anarchists with Maroto at their head of all the work of disintegration carried out in the moments in which the Italian forces attacked the little and beautiful Mediterranean city. The Party understood that this military defeat of the Republic brought closer the hour of its 'hegemony'. And it started the attack on the basis of criticisms, slogans, popular demonstrations in the most important cities of the Republican zone.⁸

Later on, Castro Delgado cited a conversation in which Pedro Checa, the second-in-command of the Communist Party, explained to him the problems involved in bringing down Largo Caballero. 'The removal of Caballero doesn't depend only on the will of the Party, but on the Party's finding allies within the Partido Socialista Obrero Español and the Unión General de Trabajadores who are disposed to get rid of the Old Man. And not just that: the CNT, without doubt will defend him. And it will be necessary also, if not to convince, at least to maneuver the CNT so that it doesn't oppose with all its forces the reorganization or creation of a new government.'⁹

One strange aspect of this attack on General Asensio after the fall of Málaga was that at least some of the anarchist press joined in the attacks on the general. Thus, the editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera*:

No one succeeded in understanding why this military man who in the past was a monarchist and a Leroux man was given a position of such high responsibility in the very midst of a social revolution... No sooner did General Asensio begin to intervene in the course of war, than military defeats of a mysterious nature followed one after the other. With the formation of the 'victory' government of Largo Caballero, those defeats began to take on the nature of calamities. Irún, San Sebastián, Talavera and Toledo were lost in succession. The Málaga disaster brought to a head the disquieting feeling permeating the public opinion of the country.

FROM THE VERY DAYS OF JULY 19, THE MINISTRY OF WAR HAS BEEN IN THE HANDS OF INCOMPETENT PEOPLE, AND ON THE FRONTS – TREASON WAS CLOSELY ALLIED TO INTERNATIONAL FASCISM.¹⁰

Why Communists Wanted to Dump Largo Caballero

It is clear that during Largo Caballero's tenure as prime minister and minister of war the Communists succeeded in penetrating extensively not only the military but various parts of the civilian administration. He had been unable to prevent the establishment of a GPU secret police network totally outside the control of the Republican government. He had also to back down from his defense of General Asensio, and on various other issues, when faced with pressure not only from the Spanish Communists but also from their Soviet masters.

However, it soon became clear to the Spanish and Russian Communists that Largo Caballero had no intention of becoming their puppet. On at least one occasion, he ordered Soviet Ambassador Rosenberg out of his office. The incident occurred at the height of the campaign of the Communists to have General José Asensio removed as under-secretary of war, largely, according to Largo Caballero himself, because Asensio refused to join the Communist Party.¹¹

Largo Caballero described the incident with Ambassador Rosenberg: 'On another day, no one less than the Ambassador of Russia,

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Señor Rosenberg, accompanied by Alvarez del Vayo, visited me to ask the same thing as the Committee of the party. That seemed to me too much. I rose from my chair and in an undiplomatic tone I asked him to leave and not to return to talk to be again about this matter.’

The ex-prime minister added another significant detail about this incident. ‘I remained alone with Alvarez del Vayo. I rebuked him for playing the game of the Communists at a time and in a matter of such gravity as accusing a general of being a traitor without any proof... His only reply was that when someone said it, even if it was unjust, he should be thrown out. Good theory! But which people said it? The Communists and no one else.’¹²

When Largo Caballero was finally forced to accept Asensio’s resignation as under secretary of war, he did not appoint someone to replace him who was in any way inclined to serve the interests of the Communists. On the contrary, he named Carlos de Baraibar, one of his closest associates within the Socialist Party.

Baraibar sought as much possible to limit the influence of the Communists within the new military establishment. One of his early acts was to dismiss the man in charge of the medical services of the army, an old friend of his, a colonel, and a Communist. He found that under this man’s direction hospitals which were not controlled by the Communists were unable to get adequate supplies of bandages, drugs and other material. When de Baraibar confronted the colonel on this issue, he said that he was only following the orders from the Communist Party. Carlos de Baraibar soon found a new, less harmful, assignment for the colonel.

Later, de Baraibar also dismissed the head of the supply forces of the army. This case came about as the result of an incident involving a speech by the Communist leader Dolores Ibarruri in front of a plant turning out smoked hams and other meats for the army. While she was addressing the workers, Communists stole from the rear of the plant some 4,000 hams, which were turned over to the party. When Carlos de Baraibar confronted the supply chief, a conservative Republican regular army colonel, he was told that the Communists had threatened to kill him if he did not allow them to carry out their raid.¹³

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As minister of war, Largo Caballero himself took several important steps seeking to curtail Communist influence in the military during the period just preceding his downfall. 'I published circulars, which were sent to the generals and chiefs of Army Groups to impede during the war their engaging in politics, and directing that all limit themselves to fulfillment of their military duties; that ranks and promotions were without validity if they were not countersigned by the Minister of War and published in the *Diario Oficial*, and that hospitals suppress personal names in their titles and he designated National Hospital, Number ... and that the naming of their personnel be made by War. In case these dispositions were not fulfilled, all subsidies and subventions to them would be suppressed.'

However, of even greater potential significance in limiting Communist influence in the army was Largo Caballero's move to purge the corps of political commissars. This involved a showdown with Julio Alvarez del Vayo, of whom Largo Caballero wrote: 'He called himself a Socialist but was unconditionally at the service of the Communist Party and aided all of their manouvers, hoping, undoubtedly to best serve his personal aspirations.'

Largo Caballero described his confrontation with the political commissar general: 'I called in Alvarez del Vayo; I denounced him for his conduct and for more than two hundred appointments favoring the Communists made without my knowledge and signature. As he listened he became pallid ... he answered that the appointments were for Company commissars and that he had made them believing that that was within his competence. I showed with the Law in my hand that there were no exceptions whatever, and all had to be signed by the minister.'¹⁴

What Largo Caballero did not add was that he issued an executive order, dated April 17, reaffirming that all appointments as political commissars had to have his signature, and that any made previous to that date, and which he did not confirm by May 15, would be null and void.¹⁵

Of course, the Stalinists were quite aware of the reasons for this order by Largo Caballero. The depth of this understanding is shown by the comments on it by the American Communist member of the

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International Brigades, Joe Dallet, who was attending a political commissars' training school, in writing to his wife: 'The school assumes particularly important proportions in view of the present political situation here, with Caballero leaning toward the Right, demanding the abolition of all political commissars, except those approved by Caballero. This, of course, is a definite attack on our Party. The Right-wing elements in the government are afraid of our influence in the army, which is growing by leaps and bounds.'

Certainly, each day-to-day clash with the Communists (both Spanish and Soviet) by Largo Caballero and his closest associates helped to convince the Communists that Largo Caballero was a serious stumbling block to their achieving complete control of the Spanish Republican government. Another factor was certainly the increasingly close relations between the prime minister and the anarchist members of the cabinet. In an earlier chapter we have noted the close cooperation between Largo Caballero and Juan García Oliver, and between Carlos de Baraibar and Juan López. Largo Caballero maneuvered with García Oliver to prevent the infiltration of Communist political commissars into the officers' training schools which the anarchist minister of justice had established and was supervising. Similarly, we have noted the agreement between the minister of war and the CNT that, when the anarchist militia units were converted into regular army brigades and divisions, they should continue to be commanded by anarchist officers.

However, there were certainly other factors that convinced the Communists that Largo Caballero must be overthrown. One was that Largo Caballero and his associates in the Socialist Party and UGT, like the anarchists, felt that success in the Civil War was closely associated with success in the Revolution which had taken place in Loyalist Spain after July 19 1936. Although during his prime ministership, Largo Caballero sought, successfully, to re-establish the effective power of the State, he also took important steps to defend the Revolution, such as legalizing the council of Aragón, and working with the anarchist ministers to provide certain help for the workers' collectives in various parts of the Republic.

Perhaps the position of the Largo Caballero faction of the Socialists and UGT was put forward by Carlos de Baraibar, as well as anyone,

at the joint UGT-CNT May Day meeting in Valencia on May 1 1937: 'Frequently there is someone who tries to divert the attention of the proletariat, telling it that it has to be concerned exclusively with winning the war, since that way the Revolution will be won. That is not true, because it could come to pass that we win the war and then lose the Revolution ...'¹⁶

This kind of position certainly ran totally counter to that of the Stalinists who from the beginning were set upon destroying the Revolution which had taken place at the onset of the Civil War.

Finally, Jesús Hernández, the Communist who was minister of education in the Largo Caballero government, insisted in his memoirs written some years after he had ceased to be a Communist, that the issue which made Stalin decide that Largo Caballero had to go was the secret approval which the Spanish prime minister had given to a British-French proposal for possibly ending the Civil War.

Without specifying the exact time of the Anglo-French proposition (although other evidence would seem to indicate that it was in January or February 1937), Hernández insisted that it consisted of possible overtures by the British and French to Hitler and Mussolini that they withdraw their support from Franco and suggest to him that he make his peace with the Republic, in exchange for Spain possibly agreeing to at least joint control with the Italians over Spanish Morocco and return of the former German colony of Cameroons to the Reich. The British and French made this proposal to Luis Araquistáin, Spanish ambassador to France and a close personal and political associate of Largo Caballero, who passed it on to the prime minister. According to Hernández, Largo Caballero tentatively accepted the idea, if it could be brought to fruition.¹⁷ Salvador de Madariaga accepted the validity of these proposed concessions by the Largo Caballero government to the French and British.¹⁸

If Jesús Hernández is to be believed, the Russians also soon got wind of what was afoot, and Stalin was outraged. He feared that an end to the Spanish Civil War and an agreement for sharing power with the Axis in the Mediterranean would remove major issues which were likely to provoke war between the Allies and the Axis,

and thus give Hitler a freer hand to attack the USSR, without fear of having to face a second front in the West. According to Hernández, it was at that point that Stalin passed word to the Spanish Communists that 'Largo Caballero must leave the government'.¹⁹

At least one foreign newspaper, *Echo de Paris*, noted on May 17, something else which was also part of the Stalinists' plan to oust Largo Caballero – that is, the removal of the anarchists from the Republican government. 'The directives from Moscow are to remove the four anarchist ministers, García Oliver, Juan Peiró, Federica Montseny and F. López, from the Government. This seems to be the principal motive for the crisis. If this is achieved, one can then say that Moscow has obtained what it wanted...'²⁰

Luis Araquistáin has claimed that in the weeks before the removal of Largo Caballero, the Soviet government brought pressure to bear to achieve this objective by decreasing aid shipments to Spain, as they did a year later to oust Defense Minister Indalecio Prieto, and that in both cases aid shipments rose substantially when the Communist objective had been achieved.²¹

The Timing of Largo Caballero's Fall

There was certainly another issue which provoked the Communists to bring about the downfall of Largo Caballero at the time they did. This was a proposed major offensive by the Republican forces into Extremadura, which, if it had been successful, would have made the prime minister's position almost impregnable.

Largo Caballero himself described the proposed offensive, which was scheduled to commence on May 16 1937: 'The operation would be initiated attacking Penarroja, taking control of the railroad from Córdoba to Extremadura, and entering in that region, cutting communications with the province of Madrid. At the same time, another offensive towards Guadalupe would seek to cut the highways near Madrid.' He said that some 40,000 men would be involved.

The ex-prime minister wrote that when he proposed this to the Russian advisers 'who visited me every day to talk about the war,'

they raised no objections. Instead, they proposed the names of brigade commanders, all Communists, who should lead the offensive. '... The General Staff and I had already designated the people for these commands...'²²

In view of the later attitude of the Russians, the question may be raised as to the feasibility of the offensive planned by Largo Caballero. However, Burnett Bolloten cited the pro-Franco student of the Republican Popular Army Ramón Salas Larrazábal (who said that the planned offensive was to have involved 100,000 men rather than the 40,000 reported by Largo Caballero) as rating its possibilities 'very highly'.²³ Juan López, the CNT member of Largo Caballero's cabinet, confirmed that the Republican military leaders had high hopes for the success of this offensive.²⁴

In any case, the Russian advisers finally strongly opposed the Extremadura offensive. Jesús Hernández described the meeting at Alcalá de Henares, in the office of General G. Kulik, Soviet adviser to the central front, at which this decision was taken. In attendance were not only various Soviet officers, but the two Communist members of the Largo Caballero cabinet, as well as Comintern representatives Palmiro Togliatti and Victorio Codovila.

After the assembled guests had consumed a considerable amount of food and drink, Kulik announced that before transacting business, they had to await a dispatch from the Soviet embassy in Valencia. The dispatch rider finally arrived, and the document was duly deciphered. After reading it, Kulik announced: 'Moscow notifies us that the operation in Extremadura cannot go forward.'

There followed a considerable discussion in which, according to Hernández, he and Vicente Uribe spoke up in defense of the proposed offensive, on the grounds that the Franco troops were weak and most vulnerable in the area and that the Republican army could expect considerable support from the local population in Extremadura, which strongly favored the Loyalist cause. At the same time, Hernández claimed that the attack against Brunete, near Madrid, suggested as an alternative by General Kulik, would put the Republican forces at a disadvantage because it would involve assaults on entrenched positions, at which the Loyalist forces, and in any case

would not, even if successful, result in a fundamental change in the war situation.

Kulik and the Comintern officials were naturally unmoved by these arguments. Hernández noted: 'The death of the "Caballero plan" was decreed.' Togliatti suggested, on the possibility that Largo Caballero would not desist from his plan that 'if he insists, there will always be ways of making him desist'.²⁵

Hernández claimed that the possibility of the success of this offensive was not what made the Communists – Russian and Spanish – decide to topple Largo Caballero; that decision had already been taken. However, it is clear that the Russians in fact strongly opposed the offensive, and that the fall of the Largo Caballero government prevented its execution.

Even before the cabinet crisis, the Communists did their utmost to frustrate the Extremadura offensive. On the one hand, they operated through General Miaja, who was by then totally under their influence, if not a member of the Party. He refused pointblank to send two seasoned brigades from Madrid front (to be replaced by two others with less experience) as ordered by the war minister, and only backed down when Largo Caballero, in a cabinet meeting, threatened to dismiss him. Then, when Largo Caballero sent a written note to 'the effective chief of aviation', asking how many war planes would be available for the offensive, he was informed that only ten could be spared, obviously a ridiculous number given the scale of offensive action which was being planned.²⁶

Largo Caballero explained what was meant by 'the effective chief' of the Spanish air force: 'The aviation was directed by a Russian chief, although officially there was a Spaniard. The Republic paid for the material and the Russians believed they had the duty to control recruiting, the pilots school, and even whether or not to fulfill orders to send aviation to whatever front... The General Staff ordered the sending of aviation... Prieto communicated this to the official chief of aviation, he to the Russian chief, and there was an infinitude of cases in which that force was not provided.'²⁷

Perhaps Enrique Castro Delgado has given the clearest and most succinct explanation for why the Communists were determined to get rid of Francisco Largo Caballero as head of the Republican

government. 'Largo Caballero was a battle and an indispensable victory, not only for the war, but to assure at the end of it, an objective that the Communists didn't talk about, but which was clear to each of them: to bury the Second Republic and birth to a new republic, the character of which had been defined by the classics of Marxism.'²⁸

Finally, it is probable that the removal of the anarchists from the government was at least one of the objectives sought by the Communists in bringing about the fall of the Caballero cabinet. Augustine Souchy has quoted the French newspaper *Echo de Paris* 'at the end of May', to the effect that: 'The instructions of Moscow were that the four anarchist Ministers ... should be removed from the Government. This seems to be the main cause of the crisis in the government.'²⁹

The Final Decision to Oust Largo Caballero

According to Jesús Hernández, the formal decision that Largo Caballero had to be removed was made at a meeting of the Politburo of the Spanish Communist Party in Valencia early in March 1937. That meeting was attended by Politburo members José Díaz (general secretary), Jesús Hernández, Dolores Ibarruri, Vicente Uribe, Antonio Mije, and Pedro Checa, with only Pedro Martínez Cartón, who was at the front in Extremadura, not being present. But, in addition, Comintern delegates Boris Stepanov, Victorio Codovila, Erno Guero, Palmiro Togliatti, and André Marty attended. So did the conseller and chargé d'affaires of the Soviet embassy Gaikins, and another Russian, whom Hernández identifies as Alexander Orlov. As he noted, there were more foreigners than Spaniards at that meeting. (Orlov denied that he had taken part in the March 1937 meeting. Burnett Bolloten has suggested that in fact it may not have been Orlov, the head of the GPU in Spain but his deputy Belayev, who was present at the fateful Politburo session.)³⁰

The Politburo meeting was a stormy one. According to Hernández, he and José Díaz strongly opposed any move to bring about the ouster of Largo Caballero, on the grounds that the Communists had

been able to make great headway under his administration, that his removal would split the 'antifascist front' and that if the Communists engineered it, that would result in severely isolating them. At one point, José Díaz and André Marty almost came to blows.

Until the Comintern officials had spoken, none of the other Spanish politburo members dared speak out. Stepanov led the attack on the prime minister/minister of war, accusing him of being responsible for 'catastrophe after catastrophe'. Gaikins gave what was probably the real reason for the manoeuvre, when he said: 'Caballero is getting away from Soviet influence. A few days ago, he almost threw Rosenberg from the President's office ... Rosenberg asked insistently the suspension of *La Batalla* ... the illegalization of the POUM, he paid no heed ...'

After it was clear what the Comintern and Soviet delegations wanted, all of the Spanish Politburo except Díaz and Hernández went along with 'the line'. Those two said that because of party discipline they would toe, but that they wanted it understood that they still thought it wrong. Thereupon, Palmiro Togliatti, 'the heavy artillery of the delegation', answered Díaz and Hernández, saying, 'It is not worth the trouble to spend time on the reservations expressed by Díaz and Hernández towards "the House" [the Kremlin]. That would be to accept that there could be a serious basis of discussion, an inadmissible thing. I think that all the rest is perfectly clarified. I propose to commence immediately the campaign to loosen the position of Caballero.' Then, with supreme irony, Togliatti added, 'We must begin with a large meeting in Valencia, where Comrade Hernández will make the speech. It will have a great political effect that a minister of Caballero rises against the president.'³¹

Hernández bowed to party discipline and gave a violent speech against Largo Caballero a few days later. The prime minister then dismissed him, but when he asked the Politburo of the Communist Party to name a substitute, it refused, and Largo Caballero was forced to agree to Hernández's continuing as minister of education. Hernández noted: 'After this backing down, the *agitprop* of the Party entered into full activity. A few weeks were enough for that colossus of political authority to be converted into a broken tatter, who was

going to be ousted from power like one throws into the attic a no longer useful piece of furniture. Caballero was defeated.³²

The Onset of the Cabinet Crisis

President Manuel Azaña was informed shortly before it happened of the coming downfall of Largo Caballero. When he arrived in Valencia from Barcelona after the May Days, he was waited upon by representatives of the Left Republican, Right-wing Socialists and Communists, who told him that they were fed up with Largo Caballero and that the Communists were going to provoke a crisis in the next cabinet meeting, by demanding that Largo Caballero leave the War Ministry.³³

The downfall of the Largo Caballero cabinet – and with it the exit of the anarchists from the Republican government – began on May 13 1937. In the cabinet meeting of that day, Largo Caballero first gave a report on the ‘solution’ of the May Days crisis in Barcelona. Then, according to Largo Caballero, the Communist ministers ‘proposed the dissolution of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and the Partido de Unificación Marxista (POUM), Trotskyist, which had united with the sindicalists to combat the Partido Socialista Unificado (Communist).’

Largo Caballero then noted: ‘I indicated that that could not be done legally; that so long as I was president of the Government, it would not be done, because I had not been fighting for political and trade-union liberties for half a century, only now to stain my history by dissolving governmentally any organization, whether anarchist, Communist or Socialist, Republican or of any other tendency whatever; that if the tribunals proved that there had been committed some crime meriting suspension, they would do it, but not the government.’ At that point, according to Largo Caballero, the Communist ministers ‘those that always have the word democracy on their lips, revolted and resigned, rising and leaving’. Thereupon, the prime minister adjourned the meeting, according to his report on the incident.³⁴

According to Largo Caballero’s account, he then went to see

President Manuel Azaña, and submitted his resignation. Azaña asked him to think it over overnight. The next morning, Azaña suggested that he withdraw his resignation, and go ahead with the launching of the Extremadura offensive. It was only when he had agreed to this and was preparing to leave in the direction of the front that three of the Socialist ministers, Ramón Lamonedá, Juan Negrín and Anastasio de Gracia came to inform him that, in view of the resignation of the two Communist ministers, they had been ordered by the executive of the Socialist Party also to resign, which they had done.³⁵ That, of course, made the cabinet crisis unavoidable. It also meant the indefinite postponement – in fact, the cancellation – of the Extremadura offensive.

The version which José Peirats gave of this cabinet meeting was somewhat different from that given by Largo Caballero himself. After noting the prime minister's refusal to take action against the POUM and CNT, and the withdrawal from the meeting by the two Communist ministers, Peirats wrote that Largo Caballero then said, 'The Council of Ministers continues... It was then when the strangest thing occurred. Slowly there rose the majority of the ministers, among them Prieto, Negrín, Alvarez del Vayo, Giral, Irujo. There remained in their seats the president of the council, Anastasio de Gracia, Angel Galarza and the four CNT ministers.'

At that point, according to Peirats, Caballero stated: 'In the face of this situation, the crisis is presented. However, the four CNT ministers suggested that they go on with the business before them, to which Largo Caballero replied, 'That would be dictatorship. I don't wish to be dictator'³⁶ Juan López presented the same version of what happened, as did Federica Montseny, also present at the May 13 meeting.³⁷

The Anarchists and the Ministerial Crisis

Whether the formal crisis occurred at the meeting of July 13 or on July 14, by the latter day the four CNTers who had been in Largo Caballero's cabinet were ex-ministers. On that day they met with the CNT National Committee, to decide what proposals to submit to

President Azaña (who, following parliamentary custom, was consulting all of those groups which had participated in the fallen cabinet) about how to resolve the crisis. The meeting decided to urge the president to rename Largo Caballero to try to form a new government. This the president soon did.³⁸

The CNT pledged Largo Caballero their support. Mariano Vázquez the national secretary of the CNT, called for 'A Government which has a trade-union base, and is presided over, indisputably, by Largo Caballero.' The CNT daily *Fragua Social* of Valencia ran a biography and picture of Largo Caballero, and under the picture carried the caption, 'Largo Caballero, leading figure of the Iberian revolution, with whose activities as chief of Government and Minister of War, the CNT is identified.'³⁹

On July 15, Largo Caballero presented his proposed new cabinet, with three portfolios of the UGT (including the premiership and national defense) and two each for the Communist Party, Socialist Party, Unión Republicana, Izquierda Republicana, and the CNT.⁴⁰ Clearly, Largo Caballero did not consult either the Communists or the CNT in drawing up this proposal.

García Oliver insisted in his memoirs that the CNT agreed to this reduction from the four positions it had had before to only two.⁴¹ However, Burnett Bolloten cited an article in *Fragua Social* arguing that although the CNT was not seeking to increase its representation in the government, it certainly could not accept a reduction, particularly it could not accept having the same representation as the Communist Party which had provoked the crisis.⁴² José Peirats noted that the CNT (as well as the Communist and Socialist parties) 'roundly refused its participation'.⁴³

In any case, Largo Caballero was unable to form a new cabinet. Palmiro Togliatti reported the fall of the Left Socialist prime minister to his Comintern bosses as a 'triumph of the Communist Party'.⁴⁴

The Succession of Juan Negrín

When Francisco Largo Caballero failed in his attempts to organize a

new cabinet, President Manuel Azaña quickly turned to Juan Negrín, who succeeded almost immediately. His new government was made up of Right-wing Socialists, Communists, and members of Izquierda Republicana, Unión Republicana, the Basque Nationalists and Catalan Left. Both the UGT and the CNT were left without representation in the Negrín government.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that Juan Negrín was, above all else, the choice of the Communist Party (and their Russian and Comintern advisers) to succeed Francisco Largo Caballero as prime minister. We have noted earlier in this chapter that as early as November 1936, at least one key Russian political operative in Spain, Stashevsky, had picked him out to be Largo Caballero's successor. The actual decision, however, appears to have been taken at the March 1937 meeting of the Spanish Party's Politburo where the definitive agreement to get rid of Largo Caballero had also been taken.

Jesús Hernández recorded that Togliatti at that meeting commented: 'With regard to the successor of Caballero, there is a practical problem on which I invite the comrades to reflect. I think that we must proceed to choose him by elimination. Prieto? Vayo? Negrín? Of the three, Negrín could be the indicated one. He is not anti-Communist like Prieto, nor stupid like Vayo.'⁴⁶

Later, Hernández notes: 'I suppose that as a pre-arranged formula (the choice had been made without any consultation with us). I was deputed to speak with Don Juan Negrín, to offer him our support if he agreed to occupy the presidency of the new Government.' Hernández also noted that he invited Negrín to meet with him in the ministry of education. After some discussion of the cabinet crisis, Hernández told Negrín: 'The Political Bureau of my Party wants to advise the President your candidacy as prime minister.'

At first, Negrín pointed out that he was not a popular figure. Then he told Hernández: 'I am not a Communist.' Hernández answered: 'That is better. If you were a Communist we could not propose you as President of the Council. We want a president who is a friend of the Communists . . . nothing more but nothing less either . . .'

When Negrín told Hernández that he did not want to be pictured as a 'straw-man' for the Communists, Hernández assured him that 'our support will be as discreet as it is decided and respectful.' But, he

added, 'One thing can't be avoided: that you will be called a "Communist fellow-traveller".' This would be particularly the case if Negrín agreed with the Communists' military policy, to which Negrín replied: 'In general I am identified with it.'⁴⁷

Negrín was destined to be a loyal ally of the Communists until the end.

The Anarchists and the Advent of the Negrín Regime

During the days in which Largo Caballero was trying to find a way to stay in office, the anarchists made it clear that they would not participate in any government which was not headed by Largo Caballero as prime minister and minister of war. They therefore refused to enter the government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín.

Indeed, once the composition of the new government was made known, the CNT publicly announced its refusal to cooperate in any way with the Negrín government. Its statement of May 18 read: 'The Negrín Government being constituted without our participation, consistent with our position, we shall not lend it any collaboration. At this moment we only let the proletariat organized in the CNT know that now more than ever it must pay attention to the watchwords of the responsible committees. Only with homogeneity in action shall we make the counter-revolution fail... Comrades: attention to the watchwords of the responsible committees! Let no one lend themselves to the ploys of the provocateurs! Serenity! Firmness and unity! Long live the alliance of the trade unions!'⁴⁸

However, there were apparently some among the CNT leaders who did not agree with that position. The son of Horacio Prieto wrote many years later: 'Numerous leaders were not in accord with this decision. They insisted that the interests of the CNT should not be hurt by a prideful attitude, lacking all political realism, in favor of the old leader of the UGT, whose hostility to anarchosindicalism had been profound throughout his life and who had just demonstrated his ingratitude in proposing to this Confederation, which had been his strongest support against Indalecio Prieto and the Communists, only two ministries. Why, they said, should they put in danger a

freedom of action acquired with such difficulty? Why leave the field clear to the worst enemies of the CNT?'⁴⁹

Clearly, Horacio Prieto was one of those who felt that the CNT had made a serious mistake in not joining the Negrín government. He wrote later: 'The new President of the Council offered three ministries to the CNT which, from a political point of view, were of more importance than the four they had had; but the person of the President did not please the CNT and it refused to collaborate. A year later it participated in the same government with one sole ministry and without the President having modified at all his habitual manners.'⁵⁰

There is at least some indication that some elements within the anarchist movement may have considered the possibility of ousting the Negrín government by a coup. According to Terence M. Smyth, 'At some point in 1937, probably after the May days, an internal organization of the libertarian movement drew up a plan for a *coup d'état*, which contained an estimate of their probable force in the most important cities of the rearguard... The scarce information about Almería and Albacete makes one think that, in spite of the fact this was a work of the National Secretary of Statistics, it was not being carried out by the official CNT.'⁵¹

For his part, Palmiro Togliatti reported to his Comintern chiefs in Moscow on September 15 1937: '...rumors have circulated these days of the preparation of an anarchist putsch... A few days ago we received confidential information that the anarchists, together with elements of the V column, were preparing the revolt for the 14 and 15 of the month... Actually something very strange occurred. It seems that, at the same time that we were warned of an imminent anarchist revolt, the anarchists received information that a Communist revolt had been planned, also for the night of the 14th to the 15th. They also took the precautionary moves...'⁵²

The Anarchists in the Catalan Provisional Government

The removal of the anarchists from the Republican government was soon followed by their disappearance from that of Catalonia. At the

height of the conflict in Barcelona and other Catalan cities, on May 5 1937, the incumbent government of the Generalidad of Catalonia had resigned. Its place was taken by what amounted to a provisional government, which would continue in office, as César Lorenzo has written, 'until the reestablishment of the normal course of social and political life' in the region.⁵³

As originally conceived of, the government (called the Executive Council of the Generalidad) and presided over by President Luis Companys) was to be made up of the regional secretaries of the CNT, PSUC, Unió de Rabassaires and Left Catalan Party. However, as we have noted earlier, PSUC secretary Antonio Sese was killed in the streets of Barcelona shortly after being appointed, and his place was taken by Rafael Vidiella.

Three of the four members of the Executive Council had several portfolios. CNT Secretary Valerio Mas was in charge of the economy, public services and health; Rafael Vidiella controlled public order, justice and labor; while J. Ponso of the Unió de Rabassaires had the portfolios of supply and agriculture. Only Carlos Martí Faced of the Esquerra Catalana had a single charge, that of finances.⁵⁴

Valerio Mas had his principal problems with the Portfolio of economy. His main worry was that of supplying the raw materials which were needed by Catalan industry. At one point, both of the major chemical plants which provided raw materials were bombed, one beyond recovery. The workers in the other one at first did not want to repair and re-open it, because they were afraid that as soon as it was re-opened, it would be bombed again. However, he was able to force the re-opening of the factory.

Mas worked with the Consejo de Economía during his month and a half in the government, and his relations with the *consejo* were generally cordial. During that period, the *consejo* was still following the general lines of policy of the CNT.⁵⁵

However, whatever success Valerio Mas may have had in giving general direction to the Catalan economy, and protecting the workers' control of large segments of it, the CNT was suffering severe setbacks in the political arena during the last month and a half that the anarchists were in the Catalan government. Burnett Bolloten has noted that on June 4, the councillor of public

security officially dissolved the *patrullas de control*, the largely CNT-controlled police which had been established right after July 19 1936.⁵⁶

Bolloten went on to note: 'If the dissolution of the patrols was a heavy blow to the CNT and FAI, no less so was the loss of their power in countless towns and villages. On 15 May, the revolutionary committees – that had hitherto resisted the Generalidad's decree of 9 October 1936 providing for their replacement by municipal councils in which the various organizations were to be seated in proportion to their representation in the cabinet – were declared illegal by the Catalan government. In fact, many of the committees were overturned by the newly arrived guards and *carabineros* even before they were outlawed in mid-May.'⁵⁷

The Exit of Anarchists from the Catalan Government

On June 26, by common accord of all of the elements represented in the Catalan government a 'cabinet crisis' was declared, that is, it was agreed that the government should be reorganized. During the next few days, there were negotiations between Luis Companys and the various political and trade-union groups.

The day after the resignation of the four-man cabinet, *Solidaridad Obrera* published an editorial to the effect: 'It is necessary to rapidly constitute the Council of the Generalidad, but without interfering with the legitimate rights of any party. The CNT is not ignorant of the attempt to wound it, reducing the number of the representatives, and loyally and with anticipation points out that that is not the most adequate way to reaffirm the bases in which the new governmental line of mutual respect must rest, if it is really desired to win the war.'⁵⁸

In the negotiations, it was tentatively agreed that in the new cabinet there should be three from the CNT, three from the PSUC, three from the Esquerra Catalana, and one from the Unió de Rabassaires, and that President Companys would preside over the cabinet without a prime minister. It was also agreed that the three CNT councillors would be Roberto Alfonso Vidal in health and

social assistance, Juan García Oliver in public services, and Germinal Esgleas (the companion of Federica Montseny) in economy. Vidal had been substituted for José Xena, a relatively unknown member of the FAI, to whom President Companys objected.

During the negotiations, President Companys had suggested the appointment of an eleventh cabinet member, Pedro Bosch Gimpera, of the *Acción Catalana* party. The CNT negotiators objected to this, and although they were advised by CNT national secretary, Mariano Vázquez, not to be intransigent on the subject, when President Companys did not press the point, they thought that he had abandoned the idea.

Finally, on June 29 the list of the new Catalan cabinet was published. It contained the ten names which had been agreed upon, but also included Dr Bosch Gimpera as a councillor without portfolio. The decision to name him had been taken by President Companys without the agreement of the CNT.

The CNT strongly objected to the addition of the name of Dr Bosch Gimpera. In a declaration published on June 30, the regional committee noted: 'When it appeared that the political problem had been resolved, and when the *Confederación Regional del Trabajo* of Catalonia had given the names of the men who would represent it in the Council of the *Generalidad*, the confederal Organization of Catalonia is confronted with the *fait accompli* of a list of the new Government in which there is a councillor without portfolio, for which our organization had not given its approval, rather had opposed this formula from the first instant in the negotiations on the crisis...'

The proclamation went on to say: 'Since this would seem to be a maneuver, an act of disloyalty, the *Confederación Regional del Trabajo* of Catalonia has made it clear to the President of the *Generalidad* its absolute inconformity with this nomination, and the President of the *Generalidad* has pronounced in favor of retaining it...'⁵⁹

The CNT leaders made their protests clear by refusing to have their three members of the new cabinet take up their duties. As a consequence, after five days, President Companys announced the installation of still another cabinet, without CNT representation.

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That one remained in office until the fall of Catalonia to the Franco forces.⁶⁰

There are indications that President Companys' maneuver was designed to make the anarchists refuse to continue to take part in his government. Even before the negotiations for a new cabinet began, the *CNT-FAI Bulletin* published parts of a 'reserved political report' of the PSUC which foresaw the cabinet crisis and said: 'In this Government participation of the CNT will be permitted, but under such circumstances that the CNT will see itself obliged not to accept collaboration and in this way we shall present ourselves before public opinion as the only ones who want to collaborate with all sectors. If there is intransigence in this situation, it will not be us, but those who on other instances have maintained the same position.'⁶¹

César Lorenzo summed up the significance of the exit of the anarchists from the Catalan regime:

The libertarians understood that the Catalanists and Communists had decided to eliminate them from power, and finding the political maneuvers repugnant, they retired from the Council of the Generalidad... In truth, not only were they tired of so much intrigue and sordid maneuvers for which they were hardly prepared by their ideology and their customs as revolutionary militants, but they perceived also that the Catalan government was no more than a façade and that the sole effective authority was that of Negrín...

All these affairs of more or less ministerial portfolios were only the exterior, superficial aspect of a very grave struggle. It was the conflict between the anarchists and the Communists, that conflict which was the fundamental fact of the internal history of the Republican zone during all of the Civil War. After having eliminated from power the elements least hostile to the CNT (the Left Socialists and in Catalonia the anti-Stalinist Marxists), after having eliminated the CNT itself from the central government, the Stalinists dotted another 'i': eviction of the libertarians from the Generalidad. The PSUC was now master in Catalonia, as the CP was in the rest of Spain, but only to the degree that these parties controlled the mechanism of the

state and had control of a considerable part of the UGT. It still remained to wipe out anarchosyndicalism where it still concerned imposing force, that is to say, in the streets, in the factories, in the agrarian collectives, and at the front.⁶²

The Anarchists on the Defensive – I

After the May Events in Barcelona and the consequent removal of the anarchists from the governments of Catalonia and the Republic, the anarchists were thrown strongly on the defensive. The issue was no longer extension of the Revolution, but rather an increasingly last ditch attempt to defend the gains which had been made in the first weeks and months of the Civil War, and to preserve the existence of their organizations and even the lives of their members.

Meanwhile, their principal enemies, the Stalinists, pushed their own inexorable drive to achieve absolute power within the Republic. Many years after the Civil War, the Spanish Communists ‘confessed’ to the ‘errors’ of their behavior during the conflict. Julian Gorkin has noted that this occurred during the meeting of 81 Communist parties held in Moscow in November–December 1960:

In the midst of so much mystery surrounding the Moscow meeting, something has filtered out via Warsaw – undoubtedly purposefully – concerning an applauded self-criticism made by ‘Pasionaria’ in the name of the Spanish Communist Party – in reality as the result of a decision higher up. This notice said simply: ‘Dolores Ibaruri has said that, in the course of the civil war, the Spanish Communist Party committed grave errors, denying in practice sincere and profound cooperation with the other popular forces which had risen against Fascism.’ This unexpected statement, passionate and apparently vigorously

applauded, came in support of the condemnation of ‘sectarianism’, which was one of the predominant themes of the Moscow Congress.¹

Step by step the Stalinists sought to crush all groups that stood in the way of their achieving absolute power. First, the POUM was totally crushed. At the same time, the power base of Francisco Largo Caballero in the Unión General de Trabajadores was almost destroyed and he was virtually placed under house arrest.² Next came the turn of the Stalinists’ erstwhile ally, Indalecio Prieto, who suffered from his attempts to block Communist predominance in the military by being totally eliminated not only from the government, but from political influence. The Spanish Republican parties and the Catalan Left Party in Catalonia were reduced to impotence in the face of the Stalinists’ destruction of their more formidable adversaries.

By the last months of the War, the only significant opponent still left standing was the anarchist movement, and it was being subjected to unremitting persecution and frustration. Its resistance to the Stalinists and their ally Prime Minister Juan Negrín, weakened, and grave divisions were opened in the libertarian ranks. Only when it was too late, did the anarchists finally react and participate in the coup which ousted Negrín, in the National Defense Council which resulted from this *coup*, less than a month before the end of the War.

Divisions within the anarchist ranks, and their participation in the National Defense Council will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. Here we want to center our attention on the Communists’ drive to power, how the anarchists reacted to it, and suffered from it.

The Anarchists’ Campaign to Return to the Government

From the moment they were ousted from the Republican government, the anarchists began demanding that they be reincorporated in it. Jesús Hernández, in his book against the anarchists, cited a letter dated June 3 1937 from Mariano Vázquez, national secretary of the

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CNT, asking that the CNT be reincorporated in the government, a request which Negrín refused.³

At a meeting early in July 1937 in Valencia, organized by the national committee of the CNT, with Mariano Vázquez as the major speaker, a resolution was adopted which called, among other things, for 'Constitution of a Government with proportional representation of all the antifascist forces...'⁴

Three weeks later, Joaquín Cortes, speaking on behalf of the CNT national committee at a meeting in Caspe, Aragón, said '... Although they have thrown us out of the Government, the CNT has not said that it didn't want to participate in it. What the CNT said and says is, simply, that it is not disposed to go into the Government to horse-trade indecently as everyone has been doing until now. We want to enter the Government to carry forward the war, to carry forward also the revolution... I ask you, anarchist, socialist, republican, non-party comrades, are we fighting at the front and on the job, in the vanguard and the rearguard, so as, in addition to stopping fascism, to permit a party to establish its dictatorship, wiping out all the other antifascist organizations?'⁵

On July 18, a Levante regional congress of the CNT demanded for the CNT 'intervention in the direction of the policy of Spain, in all organisms having to do with the progress of the war, juridical organization, political-administrative organization and control of the economy.' It demanded 'participation in power' for the CNT, and a 'proportional representation in the Government and its representative and executive organs.'⁶

However, there is evidence that Negrín and Indalecio Prieto had no intention of admitting the anarchists to the government, until its strength had been drastically reduced. Louis Fischer wrote: 'Negrín told me he did not want the Anarchists in his government. They might come in later when they learned to collaborate. Prieto was of the same mind. Prieto explained his stand to me. He said, 'We are a coalition government. Each minister brings the government the support of his party. But an Anarchist minister does not do this; his party is an unorganized flock; part goes in one direction, part in another. The Anarchist leaders have no influence over their own people...'⁷

The campaign of the anarchists for reincorporation in the government continued. At the end of December 1937, a front-page editorial in the *CNT-FAI Bulletin* read: 'It is necessary to become convinced of the value for the future and for the movement, of the collaboration the workers could provide in the Government... The quicker the CNT and the UGT collaborate in the Government the quicker will be the victory, and the revolution will continue its ascendant path...'⁸

Another front page editorial in the same publication a couple weeks later argued that there should be in the government, 'All three antifascist nuclei, and most particularly the two great labor centrals which are and represent the most select of the Spanish people...'⁹

The CNT leaders pushed the idea of its reincorporation in the Republican government in the process of negotiating a unity of action pact with the UGT. As a consequence of this, the document which was finally adopted in March 1938 by the two central labor organizations stated: 'The UGT declares that it will not be an obstacle to the incorporation of the CNT in functions of government.'¹⁰

Then, on April 2, at a meeting of the new liaison committee set up under the March 1938 CNT-UGT agreement, an official letter was drafted demanding participation of both the CNT and UGT in the cabinet. On the following day a plenum of the regional federations of the CNT officially approved the CNT's entry into the Negrín government.¹¹

Segundo Blanco in the Negrín Government

About a month after the signing of the CNT-UGT Pact, Prime Minister Negrín finally agreed to have a CNT member of his cabinet. However, he did so on his own terms. For one thing, he offered them only one ministry, and that not one of great consequence in the prosecution of the War. For another, Negrín wanted the choice of cabinet member to be his, not that of the CNT itself.

According to Manuel Muñoz Díez, of Mariano Vázquez's biographer, Negrín decided to have at least token representation of both

the CNT and UGT, and at first proposed that the national secretaries of the two labor groups occupy the two seats in the cabinet allotted to the organizations. Vázquez rejected this idea, and did not submit it to the national committee.¹²

Negrín still did not want to leave the free choice of their cabinet minister up to the CNT. According to José Peirats, 'Señor Negrín asked the CNT for three names from whom he would choose the future minister. This annoying proposition was debated in a meeting of the Libertarian Movement, and there was evident there the expected opposition. Mariano R. Vázquez and Horacio M. Prieto succeeded in once again obtaining a favorable decision. The list presented contained the names of Horacio M. Prieto, García Oliver and Segundo Blanco. Negrín chose the last of these...'¹³ (García Oliver has said that the CNT list was Juan López, Horacio Prieto and Blanco.)¹⁴

Juan García Oliver has indicated that there was great unhappiness among the CNT rank and file about the return of the anarchists to the government. 'Segundo Blanco and Puig Elías were not seen as bad candidates for minister and sub-minister. They formed part of the Negrín team and that was enough for them to be looked upon with contempt. When it became known that Segundo Blanco, an outstanding militant in Asturias, but totally unknown in Catalonia, the seat of the government, had been chosen by Negrín as the most mature melon of the pile, it was not rancor or anger that the CNT militants of the *sindicatos* felt, but loathing and contempt. This was not towards the minister but towards the Representatives and leaders of the CNT, the FAI and the FJL.'¹⁵

Thus, on April 6 1938, Segundo Blanco became the one CNT member of the Negrín cabinet with the post of minister of education. Among those who have written about Blanco's role as Negrín's minister, opinion has been sharply divided. Thus, Burnett Bolloten has observed, after noting the unimportant posts given to the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties in Negrín's April 1938 cabinet: 'No less trivial was the role of Segundo Blanco of the CNT, named minister of education as a sop of the libertarian movement...'¹⁶

For their part, Broué and Temime have called the role of Blanco as

that of being Negrín's 'spokesman within the Libertarian movement'.¹⁷ This judgment coincided with the opinion of José Peirats, who called Blanco 'after a time just one more Negrínist'.¹⁸

Juan López, who himself had been a minister in the government of Francisco Largo Caballero, said many years later that he had felt at the time (April 1938) that it was a great mistake for the CNT to have a minister in a government which was really controlled by the Communists. He claimed that Segundo Blanco had no power at all in the Negrín administration.¹⁹

However, Ramón Alvarez, Segundo Blanco's long-time colleague in the libertarian movement in Asturias and who served as Blanco's secretary when he was Negrín's minister, disagreed with these judgments: 'I can say about this – and I talked about it with Santillán before his death – that it is an injustice to speak in the way that is done against Segundo Blanco while the government functioned in Spain, since as everyone is obliged to know, the policy carried out by Segundo Blanco in the Cabinet was dictated by the National Committee, which he punctually informed of everything. I can give irrefutable testimony of this.'²⁰

However, Alvarez has also commented that in so far as Blanco's 'ability to protect the anarchists from the Communist persecutions supported by Juan Negrín himself, I don't think that Segundo accomplished much. The only thing was that his presence in the government obliged Negrín and the Communists to operate with more caution to make sure that Segundo Blanco be kept ignorant of the persecution and even assassinations committed by the disciples of Stalin, charged, from Moscow, with destroying the Libertarian Movement, an almost impossible operation given our strong support in Spain.'²¹

César Lorenzo also argued that the presence of Segundo Blanco in the Negrín cabinet made a considerable difference to the CNT. He cited his father as arguing that Negrín 'had need of the participation of the CNT'.²²

From the anarchists' point of view, Lorenzo argued, 'In reality, the true motive for participation of the CNT in the government of Doctor Negrín was the necessity for the libertarians to put an end to the activities of the Communist Party and to its progress, to prevent

its seizure of power and to fight it with all the arms which it was using ... it was necessary to act now to avoid pure and simple destruction and to save the lives of their militants.²³

Lorenzo also argued that the national committee of the Popular Front, which the CNT had joined on March 29, and the FAI on May 31 1938, 'was a kind of sub-government whose accords often influenced the debates in the Council of Ministers.' He added that Mariano Vázquez and Horacio Prieto were chosen as delegates of the confederation on this committee, while Santillán and Germinal de Sousa represented the FAI there.²⁴

However, Diego Abad de Santillán did not agree with César Lorenzo's contention that the national committee of the Popular Front, even with anarchist representation, had any ability to influence the positions and actions of the Negrín government. Writing a year after the War was over, he said: 'The mission of the Popular Front consisted of obeying and keeping silent, in seconding the position of the Government, and not in examining and criticizing it.'²⁵

As minister of education and public health, Segundo Blanco placed fellow anarchists in key positions in the ministry. These included the sub-secretariat of public instruction, the sub-secretariat of health, and the general directorates of primary education and of health.²⁶ However, one of those anarchists who served under him in the ministry bore witness many years later that Segundo Blanco did not carry out any purging of the ministry, except for these top posts.

This same anarchist source, José Consuegra, noted that there was a change in the function of the cultural militia of the ministry of education, which originally had been planned as a vehicle for spreading general education and culture among the soldiers, but under Jesús Hernández, the Communist predecessor of Blanco, had concentrated most of their efforts on carrying on Communist propaganda among the troops, something which Consuegra claimed ceased under Segundo Blanco.²⁷

César Lorenzo claimed: 'After the entry of the CNT into the government, the position of the libertarians improved considerably. The persecutions ceased both at the fronts and in the rearguard and

ensorship over the press was less felt.’ He also saw as gains for the CNT the establishment of a council of labor, with six representatives of the CNT, six of the UGT, 12 from employers groups and seven government functionaries ‘to handle eventual conflicts between employers and workers’; as well as the establishment of a National Council of War Industries, made up of two delegates of the CNT, two of the UGT and two of the government. Finally, Lorenzo saw the naming of Diego Abad de Santillán, M. Cardona Rossell and Horacio Prieto of the CNT to draw up a project for a National Economic Council, a long-held CNT aspiration, as an advance for the anarchists.²⁸

One might observe that César Lorenzo was overly sanguine about the cessation of persecution of CNT militants, that participation in the council of labor represented another major retreat from long-held anarchist ideological positions, and that the ‘study’ of the possibility of a National Economic Council came in December 1938, entirely too late to have any practical result. The presence of an anarchist in Negrín’s government certainly served to modify criticism of that government and of its Communist supporters. It also contributed to the growing schism within the libertarian movement.

It is interesting that the CNT in Catalonia did not try to get back into the Catalan government, in which Stalinist influence was also strong, if not overwhelming. García Oliver explained this attitude:

Then, the CNT of Catalonia had no interest in returning to form part of the government of the Generalidad. What was the government of the Generalidad after the events of May? It was nothing more than a decorative figure, quite useless because of the dominant and absorbing presence of the central government...

But yes, we men of the CNT, wanted to do away with the moral predominance that Comorera exercised on President Companys. And we were interested in creating a situation as close as possible to that of the beginning of the revolutionary period: a government of the Generalidad without councillors of the PSUC...²⁹

The Liquidation of the POUM

Between the May Events of 1937 and the re-entry of the CNT into the Republican government, the Communists and their allies had succeeded in vanquishing all of their principal opponents except the anarchists. The Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista was the Stalinists' first victim.

During the months between December 1936, when the Stalinists had forced the POUM out of the Catalan government, and the May Events, the Stalinists had mounted a ferocious propaganda campaign against the POUM. Right after the establishment of the Negrín government, the press service of the Soviet consulate in Barcelona issued a 'secret circular', demanding the suppression of the POUM. The PSUC widely circulated this 'secret' document and in reply, the POUM leaders unsuccessfully demanded the establishment of an international tribunal by the Socialist and Communist Internationals to judge the Stalinist charges against them. At one time, Andrés Nin and Julian Gorkin, in public meetings in Barcelona and Valencia respectively demanded the establishment of a special Spanish tribunal with representatives of all of the antifascist organizations, to judge the calumnious charges the Stalinists were making against the POUM. Both men agreed that if the charges proved to be true, the leaders of the POUM ought to be shot; if they proved false, those making the charges should suffer the same fate. Of course, the Stalinists replied to this idea with silence.³⁰

Typical of the Stalinists' attacks on the POUM in this period was an article which appeared in the Communist Party paper in Valencia, *Frente Rojo*, on February 6 1937. It began: 'The fascist Trotskyist party should be dissolved and tried as fascist. The gutter-snipe POUM has become desperate now that its infamy has been unmasked, and has unleashed a demagogic campaign against the solid wall of anti-fascist unity at the orders of its foreign masters... It's not a matter of ideological disagreement nor even of physical revulsion towards a party of traitors, but of something deeper and more important. It's a matter of the distance between those who are in the vanguard of our people and of the agents of the Gestapo. It's a matter of a group of bandits which fascism has left amongst us.'³¹

At least one foreign Socialist sensed very early, when the POUM was forced out of the government of Catalonia, the significance of the anarchist–Stalinist struggle. Charles Orr, of the Socialist Party of the United States, wrote to the party's national secretary Clarence Senior in December 1936: 'The game of the Stalinists is, it seems, to flatter and give in to the Anarchists, until they can eliminate the POUM, then to win over what middle class support the Anarchists may have, thus to split them and crush the revolutionary remainder.'³²

This all presaged what was going to happen to the POUM. The axe began to fall in the early morning of June 3, when the police ordered the closing of the party's newspaper *La Batalla*, and the prosecution of its editor Julian Gorkin. The order was signed by the general delegate of the Republic in Catalonia, appointed by Negrín.³³ On June 16, the central committee of the POUM met and took steps to put in place a clandestine leadership, in view of the expected outlawing of the party. Later that day, and early in the next, most of the top leaders of the POUM as well as their families, were arrested.³⁴ According to Julian Gorkin, the police who arrested him were accompanied by two foreigners, whom he suspected of being GPU agents.³⁵

Jesús Hernández, at the time a Communist Party Politburo member and minister of education, in the book he wrote after quitting the Communist Party, insisted that the arrest of the POUM leaders had been carried out under direct orders of the GPU, and not of the Spanish government. He noted that this charge had been made at a cabinet meeting by the minister of government, Julian Zugazagoitia, who ought to have known.³⁶

Andrés Nin, the secretary-general of the POUM was 'disappeared', and presumably murdered. Exactly what happened to him was never officially disclosed. Jesús Hernández wrote that Nin was taken from Barcelona to Valencia, and thence to a prison run by the GPU in Alcalá de Henares near Madrid. There, according to Hernández, he was barbarously tortured, apparently to get him to 'confess' in the way the victims of the Moscow Trials had been doing. But his torturers could not break him down, and he was finally killed. Hernández charged General Orlov, the GPU chief in Spain, and

Vittorio Vidali (known in Spain and Mexico as 'Carlos Contreras') who, after the Second World War, was a leading figure in the Italian Communist Party, as those directly responsible for Nin's fate.³⁷

Both Orlov and Vidali subsequently denied involvement in the disappearance and murder of Nin. Nin's biographer, Francesc Bonamusa, noting that many details of his case remained a mystery, concluded:

However, the fundamental aspects of the kidnapping and subsequent assassination of André Nin are evident. Nin was detained by members of the police services coming to Barcelona from Madrid and not from Valencia, the city in which the government of the Republic was located. He was transferred first to Valencia and then to Madrid... Once in Madrid, he was certainly transferred to the counterespionage services of the NKVD and transferred to one of their branches in Alcalá de Henares or El Pardo. For these reasons, and since Nin was not in any official jail of the government, it was impossible for the Ministers of Justice, Manuel de Irujo, and of Government, Julian Zugazagoitia, to obtain information of the location of the ex-Councillor of Justice of the Generalidad.³⁸

On June 22, the government announced the establishment of a special espionage tribunal.³⁹ The POUMist leader Julian Gorkin commented on this body: 'At the end of 1937 there are sixty-two condemned to death in the Carcel Modelo. An infernal circle has been created, which would be expanded month after month as the defeats, confusion and demoralization increased: the SIM detains and tortures, and the Tribunal de Espionaje condemns. This latter has acquired a sad fame: it is currently called The Tribunal of Blood. The Minister of Justice, who undoubtedly is conscious of that, evidently hesitates in the application of the sentences.'⁴⁰

In the meantime, the POUMists suffered persecution. According to Víctor Alba, 'On June 17 1937 there begins for the POUMist militant an epoch, which will last until the civil war ends and for which there is no precedent. If he falls in the power of the enemy, ill will befall him, and if he falls into the power of the 'friend', ill will befall him,

and in addition he will be defamed. If the war is lost, they will persecute him and if it is won, the persecution which has now begun will continue...⁴¹

The persecution of the POUMists worried many political leaders who had little sympathy for that party. President Manuel Azaña warned Prime Minister Negrín about it. He wrote in his memoirs: 'As great as the imitating ability of the Communists is, here we cannot adopt the Muscovite methods, every three or four months discovering a plot and shooting various political enemies... I am not disposed to have the parties turning on one another ferociously; tomorrow shooting those of the POUM, the next day others.'⁴²

Alba noted that a new underground executive committee of the POUM was established right after the arrest of the party's principal leaders. It was composed of 'members who had escaped detention and some militants called from outside of Barcelona... This Committee was changing its composition as some of its members were detained... At no time, then, did the POUM remain decapitated.'⁴³

Adolfo Bueso, at the time a leading POUMist trade unionist, has noted that the underground POUM found 'very useful the organization called Friends of Mexico, with its branches... Meetings of the leaders were held in the Mexican consulate itself... Seen from a distance, now (1961) it looks like a lie that in 1937 the Communist police were not informed of the role which was played by those centers of the Friends of Mexico.'⁴⁴

The principal leaders of the POUM were finally brought to trial in October 1938, in what Julian Gorkin has called 'The Moscow Trial in Barcelona', before the tribunal of espionage and high treason which had been established 15 months earlier. Charges against them included having contact with the Nazis and with Franco representatives, as well as having been opposed to the governments of Largo Caballero and Negrín.

There is little doubt that the Stalinists hoped to stage in Barcelona a show trial with the POUMists similar to those which were being held in this same period in Moscow. The kind of 'charges' which they hoped to develop against the POUM leaders was indicated by the PSUC's English-language bulletin soon after the leaders of the POUM were arrested:

'All the offices of the POUM have been searched and numerous documents have been found which give full proof of Nin's part in the conspiracy, as there are messages from him to Franco... The documents prove that the trotskyist spies were in direct contact with the spy agencies of fascist states and before all with Germany. All this material shows the role which German and Italian fascism played in the trotskyist uprising in May. This discovery in Barcelona is a big success for the Republican Police and a defeat for the German Gestapo and the Italian Ovra, who with the aid of the trotskyists were carrying on their work in the Republican rearguard.'⁴⁵

One of the things which frustrated the Stalinists' attempts to organize a 'Moscow Trial in Barcelona' was the failure of Andrés Nin to 'confess' to anything, even under brutal torture. That failure was almost certainly the reason for the GPU's decision to murder Nin.

The trial of the POUM leaders took place in an atmosphere of intense government pressure for their conviction and execution. Not only did the Communist press both inside and outside Spain carry on a raucous campaign to that end, but Prime Minister Juan Negrín did also. Julian Gorkin recounted a meeting of Negrín in his office with Ramón González Peña, minister of justice; Mariano Gómez, president of the supreme court; Iglesias Portal, president of the espionage tribunal, and José Gomis, attorney-general of the Republic, in which Negrín said, 'Señores, the Army demanded the death penalty for those of the POUM who are to be tried... I consider it necessary to give satisfaction to the Army.'

According to Gorkin, when the president of the supreme court objected to this, saying that the court's decision would be based on the evidence, Negrín responded, 'I need the condemnation of those men! If necessary, I'll place myself at the head of the army against the Court.'

González Peña, the minister of justice and a Socialist trade-union leader from Asturias, also objected to Negrín's outburst. He argued that the letters supposedly coming from army members and groups were the result of intense coercion on the part of the Communists, and that he had urged the president of the supreme court to throw them all in the waste basket.⁴⁶

Aside from the defendants themselves – Julian Gorkin, Enrique Adroher (Gironella), Pedro Bonet, Jordi Arquer, José Escuder, Juan Andrade and David Rey – the defense called as witnesses Francisco Largo Caballero, Federica Montseny, ex-ambassador to France (and one of Largo Caballero's principal lieutenants) Luis Araguistáin and Trotskyist leader Fernández Grandizo (Munis), as well as former Minister of Justice Manuel de Irujo (a Basque Nationalist), and of Government, Julian Zugazagoitia (a Socialist supporter of Indalecio Prieto).

Perhaps the most damaging testimony of these witnesses, from the prosecution's point of view, was that of Julian Zugazagoitia, who had been minister of government at the time of the arrest of the POUM leaders. He declared: 'The government had no knowledge at all of the detention of these men. This was done apart from the government and against its will.'⁴⁷

Víctor Alba has indicated the quandary faced by the judges in this case: 'They formed a political tribunal ... as well as a legal tribunal. None of the accusations had been proven. But to let the accused free was equivalent to permitting the Communists to liquidate them and then say that they had fled to Berlin, and as a result the government would have a new embarrassing situation, such as that of the Nin case. The best thing was to condemn, but respect what the accused had demonstrated which was fundamental for them: their prestige as revolutionaries.'⁴⁸

According to Gorkin, after their conviction, the accused were offered a 'deal', that is, they would be exonerated, but would have to go into exile, and the POUM would continue to be outlawed. Gorkin said that they turned down these terms.'⁴⁹

The final sentence was the absolution of David Rey; Jordi Arquer being sentenced to 11 years in jail, and the rest to 15.⁵⁰

The Stalinists were obviously disappointed by the result of the trial of the POUM leaders. Palmiro Togliatti, in reporting to his Moscow bosses in the Comintern, noted the 'scandalous results of the trial of the POUM, which ended without any serious sentences'.⁵¹

The failure of the Stalinists to offer any convincing proof of their charges against the POUM did not prevent them from repeating their calumnies for many years after the Civil War. Thus, Steve Nelson,

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the American Communist ex-political commissar in the International Brigades, in his memoir of his Spanish experiences published in the early 1950s, talked about 'the Trotskyites, out-and-out traitors and agents of the Nazis and black-shirt fascists. Their organization was the POUM...'⁵²

The trial of the POUM leaders was followed closely by anti-Stalinist foreign supporters of the Republican cause. This was shown by an Open Letter to Minister of Justice Ramón González Peña from Norman Thomas and Devere Allen, in the name of the Socialist Party of the United States, which was published as a pamphlet.

Thomas and Allen were obviously relieved by the outcome of the trial:

The conduct of the trial was especially heartening to friends of Loyalist Spain in America... At the trial the defendants were represented by an able defense attorney; many witnesses, including former and present high government officials, testified as to the character of the defendants... We note with especial satisfaction that it was the prosecution itself which recommended the absolution of the defendants from the ridiculous charges of 'Fifth Column' espionage...⁵³

We feel confident that the trial will mark the definite end of those irregularities in justice that unfortunately occurred during a period of several months of the war. We know that its outcome will do much to strengthen and reinforce the unity so necessary to military victory – unity which must include all workers forces in Spain.⁵⁴

Long after the Stalinists had all but annihilated the POUM, they continued to use it (labelling the POUMists 'Trotskyites') as their favorite whipping boy. Thus, Dolores Ibarruri, in a speech to a Communist Party plenum on May 23 1938, almost a year after the outlawing of the POUM, included an extensive diatribe against them. Among other things, she charged: 'It was the Trotskyite criminals, who tried by all means to impede the incorporation of Catalonia with its enormous resources, in the tasks of the war... It has been they who have fraternized on the Eastern front with elements of the

fascist Army... It has been they who have figured in the leadership of the majority of fascist espionage organizations discovered until now...⁵⁵

The Anarchists and the Persecution of the POUM

The anarchists strongly opposed the persecution and prosecution of the POUM and its leaders. So long as they were not impeded by Stalinist-controlled censorship, they made their opposition publicly known.

Federica Montseny claimed that she was the first person publicly to raise the question of what had happened to Andrés Nin.⁵⁶ The daily *Bulletin* of the CNT-FAI, on August 4 1937, carried at the bottom of its third page a note in capital letters: 'Where is Nin? What has been done with the workers' leader since the Dirección General de Seguridad published the press release about his detention?'⁵⁷

Mariano Vázquez protested at a meeting in Valencia early in July at what was happening to the POUM. Vázquez's speech was interesting not only for its protest against persecution of the POUM, but also for the fact that Vázquez apparently continued to see the problem of the conflict between the POUM and the Stalinists as a family quarrel among Marxists rather than as part of an overall attack by the Stalinists on all of their opponents and against the Revolution which had taken place after July 19 1936.

Vázquez started his discussion of the problem of the POUM by commenting: 'What do we care that there are two fractions or twenty fractions of Marxism? The only thing which can interest us is that from the point of view of the interests of the proletariat it would be very convenient if the different branches of Marxism would be converted into a single one...'

However, Vázquez then went on to say: 'What is inadmissible is that an organization be attacked, with charges that those who belong to it are in contact with Franco and I don't know how many other charges. All right. Proceed judicially against those who are guilty, execute whomsoever, sanction those who merit it ... but between that and the extermination of an organization there is a great abyss.'

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Vázquez then particularly defended Andrés Nin: ‘What no one can understand, what the people cannot understand, is that they say that Nin was in contact with Franco and that Nin is a fascist. This must be brought before the courts and be demonstrated to the people, because Nin, for the people, is a revolutionary. He is a man who, since he was small, has been in the revolutionary organization and movement and the people cannot agree with the charge that he is in contact with Franco...’⁵⁸

Diego Abad de Santillán indicated that he understood better than Vázquez the significance of the attacks by the Stalinists on the POUM. He wrote in his first book on the Civil War, written (and published abroad) in 1937: ‘...We should have impeded by all means, even arms in our hands, crimes such as that of which Andrés Nin was victim... They began with the POUM because it was a relatively weak party; but that easy victory gave courage to the aspirants of a new dictatorship to confront us...’⁵⁹ Juan López also noted the importance for the CNT of the persecution of the POUM. In an article, he raised the question ‘has the first bill been presented for Soviet aid?’⁶⁰

The anarchist writer Lazarillo de Tormes published a book late in 1937 in which he devoted two chapters to denunciation of the Stalinist persecution of the POUM. Including citations from hysterical Communist charges against the party itself, and almost equally violent attacks on two international missions – composed of leaders of parties of the Second International and the so-called London Bureau – which had come to Spain to investigate the campaign against the POUM, this book strongly defended both the POUM and the foreign visitors.⁶¹

After the May Events, some of the anarchists came to realize the real alignment of forces which had existed in Catalonia before May 1937. Thus, an anarchist pamphlet on the May Events noted that between July and December 1936, ‘Six months had passed since the defeat of the fascist uprising; six months of revolutionary development, which logically should lead to socialization. But on the part of certain parties, it was sought to put obstacles in the way of this development. Instead of a social revolution, they wanted a war of a national character. Against the phrase war and revolution, presented

by the CNT and the FAI, as well as the POUM, there was presented the phrase of all the other organizations and parties which was: First, win the war.’⁶²

Also, early in July 1937, Vázquez, on behalf of the national committee of the CNT, sent a formal document addressed to ‘The president of the Republic, the Cortes, the council of ministers, the ministers of government and of justice, and the national committees of all the parties and organizations of the front of antifascist struggle’:

For months, since December in Catalonia, there began in Spain the persecution of an antifascist sector which took part in the struggle in the streets, in the July days, and which has acted decisively at the front... That sector, the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, represented a part of Marxist opinion, against the policy imposed by Stalin on the Russian state and by his friends and partisans in the Communist International. But all that doesn’t concern us. We are entirely separated from those internal quarrels, with such bloody results in the USSR...

What interests us... is the path begun, the excessive servility, putting aside all of its own personality, of the Government of the Republic and the apathy with which the other sectors of the antifascist struggle view the fact, which we think grave, of the elimination of a party, more or less powerful, and with more or less of a role in the political life of Spain...

Nothing would have been said, if judicial proceedings had been commenced against particular individuals, with trials which would offer a guarantee of judicial proof of the accusations. But the elimination of the POUM begun in Catalonia in December, and which has been continued systematically, has not begun with a prosecution of certain men hidden in it, agents of fascism, but this process, which could well be an able manipulated pretext – the suspicious succession of acts obliges us to fear it – has come now, when the POUM as a party has already been excluded from all antifascist activities... After the events of May, the persecution becomes public. Not against particular men, but against the party...

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Let them resolve their problem in the USSR as they can and as the circumstances advise them. It is not possible to transplant to Spain the same struggle, persecuting with blood and fire internationally, by means of the Press, and here by means of the law, using as a weapon undignified moral blackmail, to a party of opposition or dissident sector of an ideology and a policy...

As synthesis and making concrete all that has been said, we ask in the name of Justice, of constitutional legality and of the right of all citizens, defended and represented by democracy itself, that the political persecution against the POUM cease...⁶³

Subsequently, so long as the censorship did not prohibit it, anarchist periodicals continued to protest at what was happening to the POUM. According to Víctor Alba, 'The anarchists and some Largo-caballerists protested. Federica Montseny in a meeting launched a ferocious attack on the Communists, in which she said, "They created the tyranny of Stalin when the Russian people freed itself from the tyranny of the Czars," and Juan López asked in an article if the trial is "the first bill which Russia presents for collection". Juan Peiró wishes to publish in the daily which he edits, *Catalunya*, an article on the trial which the censor removed. The SIA (Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista) created by the CNT to take care of its prisoners, made appeals in favor of the POUMista prisoners.'⁶⁴

The anarchists asked one of their lawyers, Benito Pabón, a member of parliament for the tiny Syndicalist Party, to undertake the defense of the POUMist leaders who were finally brought to trial in October 1938.⁶⁵ However, after undertaking to do so, he finally fled the country in the face of threats by the Stalinists to murder him. His position was then taken by Vicente Rodríguez Revilla, to whom the CNT offered a military guard to protect his life.⁶⁶ As we have seen, Federica Montseny was one of the principal witnesses on behalf of the POUMist leaders.

The anarchists also tried to help the POUMists in the armed forces. After the outlawing of the POUM, its major military unit on the Aragón front, the 29th Division, was dissolved, and its principal

leaders were arrested, but Minister of Defense Indalecio Prieto ordered their release.⁶⁷ An office was set up in Barcelona to organize the liquidation of the division. Negotiations with Indalecio Prieto provided that all lower officers of the division would maintain their ranks, and that the various units and men of the division would be distributed among non-Communist units of the Army.⁶⁸ According to Juan Molina, who had been in charge of the Catalan and Aragóense military until the May Events, the CNT troops took special efforts to open the ranks of their own units to soldiers of the 29th Division.⁶⁹

The Political Liquidation of Largo Caballero

While the campaign to exterminate the POUM was under way, the Stalinists also moved to destroy, politically at least, Francisco Largo Caballero, whom they had driven from the leadership of the Republican government. This process involved several steps.

Even after he was driven from the government, Largo Caballero's position still seemed one of continued strength. He was still secretary of the Unión General de Trabajadores, and although the national committee of the Socialist Party was in the hands of his enemies, he still had the loyalty of key regional sections of the party, particularly those of Madrid and Valencia. He also had the strong backing of the anarchists.

Largo Caballero himself described his position. 'My obligations are: to take care of the Secretariat of the Unión General and on Sundays to go to Madrid from Valencia, to attend meetings of the Committee of the Madrid Socialist Group, of which I am president... The Executive of the party wants to have the Group submit to its stupid policy, without being able to achieve this. Madrid would not submit to tyranny.'⁷⁰

Largo Caballero took at least two steps to try to reinforce his position. On his initiative the executive of the UGT called a meeting of its national committee. He gave a six-hour speech there, explaining and defending his role as prime minister and minister of war.⁷¹ Largo Caballero described this meeting: 'It was agreed to have the

meeting of the National Committee, but without those organizations behind in their dues payments being able to participate... The meeting of the National Committee was held, all items of the agenda being discussed without incidents. This exasperated the Communists and fellow-travellers. They said that that meeting was invalid and that another should be held, with attendance of those behind in their dues payments.⁷²

His second move was to have the executive of the UGT sign a pact with the national committee of the CNT. It was in essence a 'non-aggression pact' pledging the two organizations not to attack one another in public, and setting up a joint liaison committee to deal with whatever problems might arise between the two trade union organizations.⁷³ The Communists and their Socialist allies within the UGT later strongly criticized this accord, on the grounds that such a document should have been signed by the national committee of the UGT instead of its Executive – in spite of precedents for such a document going back almost two decades.⁷⁴

This CNT-UGT pact aroused considerable enthusiasm in the CNT. In the weeks following its adoption, the national CNT received numerous endorsements and pledges of support from local union groups in various parts of the country.⁷⁵

The Stalinists and their allies within the Socialist Party wasted little time in mounting their campaign to destroy Largo Caballero politically. Late in July, the national executive of the Socialist Party 'suspended' the Valencia Regional Federation of the party, and ordered the seizure of its periodical, *Adelante*. When the editors of the paper refused to turn it over on the grounds that it was not legally registered as the party's property, Assault Guards were sent by Minister of Government Julian Zugazagoitia, a Socialist ally of Indalecio Prieto, to seize the periodical.⁷⁶ About the same time, the police seized the pro-Largo Caballero paper *Claridad* in Madrid and turned it over to his enemies within the Socialist Party in spite of the fact that it legally belonged to two of Largo Caballero's closest personal and political friends, Luis Araquistáin and Carlos de Baraibar.⁷⁷

The degree to which Largo Caballero had lost out within the Socialist Party, and the degree to which it had come under control of

these who were willing to follow the Communist line, was indicated by a joint program of action of the Socialist and Communist Parties issued by the liaison committee of the two parties. One passage of this said: 'The Socialist and Communist Parties will spare no effort in their struggle against the enemies of the USSR, will publicly stigmatize them and stop their shameful campaigns, be they open or disguised. They will work to render ever closer the relations between the Spanish people and the Soviet Union.'⁷⁸

Late in November 1937, the last periodical supporting Largo Caballero was seized and turned over to his enemies. This was *La Correspondencia de Valencia*, the organ of the Largo Caballero faction of the UGT. After the seizure, Salvador Chadín, until then director of the Valencian organ of the Communist Party, was named as editor of *La Correspondencia*.

After this seizure, *Spanish Labor News*, associated with the Socialist Party of the United States, commented: 'It is significant that today in Spain there are Union Republican papers, Left Republican papers, Right-wing Socialist papers, Communist papers, and completely emasculated papers of the Syndicalist Party and the Anarcho-Syndicalists. Only the Revolutionary Socialists are without a legal organ. The POUM still publishes *La Batalla* illegally, but it is reduced to four small pages...'⁷⁹

Four and a half months after Largo Caballero was removed from the premiership, his Communist and Right-wing Socialist opponents set out to remove him from the control of the UGT, his principal power base. On September 25 1937, the anti-Largo Caballero leaders of the UGT demanded the immediate summoning of a plenum of the national committee of the UGT. The executive replied immediately that it would summon such a meeting 'as determined by the statutes of the UGT, that is, with organizations which had not paid their dues not being able to attend. The dissidents replied by giving the executive a 48-hour deadline to call a meeting, with all those groups claiming to belong to the UGT being able to attend. Simultaneously, they called the plenum meeting, to be held on October 1, in the headquarters of the executive of the organization.

However, when the dissident delegates arrived in that building, they were denied admission to the executive's offices, and police who

were accompanying the 'delegates' backed away from forcing admission, when they were told by Largo Caballero that there were a number of Cortes deputies in the executive's suite. So the dissidents proclaiming the meeting of the national committee to be in session in the stairway of the building – hence the label 'stairway committee'. It resolved to depose the existing executive committee, and elected a new one, and declared null and void the suspension of the 14 federations by the Largo Caballero executive for non-payment of dues.⁸⁰

The pro-Largo Caballero national committee of the UGT, meeting in Valencia on October 26, called a special national convention for early in December, to resolve the split in the organization.⁸¹ However, that convention was destined never to meet.

David Cattell has noted that 'the fourteen federations which supported Caballero were generally the mass unions with many thousands of members, whereas the opposition was composed mostly of the federations of professional and skilled unions with only a few thousand members. The mass federation which supported Largo Caballero were of particular importance because they included a large portion of workers in war industries.'⁸²

The UGT splitters were endorsed on October 7 by the liaison committee of the Socialist and Communist parties.⁸³ However, the pro-Largo Caballero Federation of Land Workers undertook to set up a mediating committee, to bring about a reunification of the UGT.⁸⁴

The Negrín government also sided openly with the anti-Largo Caballero faction of the UGT. It issued orders to the Bank of Spain not to honor checks of the Largo Caballero faction, and that all bank accounts of the UGT be passed over to the opponents of Largo Caballero.⁸⁵

The anti-Largo Caballero UGT faction attacked the CNT for sticking by the pact which it had signed with Largo Caballero before the UGT split. *Solidaridad Obrera* replied: 'We have maintained and we still maintain that in order to conclude a pact of common action or of alliance between both unions a perfect internal unity must exist in each one of them. Consequently everything which seems to provoke division within either one of the organizations automatically

represents an obstruction in the way of unity... In the name of this indispensable alliance, superior to all factional interpretations and to any interest of a politically partisan character, we asked the comrades of the UGT to reflect seriously, so that they might succeed in preventing the conflict from dragging on and reaching a definitive division...⁸⁶

The lack of concern in this situation of the Communists and their Right-wing Socialist allies for ‘antifascist unity’, about which they talked so much, was shown in what happened in the Frente Popular Antifascista, which had been formed shortly after the split in the UGT. When the issue of which UGT should be seated in the Frente was raised, it was decided that until the unity of the UGT had been re-established, neither faction should be seated.

However, as the American Socialist periodical *Spanish Labor News* reported, that did not resolve the issues:

At this same meeting officers were elected to carry out the practical purposes of the organization... Shortly thereafter a meeting was held to determine the minimum bases of the Committee. It was decided that all decisions should be unanimous, but that if such unanimity were not achieved, discussion should be reopened. If, after three days, the vote was still not unanimous, a majority decision would be considered binding. Any organization failing to carry out such decisions would be dropped from the Committee... Finally on October 29th, the Plenum of the Frente Popular Antifascista again met. The Communist Party had made no decision on the previous question, but announced its complete withdrawal from the Committee. The reason given was that the Communist Party also felt itself bound to the Peña UGT and that it did not want to remain as the only ‘Marxist Party’ in the Frente Popular Antifascista...

The Valencia anarchist daily *Fragua Social* editorialized on this event: ‘What sort of way is this to work for unity? The reply given by the Frente Popular Antifascista is a just one. The insistence that all anti-fascists take part in the internal quarrels of the UGT is neither correct nor does it contribute in any way to unity. It would seem that

the UGT represented in the Frente Antifascista of Valencia is not an anti-fascist force, since it is treated as if it were fascist. And not only is there committed such an illogical absurdity, but an attempt is made to involve political and trade union groups in the same absurdity.⁸⁷

The 'solution' to the split in the UGT was reached in January 1938. Both sides had appealed to the International Federation of Trade Unions, to which the UGT was affiliated. As a consequence, Leon Jouhaux, head of the French Confederation Générale du Travail, a Socialist who at the time was working more or less closely with the French Communists, went to Valencia as mediator.

As a result of his mediation it was agreed that four members of the Largo Caballero faction – Carlos Hernández Zancajo, Ricardo Zabalza, Pascual Tomás and Díaz Alor – would be added to the executive of the dissident one, as mere members, while the presidency, vice-presidency, secretary-general, vice-secretary and treasurer remained in the hands of the dissidents, including for the first time, some Communists. On this, the anarchist historian of the CNT, José Peirats, commented: 'The absence of Largo Caballero in the new Executive was the most eloquent note of the characteristics of this solution. The Communist fellow-travelling elements had won the game.'⁸⁸

This judgment of Peirats was confirmed by Palmiro Togliatti: 'Beginning early in 1938 our point of view triumphed on almost all questions. Our minority, supported by a small group of Socialists ... was in reality the group which inspired the policy of the UGT. The Caballeristas were isolated ...'⁸⁹

The Protests of Largo Caballero

Between his deposition as prime minister and October 17 1937, Largo Caballero made no public speech. However, on that day he made a speech in Madrid. Sam Baron, an American Socialist journalist, reported that 'four theatres in Madrid were filled to overflowing by the crowds that came to hear Caballero, and thousands listened on the outside to amplifiers which carried his voice.'⁹⁰

In that speech, Largo Caballero first discussed why he was ousted

as prime minister, an event that he attributed to his unwillingness to concede to blackmail of the Soviet authorities and Spanish Communists. He also discussed the Communists' campaign to split the UGT, as well as unremitting attacks on him by the Stalinists and their allies. He paid particular attention to the charges that he had become an anarcho-syndicalist because of his attempts to bring unity of action between the UGT and CNT, commenting that, although he was not an anarcho-syndicalist, if he were that would not be something to be ashamed of.⁹¹

The Madrid speech was planned as the first of several discourses. However, when Largo Caballero was leaving Valencia for Alicante to deliver his second talk, he was prevented by the police 'on orders from above' from leaving Valencia.⁹² Nevertheless, Sam Baron reported: 'When he was scheduled to speak in Alicante and was stopped by the authorities, tremendous crowds lined the highways to pay tribute to him. The city itself was bedecked with flags in his honor... It is a further tribute to the influence of Spain's leading trade unionist that his opponents are afraid to have him speak.'⁹³

However popular Largo Caballero may have remained, he was politically powerless after he was totally removed from the leadership of the UGT. Although a sarcastic critique of the Negrín regime by him was published (at least abroad) a few months before the end of the War,⁹⁴ he played no significant role in Spanish politics after January 1938. The Communists (and their allies) had 'buried' him politically, removing a major obstacle to their drive towards absolute power.

The Anarchists on the Defensive – II

'The Stalinist drive for absolute power did not end with their elimination of Francisco Largo Caballero. Other stumbling blocks remained, most notably the anarchists. In dealing with the CNT–FAI, the Stalinists used both appeals to 'working-class unity', and governmental and extra governmental force to destroy the libertarians both institutionally and personally.

The CNT–UGT Unity Pact of 1938

Ironically, it was not until their erstwhile ally Francisco Largo Caballero had completely lost control of the Unión General de Trabajadores to the Stalinists and their allies, that the CNT finally worked out a 'program of unity' with the UGT. That joint document represented major concessions by the anarchists and showed how far they had retreated from their basic beliefs.

The CNT had sought a pact with the UGT since before the outbreak of the Civil War. A resolution of the Zaragoza Congress of the CNT in May 1936 had called for a 'Revolutionary workers' alliance' with the UGT, and proposed the establishment of liaison committees of the two organizations to negotiate the terms of such an alliance.¹

It is clear that in the early months of the Civil War both the

anarchists and the Largo Caballero faction of the UGT wanted unity of action of the two trade union centrals, and even thought in terms of possible organic unity of the two organizations in the foreseeable future. This was the principal theme of a joint May Day demonstration in Valencia on May 1 1937, which was addressed by Carlos de Baraibar and two others for the UGT, and Mariano Vázquez, Federica Montseny and Juan Peiró for the CNT.²

We have noted earlier that, after the ouster of the Largo Caballero government, a tentative agreement was reached between the UGT, still controlled by Largo Caballero, and the CNT, which clearly had both trade union and political objectives, the latter being the formation of a working-class opposition to the Negrín government. The disruption of the UGT in the last months of 1937 by the Communists and their anti-Caballero Socialist allies hamstrung any effective alliance between the CNT and UGT for several months. However, under the pressure created by the Franco offensive in Aragón, which ultimately ended in the Rebel forces breaking through to the Mediterranean and splitting the Republic in two, an agreement was finally reached in March 1938.

José Peirats, the anarchist historian of the CNT during the Civil War, has outlined the proposals of both the UGT and the CNT for this 'program of unity', which covered a wide range of issues facing the labor movement and the Republic. He has also summed up the nature of the document which was adopted in March 1938, during the Franco offensive which conquered Aragón and ended in the breakthrough of the Rebel forces to the Mediterranean Sea.

According to Peirats,

In the military sphere, the CNT accepted the proposal to create a powerful army, belonging to the State, and enriches the natural or internal attributions of this army with exterior ones of militarist origin, with no guarantees for the people than those provided by the Commissariat, also belonging to the State... On war production, the CNT accepted only the intervention of the trade unions in a Council also submitted to the State, or its branch, the Armaments Secretary...

The CNT accepted the nationalization of the basic industries

and that this nationalization remains subject to the criterion of the State. This places the State at the top of the social pyramid. The same happened with the nationalization of banking, which the CNT enriched with the Iberian Trade Union bank.

On the issue of the role of municipalities, Peirats said:

On municipalization, the CNT definitively lowers the banner of its classical conception of the free municipality... In the CNT-UGT pact, the municipality continues being a simple administrator of the real estate of the militarist State, centralized and extractive...

The best proof of the centralist orientation of the pact is shown to us by the section on the economy. A Superior Economic Council, *inside the State*, composed of its representatives and those of the trade union organizations will monopolize everything...

The State, owner of the army, of industry, of the municipalities and of the whole economy, is also owner of the nationalized land. And the peasants are simple renters... In agreement, the CNT and the UGT reserves to the State ... the faculty of legislating on the Collectives and the very peculiar right to intervene in them. And that of determining which of these should continue or disappear. Only those being adjusted to legislation will be aided by the State.

Finally, Peirats noted that on the anarchists' traditional opposition to the State itself, in this CNT-UGT pact the CNT 'begins by reducing its unwavering incompatibility with the State to a simple expression of the form of government. It only opposes the totalitarian form of state, and forgets the lesson that all government is a totalitarian bastion...'³

The only significant concession by the Stalinist-influenced UGT in this document was the statement that it would not oppose the re-entry of the CNT into the Republican government. As we have seen, that was a concession of dubious significance.

In summary, the anarchist labor organization surrendered much

ground in this pact with the other major trade-union group, by then dominated by the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers. It relegated defense of the collectives which its members had established in the first phase of the Civil War to a secondary level, accepting emphasis on State nationalization of the major elements of the economy, instead of trade-union control, on both a Republican and municipal level. This document, to state it mildly, weakened the CNT's position in trying to defend the control of its members over a large segment of the economy. For the re-entry of the CNT in the Republican government in a minor role, of little significance in the general direction of the War and the Revolution, the CNT paid a high price in this 'agreement' with the UGT.

The Stalinists' Political Destruction of Indalecio Prieto

The CNT-UGT 'pact' of March 1938 was followed within less than a month by the removal from the government of the last major individual opponent of the Stalinists' drive for absolute power, Indalecio Prieto, the minister of defense in the Negrín government. In spite of their long opposition to Prieto, the anarchists sought to help to prevent his fall, which had been decreed virtually from the time that he had helped to bring down Largo Caballero, and been rewarded for this with the ministry of defense.

For almost a decade and a half Indalecio Prieto had been the leader of those in the Socialist Party who were opposed to Francisco Largo Caballero. During the months preceding the outbreak of the Civil War, when Largo Caballero had been talking about possible unification of the Socialist and Communist parties, Prieto, who controlled the machinery of the party, strongly opposed the idea. Generally, he opposed the coquetting by elements of the Largo Caballero faction with the Communists.

However, after the start of the Civil War, and particularly after the establishment of the Largo Caballero government, Prieto joined forces with the Communists – who quickly became the major opponents of the anarchist-Largo Caballero Socialist Revolution which had occurred in the first phase of the Civil War, with which

Prieto also had little sympathy – against Largo Caballero. His role in supporting the Communist ministers when they walked out of a cabinet meeting in the crisis of May 1937 was crucial in bringing about the fall of Largo Caballero and his replacement as prime minister by Juan Negrín.

Right after the fall of the Largo Caballero government the Spanish Communist Party and the national leadership of the Socialist – still largely controlled by Indalecio Prieto and his associates – signed a ‘pact of alliance’. This was a 16-point agreement, in somewhat vague terms, and a liaison committee was established to establish unity of action between the two parties.⁴

From the Communists’ point of view, this was certainly seen as a major step towards unification of the two parties in a single party of the proletariat along the lines of the PSUC in Catalonia and the United Socialist Youth. This was an idea which Indalecio Prieto had strongly opposed before the outbreak of the Civil War, when Largo Caballero was talking somewhat vaguely about it.

However, Prieto’s alliance with the Communists was temporary. He had no more wish than Largo Caballero to have the Communists and their Comintern and Soviet backers gain absolute control in Republican Spain. Least of all did he desire to have them get complete domination of the Republican armed forces.

After he had been ousted from the Negrín government, Prieto gave a report to a meeting of the national committee of the Socialist Party in August 1938. This he later published under the title of ‘How and Why I Left the Ministry of Defense’. It explained in considerable detail his effort to prevent the triumph of the Communists within the Republic, and the consequences of his resistance to the Stalinists.

Prieto recounted that before one of the first Negrín cabinet meetings in which he participated as minister of defense, the two Communist cabinet members, Vicente Uribe and Jesús Hernández, came to his office to tell him that they would like to visit him each day to tell him the Communist Party politburo’s position on the issues of the day. According to Prieto, he told them: ‘You have been mistaken if you think that you are going to continue with me a struggle like that you carried on with Largo Caballero ... you will

not manage me, nor will I permit disputes such as those you had with Largo Caballero in the cabinet meetings of unhappy memory.⁵

One of the first issues on which Prieto clashed with the Communists was that of the preponderant influence of Stalinists in the political commissariats of the armed forces. His proposals in the Superior War Council to right that situation by adding a considerable number of non-Communist commissars was strongly opposed by the Communist member of the council, and Negrín sided with the Communists in that dispute.⁶

Prieto claimed that soon after his meeting with Uribe and Hernández, the Communists began a campaign against him, demanding his removal as minister of defense. By March 1938, these attacks had become public. Jesús Hernández, writing in the Communist periodical *Frente Rojo* and the Barcelona paper *La Vanguardia* under the name 'Juan Ventura' strongly attacked the minister of defense.

When Prieto brought this question before the executive commission of the Socialist Party, and in effect demanded the removal of Hernández from the cabinet for violating the rule that members of the cabinet did not attack one another in public, Juan Negrín intervened. 'I cannot do without the Communists,' he said, 'because they represent a very considerable factor in international politics and because to have them out of Power would be very inconvenient internally; I cannot do without them, because their correligionists abroad are the only ones who aid us effectively, and because we would put in danger the aid of the USSR, the only effective support which we have in war material. But in the same way that I cannot do without the Communists, I say that I cannot continue for a moment as Prime Minister if Prieto is not Minister of Defense.'⁷ This was on March 26, and only a little more than a week later, Negrín reorganized his government without Prieto.

Prieto recounted his conflicts with Russian advisers to the various branches of the Spanish Republican armed forces. These involved particularly instances in which the Soviet officers had countermanded orders which he had given, particularly in the navy and the air force.⁸

Pressure from the Stalinists for the removal of Indalecio Prieto lasted for a considerable period. Salvador de Madariaga maintained

that during those weeks 'supplies from Moscow began to dwindle, so as to make the matter clearer still'. But after the removal of Prieto, 'with clockwork precision, supplies began to flow again ... a few weeks after Don Indalecio Prieto had been expelled from the Cabinet, Barcelona, undefended against recent German raids, witnessed an impressive flight of Russian airplanes.'⁹

Prieto described a visit from leaders of the CNT to express support for him, after the cabinet crisis which brought his downfall had already begun. Galo Díez, Horacio Prieto and Segundo Blanco came to see him very late one night. They indicated to him that they had submitted to Negrín a statement to the effect that although they wanted representation in the government, they thought that in the face of the Republican defeat in Aragón which was then in progress, they did not think that there should be any change in the government, and they supported Prieto's staying in the ministry of defense. They also told him that the Republican parties had expressed support for him. He told them that the Socialist Party executive had just indicated support of his staying in the ministry. That left only the Communists who were demanding his removal.¹⁰

According to Prieto, he was never informed by Negrín that he was being dismissed as minister of defense. The first word of the fact that he encountered came from reading the daily papers.¹¹

Prieto cited a memorandum that a Socialist commander of the 61st Brigade of the reserve army sent to the ministry of defense and to the Socialist executive committee, which described what had happened to Prieto. Lieutenant-Colonel Francisco García Lavid wrote: 'The same elements (the Communists) who until yesterday praised you even more than we did, Comrade Prieto, culminated and attacked you ... The same people who before raised the figure of Largo Caballero and then brought him down and calumniated him; the same who praised Prieto, then attributed to him things which not only our comrade was incapable of doing but no one was capable of doing...'¹²

The removal of Indalecio Prieto from the Negrín government meant the disappearance of the last major figure who represented a serious brake to the Communists' drive for power within Republican Spain. Palmiro Togliatti, the principal Comintern agent in Spain,

noted the ‘sectarian’ attitudes of many Communists at the time, urging that the Communist Party take total control of the ministry of defense. Togliatti claimed that he discouraged this idea.¹³

However, some doubt is cast upon Togliatti’s claims to ‘moderation’ on his part by the fact, which Salvador de Madariaga pointed out, that with the disappearance of Prieto from the ministry of defense, and the assumption of that post by Negrín himself, Negrín placed ‘the three departments of War, Navy and Air in charge of three Communist under secretaries; he gave the Foreign Office to Señor Alvarez del Vayo who appointed a Communist under secretary and in general turned over the Foreign Office to the Communists, and although he failed in his purpose of appointing the Communist Jesús Hernández as General Commissar of the Army, he gave him the General Commissariat of the Army of the Center, which amounted to about four-fifths of the whole.’¹⁴

The Decimation of the Republicans and Regional Nationalists

Soon, even the minor opponents of the Stalinists were to be removed from the Negrín government. The fifth element in Republican politics during the Civil War – in addition to the anarchists, Communists, Right-wing Socialists and the Largo Caballero Socialists – were the Republicans of various sorts and descriptions. These included the Izquierda Republicana (IR), and Unión Republicana (UR) parties on a national scale, and the Catalan and Basque nationalists on a regional basis. These groups, too, had been eliminated from most political influence by the Stalinists by the end of the second year of the Civil War.

The very fact of the outbreak of the Civil War and the ‘saving’ of the Republican cause in much of Spain by the union groups and the political parties associated with them had drastically reduced the political influence of the national Republican parties, that is, the IR and UR. Although Manuel Azaña of the Izquierda Republicana remained president of the Republic until shortly before the end of the War, and Diego Martínez Barrio of the UR continued as president of

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the Cortes beyond the end of the conflict, their parties were no matches for those of the trade-union organizations and others backed by the workers and peasants.

The situation of the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties was considerably stronger than those of the national Republicans, at least during the first year of the Civil War. The Basque Nationalists, as we have noted, were the dominant element in the regionalist Basque regime established with the outbreak of the War. In Catalonia, the Catalan Left Party also retained influence for a time among the middle class of that area.

However, the regional nationalist parties were also undermined. About a year after the outbreak of the Civil War, the Basque country was conquered by the Franco forces, as a result of which the Basque Nationalists who escaped to remaining Loyalist territory were reduced to a symbolic importance rather than a practical one.

The Catalan Left, on the other hand, was greatly undermined by the passionate defense by the Stalinist PSUC of the urban middle class and the peasant smallholders, which had been the principal power base of Luis Companys and his followers. Furthermore, after the May Events, when the government of the Republic took over control of both the military and the forces of public order in Catalonia, the power of the Catalan regional government was greatly reduced. In addition, with the expulsion of the CNT from the Catalan government following the May Events, that regime remained as a coalition of the Catalan Left and the Stalinist PSUC, a coalition in which the power of the Catalan Left declined drastically and consistently until the end of the War in Catalonia.

Gómez Casas has noted that, after the May Events, 'A paradox now became apparent. The autonomous government of Catalonia was linked to the existence of a strong federalist movement like the anarchists or the CNT in Catalonia. On the other hand, the predominance of Stalinism prepared the objective conditions for the ruin of the autonomous regions. The neutralization of Catalan autonomy contributed to the disintegration that preceded the catastrophic collapse of resistance before the nationalist advance at the end of 1938.'¹⁵

Manuel Cruells has noted that the *Esquerra de Catalonia* 'lost

progressively its influence over Catalan society, at the same time that it lost, with the May Events, its only political possibility in the circumstances of the war. That political possibility would have been for it to remain the arbiter between the anarchists and the men of the III International.¹⁶

Adolfo Bueso has dated the almost total collapse of the Catalan regional government, and hence the influence of the Catalan regionalist parties, from the transfer of the Republican government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín to Barcelona late in 1937: 'With the arrival of the Government and its apparatus there came, naturally, many public order forces, which choked, literally, the forces of the Generalidad. *De facto*, the presence of the central Government crushed the Government of the Generalidad. The Russians gave orders to the government of Negrín, and it took revenge by annulling the government of Companys.'¹⁷

As early as February 1937, Franz Borckenau had foreseen the possibility of the absorption of the Republican parties by the Stalinists. 'There is no difference whatever, at present, nor has been since the beginning of the civil war, between the Izquierda Republicana, the party of the non-socialist republicans, and the communists... Today a unification of the communists with Izquierda Republicana might find fewer obstacles than even one with the socialists.'¹⁸

Although such unification of Azaña's party and the Stalinists did not take place, the orthodox middle-class Republican parties steadily lost ground in the politics of Loyalist Spain. The anarchist author Lazarillo de Tormes, writing late in 1937, correctly analyzed the situation of the Republican parties when he said: 'Making a mistake as always, the parties representing the petty bourgeoisie joined the action of the Communists because they confused the march that the latter began towards the State as the signs of loyal governmental collaboration. They did not see, and still don't see, that it was really a conquest.'¹⁹

However, this same author also noted that, following the establishment of the Negrín government, the Republican parties indicated disquietude about the Communists' drive to power at their expense. 'The periodical *Política*, authorized organ of the Partido de Izquierda

Republicana, declared that significantly in recent days that it would be found in the first ranks of those opposing any attempt at dictatorship. Other parties, and particularly other periodicals which if not semi-official organs of any political or trade union organization represent broad public opinion, have expressed themselves in the same terms...²⁰

This loss of influence of all other parties to the Communists was felt acutely by President Manuel Azaña, founder and incarnation of the Left Republican Party. He wrote in his memoirs on May 12 1938: '... The President of the Republic doesn't have the freedom to change policy, if he thinks it convenient, because all of the commands are taken over by the Communists, and they would resist. Appointments are made from a list given to Negrín, including people Negrín doesn't know...' He adds that he has explained to Indalecio Prieto, recently ousted from the ministry of defense, why he opposes Prieto's being named ambassador to Mexico: 'He is needed here. I cannot remain prisoner of Negrín... I think that Negrín has taken personal precautions. Orders for turning over funds, in blank, deposited in the Russian bank...'²¹

Subsequently, in August 1938, Azaña protested against executions which had been ordered by the Negrín government without his consent. On August 12, he learned of 58 such executions only by reading about them in the press.²²

The same undermining of the Republican parties by the Stalinists was also taking place with regard to the Catalan Left Party. As early as July 1937, the New York anarchist publication *Spanish Revolution* noted: 'The boundary line between the "Esquerra" and the Communist Party of Catalonia is very tenuous. (Even Brailsford, the pro-Communist correspondent for the *New Republic* has to admit that "much of the membership of this party came from the 'Esquerra'" And it is bound to vanish in some form of a totalitarian merger of those two parties demanded by the economy of State Capitalism.'²³ Again, such a merger never occurred, but with each month the war dragged on, the Catalan Left Party was weakened to the advantage of the PSUC.

This final defeat of the Catalan and Basque regional parties came in August 1938. Prime Minister Juan Negrín pushed through the

cabinet three decrees which the nationalist ministers strongly opposed. According to José Peirats, 'The press referred to three decrees, one on the seizure of war industries, another on the militarization of the ports and another on reform of the Commissariat.'²⁴ Manuel de Irujo, the Basque Nationalist minister without portfolio, and his colleague Jaime Aiguade, the Catalan Left minister of labor and social welfare, both resigned in protest against these decrees which they insisted destroyed the last remnants of regional autonomy.²⁵

Negrín wished to maintain the fiction that the Catalan and Basque regionalists were still represented in his government. However, in fact he appointed to replace the Catalan Left representative one José Moix, a member of the PSUC, thus adding to the official Stalinist representation in his government. To replace Irujo, Negrín named Tomás Bilbao, of a small Basque party, *Acción Nacionalista Vasca*, whom José Peirats characterized as a 'Negrínista'.²⁶

Jesús de Galíndez, a Basque Nationalist, claimed that at the time of this cabinet crisis, in August 1938, the Communists carried out a veritable *coup d'état*. He said that tanks were sent to Barcelona, where the Republican government was located, to take charge of the city and to overawe the anarchists. At the same time, he said, rumors were abroad that there were going to be an attempt to oust Negrín's government. *La Vanguardia* published an article naming the new cabinet which was going to take office – headed by Juan Besteiro, the Right-wing but anti-Stalinist Socialist. Galíndez claimed that Communist troops which marched on Barcelona from the front forced out the then Catalan cabinet.²⁷

With the resignation of the Catalan and Basque nationalists, even the weak opponents of the Stalinists' drive to power were eliminated from the Negrín government.

However, one political development right after the August 1938 government crisis which was to have importance during the last months of the Civil War was a meeting of the Socialist Party's National Committee. There was a debate between Prime Minister Negrín and deposed Defense Minister Indalecio Prieto and, according to Palmiro Togliatti, there was also a modification of the top leadership of the party with the entry into it of Prieto and Caballero

followers, as well as Julian Besteiro, who immediately 'formed a common front of hostility to Negrín'.²⁸

The Censorship of the Anarchist Press

The anarchists were not spared by the Stalinists in their drive for absolute power within the Republic. As we have seen, the anarchists were forced out of the Republican government and that of Catalonia, and when they were finally readmitted to the Republican cabinet, their position there was more one of decoration than of power.

After the anarchists' expulsion from the governments, although the Stalinists never undertook an all-out confrontation with the CNT-FAI, they succeeded in nibbling away at the anarchists' still strong position in the economy and in support among the working class and peasantry of Republican Spain. Nowhere was this more clear than in the censorship to which the anarchist press was subjected.

Broué and Temime have commented on the censorship installed by the Negrín Government:

This policy of repression did not however come out into the open. As before the Revolution, trade union meetings had to be authorized by the delegate for public order, after a request made at least three days in advance. As before the Revolution, censorship, justified at the outset by military necessity, was now imposed on political attitudes. On 18 May *Adelante* appeared with its first page blank, under the headline *Viva Largo Caballero!* On 18 June the government established a monopoly of radio broadcasts and seized transmitters from the various headquarters. On 7 August *Solidaridad Obrera* was given five days' suspension for committing a breach of the censorship's directives by appearing with 'blanks' to indicate censored passages: the censorship was working and demanded that no trace should remain of its activities. On 14 August a circular banned all criticisms of the Russian government. It said that 'With an insistence suggesting a plan specifically designed to offend an

exceptionally friendly nation, thus creating difficulties for the government, various newspapers have treated the USSR in a way that cannot be allowed... This utterly reprehensible license ought not to be permitted by the Council of Censors... Any newspaper that does not conform will be suspended indefinitely, even if it has been censored, in which case the censor will be summoned before the special tribunal dealing with crimes of sabotage.' The censorship, like the police and the radio, played an active part in the secession of the UGT, systematically 'cutting' statements by the Caballero executive or articles by the CNT devoted to this question.²⁹

The Negrín government's censorship of anarchist publications was facilitated by the removal of all anarchists from the censorship apparatus, in which they had participated so long as it existed for the purpose of preventing publication of military secrets. According to Helmut Rudiger, writing late in 1937, 'On August 7 the last of those comrades we trusted within the censorship was fired...'³⁰

From considerably before the establishment of the Negrín government, the Communists had largely dominated the Republican government censorship apparatus. David Cattell, the historian of the Communists in the Civil War, who had a certain propensity to rationalize their activities, confirmed this. 'The result of Communist control of censorship was that it was considered treasonable and an aid to Franco if anything were said against the Communists or Russians in the press. The Communists, on the other hand, could insult the various groups and persons they wished, as they freely did the POUM, the Anarchists, and the various ministers who lost favor in their eyes.'³¹

Nowhere is the nature of the censorship of the anarchists' publications more clear than in the mimeographed *Boletín de Información* issued almost daily by the CNT and the FAI in Barcelona. The first issue of that periodical which bore the note 'This Number Has Been Checked by the Censorship' was that of September 25 1937. There was a remarkable change in the content of the *Boletín* following that date.

In the months immediately following the May Days, there were

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strong polemics against the Communist Party and the PSUC of Catalonia. There were articles strongly criticizing the Negrín government. There was an article protesting against censorship of other anarchist periodicals (No. 302, July 6 1937); there was a strong defense of the CNT's Iron Column on the Teruel front in the face of attacks by the Communists (No. 330, August 7 1937) and there were strong protests against the suppression of the Consejo de Aragón by the Negrín regime.

After the imposition of censorship, there was a radical change in the nature of the material carried in the *Boletín*. Gone were all polemics against the Stalinists and all criticism of the Negrín regime. One issue, No. 389 of October 16 1937, carried an article emphasizing the need to carry out the Revolution 'slowly'.

Reflecting the pressure of the censors under which the editors must have labored, strange new things appeared in the periodical. There were fulsome articles in praise of the Soviet Union such as had never appeared in it before. There was an article comparing the Soviet and Spanish revolutions, with little attempt to picture the Spanish one as superior to the Bolshevik Revolution (No. 458, January 5 1938). There was a strange article predicting the division of the world among the United States, the USSR and Japan (No. 443, December 18 1937).

With the imposition of censorship, there were frequent instances in which the censors had clearly blocked out material which was politically unpalatable to them. On one occasion, a whole page was suppressed (No. 408, November 8 1937).

Although the *Boletín* continued to publish favorable descriptions of various urban and rural collectives, it is clear that the censors were not willing to permit publication by this anarchist periodical of any political material which was critical of the Stalinists or of the governments then in power in the Republic and Catalonia.

Apparently, at least for a time, the anarchists published some illegal periodicals, which were not subject to the official censors' scrutiny. Helmut Rudiger noted late in 1937 the existence of two of these, *Anarquía* and *Libertad*. 'They . . . used a more honest language and in general expressed what all felt and thought in reality, but that could not be published due to the censorship, especially the

revelations concerning and criticism of the Communists and the more or less sensational revelations about some of that party's leaders...'³²

Stalinist and Government Attacks on the Collectives

Certainly, the Negrín government made it clear that it was absolutely opposed in principle to the seizures of land by the peasants and urban enterprises by the workers which had occurred after July 19 1936. One of the fronts on which the anarchists had to fight most strongly after they were expelled from the Republican and Catalan governments was that of protecting the economic revolution which the workers and peasants had carried out during the first phase of the Civil War.

The Giral government, right at the beginning of the War had decreed the government's 'seizure' of all industries abandoned by sympathizers with the Rebels.³³ Of course, at the time, this was a largely meaningless gesture, since in fact they had already been taken over by the workers. However, the Negrín government set about to really establish government control over industries and other elements of the economy.

Clearly, Juan Negrín wanted to suppress the workers' collectives. Speaking to Louis Fischer soon after taking over the prime ministership, Negrín noted the difficult financial situation of many of the collectives: 'They are coming to me for running expenses and for raw materials. We will take advantage of their plight to gain control of the factories. Catalan industry is in chaos and as a result we have to depend for too much on imports which, as you know, are expensive even when we can get them.'³⁴

Prime Minister Negrín himself publicly expressed his opposition to the collectives. In an interview with foreign correspondents on March 31 1938, he said: 'If the government has not done anything or given any order with regard to collectives, how can it modify its work. The concept of private property has not been modified so far as I know.'³⁵

Diego Abad de Santillán has noted two decrees of the Negrín

government which made its opposition to both rural and urban collectives eminently clear. One was a decree of the general directorate of industry of the ministry of finance, dated March 17 1938. 'Only the Government has the ability to take over property; therefore, all seizures which have taken place without its agreement are null, and the industries must be returned to their old owners, unless they are rebels, in which case they will pass to the Caja de Reparaciones.'

The second decree cited by Santillán, issued by the same government dependency said: 'The first step in any industrial intervention is to cite the legitimate owner of the firm. If that person presents himself or sends a legal representation, the Interventor of the mines, industries, commerce, agriculture, food business, etc. has no alternative but to recognize him... In no case, so far, has there been recognized as valid any document or any property right other than that which existed before July 19, 1936. If such property belongs to a rebel, it passes to the Caja de Reparaciones.'³⁶

After the Negrín government moved to Barcelona in October 1937, it began to put into effect the policies expressed in the two decrees noted by Santillán. It began to seize some of the collectives which had been established by workers whose former employers had sided with the Rebels. The collectives in these enterprises had been legalized by the Catalan government in its collectivization decree, and the commission established to carry out that decree formally protested against these moves by the Republican government, on the grounds that they were an infringement of Catalan autonomy.³⁷

The Negrín government also began another kind of attack on the collectives, particularly in Catalonia. It began assessing fines on many of them, on the grounds that they had not paid the stamp tax required by Republican law of all corporations. Again, the body charged with administering the Catalan collectivization law protested, saying that the collectives were a new form of economic organization, and that the stamp tax on corporations did not apply to them.³⁸

José Peirats has said of the policies of the Negrín government:

The move of the government to take over industries must be

interpreted as a natural reactionary tendency in the State, which through the highpoint of the revolution always reserves its right to the last word. In Spain this state tendency persisted after the 19th of July. After May 1937 it took on the characteristics of true revenge. The seizures and requisitions began with the pretext of centralizing the industries related to war production or in the necessity of coordinating in an intense and permanent way the war industry. The offensive was really motivated by the desire to annul or to take away the workers' conquests. And to this end, there were launched calumnious maneuvers against the Collectives, against the *Sindicatos*, against the factory or enterprise Committees, which were charged with all kinds of defects, from incapacity and laziness to premeditated sabotage, vices of which only the interventionist representatives of the Government were guilty. Official sabotage was the necessary condition to justify the wished for and later intervention . . .³⁹

In an earlier chapter I recounted the struggle over the government's seizure from the workers' control of the 'war industries'. But the process went way beyond those enterprises, important as they were.

Immediately after the May Events in Barcelona, the PSUC launched a campaign to the effect that 'Public services and transport should be run by the municipalities and not by the unions . . . the public interest of the entire city population stands above the private interests of the workers' unions'. *Solidaridad Obrera* raised a cry of warning against this campaign, which was not immediately successful, but certainly foretold the Stalinists' onslaught against workers' control of much of the Catalan economy.⁴⁰

With the movement of the Negrín government from Valencia to Barcelona in October 1937, it was in a much better situation to try to frustrate and dismantle the workers' collectives. Andrés Capdevila, the anarchist who presided over the Catalan council of economy before the May Events, has noted that, long before the final government seizure of the war industries, the sub-secretariat of supply of the ministry of national defense used purchases of war material as a weapon to weaken the collectives. If a firm was owned by a private individual, the sub-secretariat was willing and anxious to offer a

contract on favorable terms. If it was a collective, the officials of the sub-secretariat found all kinds of reasons why a contract could not be given, and in many instances actually insulted the members of the councils of administration of these enterprises, saying that the sub-secretariat could not enter into contracts with thieves who had stolen property belonging to someone else – the old owners.

At the same time, Juan Comorera, the head of the PSUC who had become councillor of economy of Catalonia after the anarchists had been thrown out of the regional government, found his own ways to sabotage the collectives. One important step in this direction was a drastic reduction in the status of the Consejo de Economía. A 'regulation' of the council, issued by Comorera on August 17 1937, proclaimed the council's 'consultative role and dependence on the Councillor of Economy'. The new composition of the body emphasized that tendency and suppressed the representation on it which had been assigned to the POUM.' Henceforward, it included six government representatives, of the departments of finance, economy, agriculture, supply, public works and labor, together with three members of the Esquerra Catalana, three of the CNT, three of the UGT, two of the FAI, and one each of the Acción Catalana, Rabassaires and Cooperatives Confederation of Catalonia.⁴¹

An onslaught on the collectives was inherent in the general economic policies imposed by Comorera and his party. Martin Cruells has said of these policies:

Coincident with that accelerated rhythm of political centralization ... there began to develop in Catalonia a situation of economic speculation, private economy ...

There reappeared speculators who before had camouflaged themselves as proletarians; and new speculators appeared due to the new political situation, which caused a manifest and public display of the traditional differentiation between the nouveau rich and the poor classes ... That differentiation became little by little more irritating as there began to be scarcity of the most elemental foodstuffs ...

That situation of privileged and the under privileged began after the May Events to influence, in its turn, the PSUC, which

presided over or at least permitted it, as the arbiter of Catalan politics in that period. It followed that the Catalan Communists ... in spite of their efforts to plan the resistance and the war – were conditioned to carry on a political policy tolerant towards the speculators and in general towards the middle classes...⁴²

However, the assault of Comorera and the PSUC on the Catalan collectives went beyond these general aspects of the economic policy they imposed on the region. By the Catalan collectivization decree, both the managers of collectivized enterprises and the interventors who represented the Catalan government in such firms were supposed to be elected by the general assembly of a collective and then to be confirmed by the councillor of the economy. Many times, Comorera refused to confirm those elected; and sometimes he tried to name people of his own selection, particularly in the case of interventors. According to Andrés Capdevila, many of these were people of doubtful loyalty to the Republican cause, but had assured their positions by joining the PSUC. Comorera also undermined the decree which had been passed by the Catalan government early in the War municipalizing all housing, and began turning back housing properties to their old owners.⁴³

Comorera also moved against a collective in a sector of the Catalan economy which was certainly not a 'war industry'. José Peirats noted: 'On January 19, 1938 there was published in the *Diario Oficial* of the Generalidad a *personal order* (underscoring by *Solidaridad Obrera*) of the Councillor of Economy of the autonomous government. According to it, public spectacles in Catalonia were to be taken over, except those already subject to municipalization.' The workers involved promptly went on strike, a walkout which was 'resolved' on February 1 by the naming by Comorera of a four-person intervention commission, of which three were CNTers and one a member of the PSUC. As Peirats noted, the anarchists still were in titular control of the public entertainment of the region, but now as delegates of the government.⁴⁴ The workers' right to choose their own people to run the industry had been cancelled.

Comorera's offensive against the workers' collectives was facilitated by a decree of special interventions issued by the Generalidad

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on November 20 1937. It permitted the councillor of economy to appoint 'interventor-delegates' whose power, according to Josep Maria Bricall, included:

Not only fiscalization or public control but the effective direction of economic activities.⁴⁵

With the approval of the decree which authorized them, the interventions were not long in coming; by the end of the first trimester of 1938 more than fifteen large enterprises and economic sectors had been intervened. As the war went on, the interventions became more and more numerous...⁴⁶

The rapid introduction of special interventions in industry converted the Catalan economy into a new more rigid form of organizations evidently in a centralised form... On some occasions the Enterprise Council was deposed and the special intervention took an *absolute* form, and the total administration and direction of the firm was turned over to the special interventor.⁴⁷

These attacks on the role of the anarchists in the economy were by no means confined to Catalonia. In December 1937, the CNT daily in Madrid, *Castilla Libre*, reported that the CNT had first been forced to turn over to the government many properties which it had seized early in the war when they had been abandoned by their owners. Now, the paper reported, these properties were being turned back to their old owners, who continued to collect rents on them as before the Civil War.⁴⁸

After the Republican government moved to Barcelona, it too joined the attack on workers' collectives in Catalonia. Gómez Casas has described the most important of the moves: 'On April 15, 1938, the Negrín government published a decree creating the General Electricity Commissariat. Indalecio Prieto offered the position of Commissar of this department to Juan Peiró, who, with the approval of the CNT National Committee, accepted the appointment. Unfortunately, the government, in an effort to neutralize and destroy revolutionary creations, dissolved the Unified Electrical Services of Catalonia at the same time. The new Commissar was compelled to

appoint state controllers in each company, which then automatically assumed its previous personality – anonymous shareholder society, and to dissolve the Company and Workers' Control Committees.⁴⁹

In the case of the leather workers' collective of Catalonia, the government used various devices to strangle it. Writing more than a decade after the end of the Civil War, J. Esperanza described the process: 'Repeatedly, certain offices pestered us with forms and questionnaires which served no purpose, but had the virtue of exasperating the personnel, since to fill out what was required of us was tantamount to destroying our effort to work freely and conscientiously... Believing that working and fulfilling our obligation to supply the front and to develop the work of our organizations to the greatest extent was sufficient, we resisted the paperwork which was sent by the equally exigent and nervous bureaucracy of the State.'

Certain leaders of the collective then received personal threats. Finally, 'they insisted that we renounce our Collective, ceding our rights to the State, which we again refused. Then, the authorities decided to requisition the skins and tanning extracts which we had deposited at the frontier and other raw materials which didn't exist in Spain, all of which was robbed from us, thus introducing the crisis of work in our factories... Unable to work, our comrades were disagreeably surprised by the presence of troops in each one of our 27 factories and our 6 warehouses. For about five weeks, there was stationed in our buildings, day and night, all of a Battalion to carry out the requisition.' These troops seized all of the civilian finished goods in the collective's warehouses, and 'with all of this the cause of the people was certainly not served, but the destruction of our Collective was achieved.'⁵⁰

The Persecution of Anarchist and Other Civilians

The anarchists were not only on the defensive in the economy and in politics after May 1937, but also in a much more personal way. After the events of mid-1937, they and other opponents of the Stalinists were victims, on a large scale, of persecution. They were harassed by

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the police, many thousands were arrested, a substantial number were tortured and some were murdered.

An interesting statistic which reflects what transpired after the May Events is presented by Josep Maria Bricall. He noted that in the period between May and December 1937, the Catalan government (dominated by the Stalinists after late June) spent 3,074,037 pesetas on prisons and tribunals, compared with 395,454 which that had government had spent on that item between November 1936 and April 1937.⁵¹

Foreign anarchists were persecuted with particular severity after the May Events. Helmut Rudiger, in his report to the December 1937 Congress of the International Workingmen's Association elaborated:

The persecution of foreign antifascists in Spain started with the outrageous campaign against the POUM party, within which there was a substantial number of foreigners. While during the first months of the people's movement it sufficed for a foreign comrade to have a foreign antifascist organization as guarantor ... the authorities started to ask for official papers from the foreigners' countries of origin after the May events. In this way, a Hitlerian passport or a passport issued by the Italian fascists came to be of more value than the best documentation from CNT or FAI...

But after the May days, hundreds of foreigners were taken into custody or were left to their own devices without the governmental authorities taking up their cases. In general, those who had association with the PSUC – the Communists – were set free while the unorganized and the CNT-sympathizers were deported, without motivation, or as 'fascists'. The situation of these foreign comrades was especially hard, a thing which I think the Spanish comrades never appreciated. The foreign comrades who came to Spain through this act made themselves undesirable in their 'own' countries, not to mention the emigrants from fascist countries, who thought they had found a haven in Spain, and now after deportation once again are left to homeless wandering, facing an even more difficult emigration than when they left for Spain...⁵²

This persecution was facilitated by the fact that soon after the May Events the control patrols, the revolutionary police established after July 19 1936, were finally abolished. This took place on June 6 and, as Manuel Cruells wrote, ‘Thus disappeared definitively all vestiges of the revolutionary forces.’⁵³ Public order remained solely in the hands of the regular police – National Republican Guards (Civil Guards), Assault Guards, the *carabineros* and, in Catalonia, the regional police, the *Mozos de Esquadra*.

After their removal from the governments of the republic and of Catalonia, the anarchists lost nearly all influence, not to mention control, of the various police forces. In addition to the revolutionary patrols being ended, the anarchists lost any influence over the regular police organizations.

This was in sharp contrast to the situation in the first months of the Civil War, when the anarchists not only had the patrols, but also held important posts in the regular police forces. From July 1936 until May 1937, a CNTer was at least nominally in command of the Civil Guard in Catalonia.⁵⁴ Another CNTer was head of the secret police in Valencia during that same period.⁵⁵

The Servicio de Inteligencia Militar (SIM)

Furthermore, the anarchists were totally excluded from a new organization which was established soon after the Negrín government took over, and which quickly became the most coercive and brutal of all of the forces of ‘public order’. This was the new Servicio de Inteligencia Militar (SIM), which was almost completely dominated by the Stalinists – Spanish and Russian.

The SIM was established in August 1937 by Minister of Defense Indalecio Prieto, on the suggestion of ‘certain Russian technicians’. They presented him with a draft decree for the setting up of the SIM, which he rewrote, among other things to require that all appointments to the organization be made by him, as minister. When a Communist, named Durán, whom he appointed head of the SIM in the Madrid region on the recommendation of the same Russian ‘technicians’, on his own named several hundred Communist SIM

agents, Prieto removed him, sending him back to command an army division. When a Russian 'technician' came to protest and demand the return of Durán to his SIM post, Prieto refused.

However, Prieto was unfortunate in his choice of the head of the SIM. He first named a personal friend, who did not like the job and soon quit. He then named a Socialist lieutenant-colonel, Uribarri, who soon came to him to report that a Russian 'technician' had urged Uribarri 'to deal directly and constantly with him, behind your back'. Although Uribarri said he had refused, Prieto recounted that Uribarri soon 'changed his conduct, on whose suggestion I don't know'. Prieto concluded, 'I understood that the SIM no longer obeyed my orders.'⁵⁶

The SIM was not the first 'security' organ to pass under control of the Stalinists. José Peirats has recounted the case of the Dirección General de Seguridad. This had begun under the supposed supervision of a national council of security, 'with direct representation of the antifascist forces'. But a Communist, Colonel Ortega, was named as director general of security, and he soon was able to bring about the dissolution of the council, leaving him in complete control of the organization.

The result, according to Peirats, was that 'the General Directorate was converted then into a headquarters of the "Party".' Hanging in key places in its halls and officers were pictures of Lenin, Stalin 'and other great men of the Communist sainthood'. Active under Colonel Ortega were many agents of the old police who were being investigated as disloyal to the Republic just before July 19.⁵⁷

As far as the SIM was concerned, although ostensibly a 'military' institution, it soon became an all-encompassing organ of repression. According to Peirats, it had sections dealing with the following: foreign affairs, aviation, land forces, navy, public works, armament, economic affairs, justice, transport and communications, education and entertainment, political parties and trade union organizations, civil population, and a special brigade.⁵⁸

Peirats noted that the Special Brigade (SB) section of the SIM 'was concerned with detaining, interrogating and martyring those who were arrested'. He also noted that the SIM did succeed in rooting out some Falangista elements, but added: 'One must note that torture

made this possible. And these same methods were also applied to antifascist elements who incurred the annoyance of those who inspired the SB. In all cases, terror and martyrdom against helpless men are a repugnant monstrosity to be condemned.⁵⁹

Both José Peirats and Diego Abad de Santillán presented numerous examples of the torture to which the SIM condemned its victims. Santillán cited a number of the centers out of which the SIM operated: 'In the Hotel Colón of Barcelona headquarters of the PSUC in the Casa Carlos Marx, in the Puerta del Angel 24, and in Villamayor 5, all in Barcelona, as well as the Santa Ursula convent in Valencia, in the Castelldefels castle in Chinchila, etc., etc., crimes were perpetrated which have no antecedents in the history of the Spanish Inquisition...'⁶⁰ Peirats commented:

The SIM was also used as a tool of political blackmail. Its agents looked into the private life of the individuals whom it wished to control or neutralize. If the investigation showed some peccadillo involving the morality of the person involved, he was menaced with making public his private weaknesses if he didn't submit to certain demands. The SIM also sought State secrets, in diplomacy, industry and armaments. This kind of service served only the Soviet State...⁶¹

The SIM had its own concentration camps. The regime in these disciplinary camps was brutal: scarce and deficient food, work, which was more than forced, debilitating. The internees were prohibited to receive visitors...

These punishments were applied indiscriminately to fascist prisoners and antifascist ones: to the Falangistas of the Fifth Column and the militants of the POUM and of the Libertarian Movement...⁶²

All of this apparatus was in the hands of the Stalinists, said Peirats: 'The Chief, with his secretaries, the heads of service and administration were controlled by the Party of Stalin. The Communist agents dominated the most important sections...'⁶³

It is thus clear that after the anarchists were forced out of the Republican and Catalan governments, the Stalinists came to control

almost completely the repressive organs of the Spanish Republican State. Furthermore, those organs were used by the Stalinists to crush all those who were opposed to its total domination of Loyalist Spain, whether they were POUMistas, Left-wing Socialists, or anarchists.

Abad de Santillán wrote, on behalf of the Federación Anarquista Iberica: 'We denounced the idea that by this route we could get anything but the triumph of Franco, because it deprived us of the aid and support of the people. And we were not wrong. If anything concrete was made known about these methods, it was only due to us. The other parties and organizations, although outraged, were silent, because they said that the war demanded this. We understood that the war required the contrary: termination of these horrors prepared and organized by the Russian Communists, and the strong punishment of those who had lent themselves, from leading posts or as simple tools, to dishonor our war and dishonor our revolution.'⁶⁴

Persecution of Anarchists and Others in the Military

The Communists were particularly concerned to get total control of the Republic's armed forces. They understood that ultimately their ability to establish a Stalinist regime in Loyalist Spain would depend upon their ability to control its armed forces. As a consequence, the persecution of anarchist and other anti-Stalinists was, if anything, more intensive in the military than in civilian life.

They used various methods. We have noted in earlier chapters their efforts to use their influence in the higher reaches of the ministry of defense to transfer CNT officers out of CNT-controlled military units, to replace them with Communists and to isolate the transferred CNT officers in politically hostile units – and the differing results of these efforts in the former Durruti Column (26th Division) and the one-time Tierra y Libertad Column (later 153rd Brigade).

However, where mere transfers would not suffice, murder of anti-Stalinist officers and men was frequently threatened and not infrequently carried out. According to a report of the Peninsular Committee

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of the FAI in October 1938: ‘... At the present time we could point out some cases of our comrades who, without defense from our organization, surrounded in their front line posts, have opted to accept membership in the Communist Party... Our comrades have the impression that they are not being supported, that free rein is given to the nefarious policy of the Communist Party. There are not just a few cases, but thousands and thousands of comrades confess that they feel more fear of being assassinated by adversaries alongside them than of being killed in battle with the enemies on the other side of the front.’⁶⁵

Both Largo Caballero and Indalecio Prieto, when in charge of defense, had forbidden political proselytization within the armed forces. But the Stalinists paid no attention to this. Annexed to the above FAI report was a document containing the minutes of a meeting of Communist officers on the Aragón front in March 1938, held to discuss and push forward Communist recruiting in the armed forces there. Most of the meeting was taken up with discussion of the progress, or lack of it, in recruitment for the Party in the various units represented, and the need to get rid of those officers who were impeding Stalinist recruitment. However, at the end of the session, the highest-ranking officer there, A. Merino, chief of staff of the 142nd Brigade, ‘... again proposed the formula of elimination, saying: “Everything that has been said is very good, but I think I have said it very clearly. He who gets in the way, on a visit to the trenches, a shot will be lost, and he will encounter it. Or he’ll be taken to the barbed wire, four shots, charges of desertion and thus we shall make sure that it is not found out.”’⁶⁶

The form of ‘proselytization’ advocated by Merino was very widely practiced by the Communists in the Republican army. The FAI Peninsular Committee’s report of October 1938, previously mentioned, cited a number of them. For instance, it said that, ‘Dated June 25, 1938, the Commissar of the 43rd Division, Maximo de Gracia presented to the Minister of Defense and the General Commissar of the Army a long report on the work of the Communists in that Division when it was in the Pyrenees, attributing to those maneuvers the final collapse. In this report, there is discussion of

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assassinations, the danger of assassination of non-Communist officers and soldiers, of violation of correspondence, of immorality, etc. etc. Nothing has been done until now to determine responsibility.⁶⁷

These methods of 'recruitment' were not only used by the Stalinists against the anarchists. One Socialist veteran told me many years later of the case of a Socialist captain who had chosen as his aides two young men without bothering to find out their politics. After a while he was approached insistently by some of the Communists in the unit, who ordered his two aides to kill him. Instead, they approached him, revealed their Communist membership and told him what they had been detailed to do. They suggested that he pack up and leave, and they would say that they had been unable to find him. He did just that.⁶⁸

It was widely known among the non-Communist elements in the army what the Stalinists were doing. The terror imposed on many units by the Communists' activities served to undermine, if not destroy, morale among the troops. It also served to divert non-Communist officers and men from their ordinary military duties. I was told by one veteran of the anarchist Ortíz Column (25th Division), for instance, that when a Communist was assigned as commander of one of the brigades of that division, my informant and another anarchist officer alternated sleeping, never doing so at the same time, so that the one who was awake could constantly be on the lookout for any suspicious move that the brigade commander might make.⁶⁹

In the interim between the battle of the Ebro and the final attack by the Rebels on Catalonia, there was widespread desertion in the Republican army ranks. Adolfo Bueso, a POUMist trade unionist, set about trying to find the causes of this, by interviewing many who had left the front, as well as those on leave in Barcelona and in the military hospitals there. Among other causes, he reported, was the clear preference, in terms not only of armament, but of such things as uniforms and soap, given to Communist-controlled troops over those who were not under Stalinist command.

'Another motive for discontent was the barefacedness with which the "good jobs" were distributed among those who had CP cards, but what produced most desperation, which motivated the men to

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“return home” was the terrible persecution and the assassinations in cold blood carried out by the Communists against all those who did not lend themselves to their designs, or had POUMist or CNT antecedents...⁷⁰

José Peirats took particular note of the situation in the military hospitals. After noticing several incidents of abuse by Communist doctors and other personnel, he cited a note of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI of July 18 1938, which among other things, said:

The wounded are treated when the doctors wish, and if they are disaffected from the staff of the hospital are not treated. Our trade union delegates in the Military Hospital of Vallacarca have told of truly monstrous cases. The sick have not been treated one way, or the next, or the next, and their injuries end up with gangrene... In this hospital a Communist cell is in charge, headed by Dr Linares, one of the ‘valiant ones’ who during the offensive in Aragón abandoned equipment and the wounded and came hurriedly to Barcelona. But the case of Vallacarca is that of all, absolutely all of the Military Hospitals. The doctor, the nurse, the sick and the director, if they are not Communists, are exposed to all kinds of humiliations and menaces, and what is worse, are also exposed to being involved in an infamous trick which will bury them in the graves of Montjuich...⁷¹

Conclusion

After the events in Barcelona in May 1937, the anarchists had to conduct a bitter struggle, on a variety of fronts to preserve the revolutionary gains which they had made in the early phase of the Civil War. They had to fight to maintain as many as they could of both their rural and urban collectives, they had to try to preserve their influence in the armed forces, and to continue as a force of consequence in Republican politics.

They were faced with the drive and determination of the highly

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disciplined Spanish Stalinists, who had the complete backing, encouragement and direction of the agents – diplomatic, Comintern, economic, and military – of the Soviet regime. Where possible, the Stalinists operated from recognized posts of command within the established institutions of the Republican State; where that was not possible, they operated outside it, maintaining their own secret police, secret cells in the military, and secret and not-so-secret pressures from the wide array of Soviet ‘advisers’ on both non-Communist civilian and military officials of the Republic.

At any given time and on any given issue, the Stalinists were frequently able to marshal the support against the anarchists of other political, social and economic groups within the Republic. However, when these elements had served their purpose, they too fell victim of the inexorable drive for power of the Stalinists. As we have indicated, by the end of 1938 the Communists had been able to eliminate politically – or physically – all major opposing political forces except the anarchists.

Increasingly, the struggle of the anarchists became one for physical survival. The Stalinists, first through their own GPU, which operated independently of the government, and then principally through the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar, carried out a policy of physical extermination of their opponents both in the front lines and in the rearguard, when other methods of eliminating them did not serve.

There can be little doubt about the fact that this unremitting drive to establish in Republican Spain a replica of Stalin’s Soviet Union greatly undermined the morale of those fighting and working for the Republican cause. Certainly, creating a situation in which large numbers of Republican officers and men feared more the Stalinists who were in their midst, than they did the Franco troops on the other side of the trenches, did not stimulate those soldiers’ will to carry on the struggle against the Rebels. Since most of the members of the Republican forces were workers and peasants who had participated to one or another degree in the Revolution of the early phase of the War – or had relatives or friends who had – the efforts of the Stalinists to destroy that Revolution also could not be anything but a negative contribution to the war effort. Similarly, those efforts certainly increasingly raised troubling questions in the minds of the

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workers and peasants in the rearguard about whether their sacrifices for the struggle were any longer worthwhile.

All of these observations apply particularly to the anarchists. It was they who had taken the principal leadership role in the Revolution – seconded by the POUMists and Largo Caballero Socialists. For them, the struggle for the Revolution and victory in the War were inseparable. The surprising thing, then, in retrospect, was that the anarchist soldiers, who made up the largest single element in the military, continued to fight at the front as tenaciously as they did, and the anarchists in the rearguard continued to work as steadfastly as most of them did.

One foreign observer perhaps summed up as well as anyone, writing soon after the Second World War, the anarchist-Stalinist struggle during the Civil War. Gabriel Javscas wrote, ‘In the end, however, the Communists failed to liquidate the Anarchists and Socialists, who are pretty tough customers themselves. The CNT in particular proved that where the violent repressions of successive Spanish governments had failed to stamp it out, the chances of Moscow were not much better. Consequently, the Russians – realists to the core – finally gave up and withdrew from the civil war in the summer of 1938, nine months before the Republican government laid down its arms.’⁷²

Dissension Within the Libertarian Ranks

Clearly, from the beginning of the Civil War, the anarchists retreated ideologically. This process began with the basic decision of the Catalan CNT not to assume formal power immediately after July 19, although *de facto* power was in their hands, but rather to collaborate with other groups which were supporting the cause of the Republic. It was intensified by the decisions to enter the governments of Catalonia and the Republic. However, no significant splits took place within the libertarian movement as a result of these compromises with traditional ideology and policy.

It was not until after the May Events and the expulsion of the anarchists from the Catalan and Republican governments that such divisions began to appear to a significant degree. The extreme pressures on the anarchists during the latter part of the Civil War had their impact on the internal life of the movement. Different groups reacted differently to the pressures of the Stalinists and their allies and to the relationship of the libertarians with the Negrín government. These differences of criteria and judgment ultimately led to publicly stated conflicting positions on the role of the movement in the Republic during the last year of the struggle against the forces of Francisco Franco.

One of the strategies of the Stalinists was to try to penetrate the anarchist ranks. Diego Abad de Santillán noted these efforts to

‘dismember’ the Libertarian Movement, and that the national committee of the CNT denounced these attempts, although he also claimed that the CNT had done so ‘only in words’, and had become too much aligned with the Negrín government and those political forces supporting it.¹ There is no indication that the Stalinists succeeded in gaining any foothold for their own partisans within the libertarian organizations.

However, it is clear that the Stalinists certainly did speculate on the possibility of splitting the anarchist ranks. Thus, Palmiro Togliatti reported to his Moscow bosses on November 25 1937: ‘In the interior of the CNT there is being accentuated the difference between the legalist wing, which wishes collaboration with us and with the government, and the terrorist wing. There is discussion of a split... It remains to be seen if it is convenient to reach a pact between the CP and the CNT. My opinion is favorable... It is necessary to avoid the CNT launching, compact, on the road of adventure, and at the same time it is necessary to encounter the link with the healthy part of the CNT...’²

Controversy Over Participation in Governments

Although strong differences of opinion within the anarchist movement became more evident during the last year of the Civil War, they did not begin then. Despite the fact that the decision of the Catalan CNT not to take formal power for itself following July 19 had been close to unanimous (as we have noted earlier in this book), there had been controversy in the libertarian ranks when the anarchists decided to join the governments of Catalonia and the Republic.

The entry of the libertarians in the governments had the support of the great majority of the members of the movement, and the opposition to it was quite limited. José Peirats, who himself was opposed to this move, bore witness to this fact. After citing the official justifications of the leaders of the CNT for the entry into the Largo Caballero government, he asked: ‘Did all of the militants think this way? Did this new position of the CNT have the support of international

anarchism and anarchosyndicalism? With the exception of minority currents, which made known their protests in their own periodicals, through committees and meetings, plenums and assemblies, the sad truth is that the great majority of the militants, were moved by a certain fatalism, a direct result of the tragic realities of the war.³

However, the opposition to the anarchists' surrender, however temporarily, of their opposition to participation in 'the State' did exist. Manuel Salas, a CNT military veteran, noted many years later that, although there was very little controversy over the anarchists' entering the Catalan government in late September 1936, there was a great deal of discussion and controversy over whether the CNT-FAI should enter the Largo Caballero government.⁴

A wartime leader of the Juventudes Libertarias, Germinal Gracia, told me many years later that he had edited a paper, *El Quijote*, which spoke out against entry into the Largo Caballero cabinet, and that the weekly newspaper of the Juventudes Libertarias had taken the same position. He noted that the CNT's entry into the Largo Caballero regime had been taken without the action being submitted to the rank and file of the organization, and claimed that many rank and filers felt defrauded by the move, and were very much against it.

One of the principal opponents of CNT entry into the Republican government was José Peirats who, during the conflict was the local leader of the Juventudes Libertarias in Lérida, and edited an anarchist newspaper there, *Acracia*. He argued that the CNT ministers would be powerless within the government and that the CNT would be better off fighting for the Revolution from the ranks of its economic organizations. After the May Events in Barcelona, he was forced to relinquish the editorship of *Acracia* because of his opposition position.⁵

However, Fidel Miró, who was head of the Juventudes Libertarias during most of the Civil War, claimed that the only publication of the Juventudes which opposed entry into the government was that published by Peirats, and that in Catalan regional plenums of the organization, only the delegations of Lérida, Hospitalet and one other had opposed participation in government.⁶

The Beginning of Dissidence in the FAI

During the first year of the Civil War, there was little difference observed by the general public – and even by the members of the Libertarian Movement – between the policies and positions of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica. The initials CNT–FAI appeared everywhere in Barcelona and other cities, towns and villages of the Republic, as if the two were one single organization. The representation of both the CNT and the FAI in regional and local governments and other public institutions was a means of achieving greater representation for the libertarians, rather than a result of there being different points of view between the two organizations. There were apparently no significant divergences between the CNT and the FAI in this period. In fact, Gómez Casas has noted that the FAI ‘forgot itself to an extent’ at the beginning of the Civil War and Revolution. ‘Virtually well into September the FAI gave no sign of life as a peninsular organization.’⁷

However, after the May Events and the expulsion of the anarchists from the Republican and Catalan governments this situation began to change. The judgement of the leaders of the CNT and the FAI on how to confront the drive of the Stalinists for absolute power within the Republic, and particularly on how to deal with the Negrín government, began to diverge considerably.

Diego Abad de Santillán, a leader of the FAI, cited a FAI memorandum of September 1938 which explained this:

The Peninsular Committee of the FAI, starting in the summer of 1937, began to offer fraternal observations to the National Committee of the CNT that, since we had left to the confederation the initiative in political matters, it was necessary to begin a change to recover our own personality, in order to stop insofar as possible the sharp fall of the Spain of the revolution. We must say that our efforts were not crowned with success, and the discrepancies in the daily discussion about our collective conduct became sharper, to the point that it was impossible to have a single orientation, the same understanding of and the same

solution to the various problems of the war, the economy, and national and international policy, etc.⁸

Santillán traced the evolution of the split between the leadership of the FAI (seconded to some degree by the Federación Juvenil Libertaria – FJL) and the national committee of the CNT. To begin with there was the strong refusal of the CNT to join the Negrín government when it was formed and the public statement the national committee of the CNT had made on that occasion:

The militants of the FAI had nothing to object to in that lofty and clear position. It was appropriate . . .

Only that, those of us who were better informed gave it a different significance, and we doubted that those words, which for the great mass of the Confederation were the only acceptable line, had the same value for the improvised leaders of the great organization. Those leaders, in conflict with the spirit, the interests and the aspirations of the mass of the workers and combatants, after having publicly supported the policies of Largo Caballero, entered into communication with Prieto to indicate their support for him, and when in spite of this support, Prieto also fell from the Government, they aligned themselves with Negrín until after the defeat.

Santillán noted that after the fall of Bilbao to Franco, *Juventud Libre*, organ of the FJL, published an article with the headline ‘The fall of Bilbao signifies the failure of the Negrín Government.’ The article claimed: ‘For all of Loyalist Spain one single clamor, one single cry, crosses the countryside and the cities: Out with the Negrín Government! Out with the Communist Party, cause of all the defeats!’⁹

According to Santillán, ‘The communications of the 10th of August 1937 of the National Committee of the CNT to the president of the Council of Ministers, continued the honorable trajectory of May. Perhaps they sinned through excess prudence, tolerance, systematic avoidance of the reply which the provocateurs who sought the extermination of our work and of our men merited. But those documents are still, in form, exponents of dignity.’¹⁰

Dissension Within the Libertarian Ranks

Later in 1937, the national committee of the CNT, with the support of the FAI, presented the government with a critique of Military operations following the fall of the Largo Caballero government. That document concluded that the failure to carry out the offensive in Extremadura planned by Largo Caballero, which was due to the failure of the Russians to allow the air force to cooperate with it, 'bears responsibility for the fall of Bilbao'. It also criticized the inefficacy of the leadership of small Republican offensives undertaken in the center and Aragón, and argued:

The operation of Brunete has been an exclusively political operation, which did not serve the interests of victory over fascism, but attempted to serve the interests of the Communist Party to the detriment of other organizations...

There is necessary a violent change in war policy to avoid the disaster towards which we would go if we proceeded on as we are now...

In vain did we look for any rectification of the war policy, while Prieto was Minister of National Defense or when Negrín succeeded him, which might justify the withholding of all critical reservations, observations and judgments by the leading bureaucracy of the CNT.¹¹

On the national committee of the CNT, Santillán commented: 'The certainty is that it was ceasing all criticism, it gave Negrín, after many efforts and humiliations, a minister, chosen by him, and there remained, in the face of the collapse throughout virtually all of the year 1938, only our individual voice and that of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI.'¹²

By the time the Peninsular Committee of the FAI began reacting against the increasingly close collaboration of the CNT leadership with Juan Negrín, the ability of the FAI to appeal to the anarchist masses was sharply circumscribed. Diego Abad de Santillán wrote later:

It was not possible for us to appeal to the great masses so that they could bring pressure in a thousand ways on the Government

The attempt which Largo Caballero had made to do so a year before brought him to be a prisoner in his home. It is not that we were afraid of that or something worse, but that in the existing situation not even a personal sacrifice would bring about anything positive. On more than one occasion, the governmental press, and almost all of it was, insinuated that, for less motives than we had given, there were many persons in jail or who had been shot. And it attributed to government generosity the fact that we could circulate in the street. It is true that for lesser motives there had been jailed or shot many worthy Spaniards. Also, we denounced that as one of many reasons for the trial and execution of the worst Government Spain has known in many centuries...

What we said in our publications, what we communicated to our militants, what we commented among friends, we also clearly said to the Government itself.¹³

The CNT, the FAI and Negrín's Thirteen Points

The first open break between the leadership of the CNT and that of the FAI would seem to have occurred at the time of Prime Minister Juan Negrín's statement of war aims, his '13 Points'. These were announced to his cabinet on May 1 1938. They proclaimed the Civil War to be a struggle for national independence, called for regional liberties in post-war Spain, for freedom of religion, and for an army 'at the service of the nation'. However, there were three of the 13 Points which were of particular relevance from an anarchist point of view.

Point 3 stated that the struggle was for a 'popular Republic, represented by a vigorous State, based on principles of pure democracy and exercising its action through a Government provided with full authority conferred by the Citizen's vote and which will be the symbol of a firm Executive Power always depending on the directions and intentions of the Spanish people.'

Point 7 provided:

The State will guarantee legally and legitimately acquired property, within limits of the supreme national interest and protection to the productive elements. Without interfering with individual initiative, it will impede the accumulation of wealth producing exploitation of the citizen and subjugation of the collectivity, diminishing the controlling action of the State in economic and social life. To this end, it will foster the development of small property, will guarantee the family patrimony and will stimulate all means to the end of economic, moral and racial improvement of the producing classes. The property and legitimate interests of foreigners who have not aided the rebellion will be respected, and there will be examined, with a view to appropriate compensation, the damage involuntarily caused by the war. For the study of this damage the Government of the Republic has already created the Commission of Foreign Claims.

Point 8 dealt with agrarian reform: 'Profound agrarian reform which liquidates the old and aristocratic semifeudal property which, lacking all human, national and patriotic sentiment, has always been the major obstacle to the development of the great possibilities of the country. Establishment of the new Spain on the wide and solid peasant democracy, owner of the land which it works.'

Finally, Point 13, although not of particular concern to the anarchists, aroused grave doubts among them and other elements supporting the Republican cause: 'Ample amnesty for all Spaniards who wish to cooperate in the immense work of reconstruction and engrandizement of Spain. After a cruel struggle such as that which is bloodying our land, in which have revived the old virtues of heroism and idealism of the race, it would be to commit an act of betrayal of the destinies of our fatherland not to repress and choke all ideas of vengeance and reprisal after a common action of sacrifice and labor, which all its sons are obliged to carry out for the future of Spain.'¹⁴

The reaction of the CNT and FAI leaderships to the issuance of the 13 Points diverged widely. On May 10, the CNT leadership joined with that of the UGT in their liaison committee to issue a statement to the effect that:

Our Government of the Popular Front, in its recent program, condensed in 13 points, has formulated the fundamental exigencies of our struggle: Integral and absolute national independence; defense before the world, and in a vanguard position, of the present and future of civilized humanity, without limit in effort or sacrifices, conquering for our fatherland, in the concert of all the nations, the post which corresponds to it, defending the collective interest; right to dispose of the destinies of our country and that it be the national will which gives the Republic the juridical and social structure of living together which they esteem human and just.¹⁵

These objectives create the conditions and the force to cede no ground in our effort until victory of our cause is achieved. And as struggle to the end or to victory expresses in words the firm determination of all the proletariat that we represent, this National Liaison Committee CNT-UGT joins with our Government of the Popular Front and affirms and considers as their own those declarations.¹⁶

On May 10 1938, the CNT National Committee issued a circular in which it undertook to defend each of Negrín's 13 Points. It did so, it said, to show that there was 'an open field for advanced accomplishments' in that program, and to rebut 'the negative affirmations of the defeatists'.

With regard to Point 3, the national committee argued: 'In the Plenum of September 1937 it was agreed to make ours and to defend the thesis of an election under the auspices of a "Democratic and Federal Socialist Republic". In the bases presented to the UGT and accepted by the National Plenum of Regional Organizations, we included a section which expressed the accord of September. The declaration of the Government changes the wording and talks of a Popular Republic, which isn't opposed to our thesis.'¹⁷

The CNT circular labelled Point 7 'of revolutionary importance, since it deals with the economy and property. We would have wished a declaration of socialization, collectivization, etc., etc.' but, the CNT said, this was impossible for a government document designed mainly for foreign consumption. It argued that the CNT itself had

supported small property and had proposed ultimate compensation for foreign enterprises. It professed to see in Point 7 ‘an abundance of points coincidental with our Operations, which also are synthesized, theoretically and practically in “WILL STIMULATE ALL MEANS TO THE END OF ECONOMIC, MORAL AND RACIAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE PRODUCING CLASSES”.’

In so far as Point 8, dealing with agrarian reform was concerned, the CN of the CNT said that that point’s commitment to a ‘peasant democracy, owner of the land it works’ was quite satisfactory. This was because it did not state ‘whether the peasant is going to be proprietor of the land which he works, individually or collectively, and there can therefore exist collective systems in the countryside, considering that the peasants who form them are PROPRIETORS OF THE LAND THEY WORK.’

Finally, the CN of the CNT defended Point 13, which promised full amnesty for those involved in the rebellion against the Republic. It pictured that offer as having ‘importance for the exterior . . . and it has importance in the rebel zone in awakening hopes among those who daily face the Italo-German invasion . . .’¹⁸

The FAI leadership’s view of the 13 Points was totally different from that of the CNT National Committee. A circular that the Peninsular Committee of the FAI sent to all its regional groups read: ‘. . . the note made public by the Government with respect to the objectives sought by the Republic in this war, constitutes a transcendental document, in that it established a line of conduct which practically signifies a return to the regime existing before the 19th of July, with all the consequences which that might bring for the proletariat . . .’¹⁹

A further circular of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, dated May 6, read:

From the third point, which establishes the parliamentary regime, until the 13th, which promises amnesty to the parties of Franco, its whole content clashes violently not only with our ideas (which we would not expect to be reflected in a governmental document) but also with the reality established in antifascist Spain since the 19th of July. Significant in the

document is, above all, what is missing in it. We don't find even the most discreet allusion to the 19th of July, to the counter-revolutionary forces, which then rose in arms against the people and were eliminated radically from public life; nor do we encounter in it a formula which guarantees the conquests of the peasant and working class; the right of collective exploitation and workers' control of production. In contrast, the State promises to guarantee property, individual initiative, the free exercise of religious practices, to stimulate the development of small property, the indemnization of foreign capitalism, etc., etc.²⁰

The clash between the points of view of the CNT and FAI leaderships culminated in a controversy over whether or not the FAI would sign a declaration of the Popular Front endorsing the 13 Points. The Catalan regional organization of the FAI, which belonged to the executive committee of the Libertarian Movement in that part of the Republic, strongly urged the Peninsular Committee of the FAI to sign the document, and was supported by the FAI regional Committee of Asturias, although that of Aragón backed the objections of the Peninsular Committee to doing so. Finally, the FAI Peninsular Committee agreed to sign it 'under protest'.²¹

The Cabinet Crisis of August 1938

The second serious conflict between the Peninsular Committee of the FAI and the national committee of the CNT apparently came at the time of the government crisis of August 1938, caused by the resignation of the Catalan and Basque nationalist ministers because of the Negrín government's issuance of three decrees with which they disagreed, including one nationalizing the country's war industries. Diego Abad de Santillán explained what happened then:

The efforts which we made during the days that the crisis persisted, to try to influence the superior committees of the libertarian movement, which were committed to maintain a

sterile minister in the Negrín Government, a minister chosen by Negrín himself, without consultation, who provided no information about matters of vital interest, are beyond description. The many arguments, reports, data which we presented to bring understanding of how prejudicial was our collaboration in such a government, and how bad it was for an honorable solution to the war, should have made even those who were averse to thought reflect a bit more. However, we achieved nothing. It was announced from the start that, whatever our arguments were, nothing could be changed. The CNT or the presumed representatives of the CNT, remained firm in their position, in spite of all the humiliations to which they were submitted, even during the crisis itself, and the other parties and organizations felt intimidated by the apparatus which was in place to repress...²²

José Peirats has described the different reactions of the CNT and the FAI leaderships to the August 1938 crisis: 'The CNT did not abandon its silence. For its part, the FAI fixed its position in a document, which is summarized in these two points... 1. The decrees approved by the Council of Ministers of the 11th of this month signify an attack on the liberties and rights of the Spanish people. 2. We exhort all parties and organizations for whom the general interest is greater than their own particular ambitions, to manifest their repudiation of the policies which those decrees indicate.'²³

The FAI's Memorandum on the Conduct of the War in August 1938

The next clear break of the FAI's Peninsular Committee of with the CNT leadership's position of total and uncritical support of Juan Negrín, and of all aspects of his conduct of the war – military, economic and political – was a memorandum on the military situation. This document was submitted to the government, but also to 'the ex-Ministers of War, military chiefs, parties and organizations

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which supported the Government'. Santillán indicated: 'In spite of the silence of the majority, our arguments and criticisms were so incontrovertible that many people thought that changes suggested by us were about to be made.' Among those who communicated to the Peninsular Committee their approval of the memorandum (in whole or in part) were Largo Caballero, Indalecio Prieto, General Vicente Rojo (chief of the general staff), Luis Araquistáin, Colonel Díaz Sandino, Colonel Jiménez de la Veraza, Colonel Emilio Torres and General José Asensio.²⁴

In the document it was noted that, in the two years of war, the Loyalist forces had been in retreat most of the time. 'It is undoubtedly true that the direction which we have given to the campaign on our side suffers from serious defects and our popular army and its commanders, with little competence and in large part undermined by party politics, have those defects also.'²⁵

The first cause of 'such a difficult military situation' cited in the memorandum was the 'absurd and pernicious influence of politics in the war'. At the beginning all republican factions felt that the war would be won quickly. As a consequence, 'the policy of party hegemony in the rear-guard stimulated those who fought to defend the so-called conquests of the revolution, ignoring what was essential, that is, the war, necessarily a revolutionary war. Parties and organizations devoted themselves to accumulating arms in the rear-guard, so as to dominate in the postwar period, which they thought would be immediate, keeping those arms from weak fronts, little organized and lacking the elements of which they were deprived.'

Once that preliminary period was over, according to the FAI, 'appears in the front rank a political party of scarce popular force which, supported by the policy of a foreign power, after intense propaganda in the ranks of the army and in the institutions of public order, offering the bait of promotions and positions to neophytes of not very clean antifascist antecedents and of deficient morality, in many cases giving them membership cards dated 1933, set out without any limit to make the popular army a creature of the party.'²⁶

The second weakness of the popular army noted by the Peninsular Committee was the system of war commissars.

When the military rebellion started and we had in our hands unexpectedly the organization of the war and military resources, without knowing who were the professional elements to whom to entrust our columns, we resorted to the naming of political chiefs or commissars who, accompanied by more or less friendly military men in whom we had confidence, directed operations.

It was the only advisable procedure in those circumstances. We could not leave command in the hands of personnel whom we did not know and had to limit posts to people who had declared in favor of the people in arms. It was a temporary measure until the situation was clarified. Then, from our war schools were graduating officers of popular and revolutionary origin, and in the front itself there emerged from the militiamen excellent leaders, like Durruti in Catalonia, Cipriano Mera in the center, Higinio Carrocera in Asturias, etc. The intervention of the double apparatus, political and military, became useless, when not prejudicial, even aside from the venom of proselytization to which it gave encouragement and means.²⁷

A third problem, according to the Peninsular Committee, was 'the military councillors of the USSR and the use of aviation'. It accused the Soviet military advisers of frequently overstepping their authority and undertaking positions of command, and control. This was particularly the case in the air branch, which:

Is completely in the hands of the officers of the USSR, an extreme easily understandable because of special conditions of the air force, different from the army, although we have come to form numerous contingents of magnificent Spanish pilots, and to build various planes each week in our factories. However, the aviation that we have is not used effectively, since there has not been established aviation units of cooperation with Armies and Army Corps, perhaps for insufficient resources. We can state that our infantry never feels sufficiently supported by the air force, which maintains no liaison with the land, in contrast with the way the aviation of our enemies functions. There is no true

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aerial observation or photographic resources ... nor do they follow daily the progress of enemy fortifications, nor do they carry out, in summary, the real job which should be done by air forces in a modern war.²⁸

Next, the FAI criticized 'jealous activity with regard to military commands'. This section of the memorandum accused members of 'a certain party' of spreading extensive rumors against commanders and political commissars not belonging to that party. 'An apolitical Napoleon Bonaparte commanding a large unit of our popular army, would surely fall, with a commissar and a cell of a certain party in the general staff. On the other hand, there has been fabricated false military prestige for immodest and ignorant individuals, on the basis of the complicity of cells and commissars ... In these conditions there has been produced a moral climate far removed from the healthy, noble and exemplary comradeship in combat which should reign within a loyal officer group, and in that fact may be found the cause of many desertions, many failures and of the inexistence of good commanders.'²⁹

Next, the FAI turned to the excess of armed personnel in the rearguard. 'In May 4 1937 we had a great force of maneuver, a real reserve army which today, in spite of various replacements having been called up, we do not have ... The exemptions from service at the front, for political reasons, the so-called indispensable people in the civil administration, those assigned to war industries, those who are of draft age but are in the *carabineros*, the security corps, the SIM (Servicio de Investigación Militar), and in the police, produce great discontent among the combatants and their families. All of this must be changed with a strong and impartial hand.'³⁰

Finally, the FAI, in its memorandum, criticized the failure of the government to organize a guerrilla force to work behind the enemy lines, and elaborated at some length on how this could be done.³¹ It then suggested four 'urgent and preliminary measures'. The first of these was: 'Complete change in the direction of military operations and war policy. Until the retirement of volunteers proposed by the Non-Intervention Committee is carried out, Spanish officers should be named to control the International Brigades. No foreigner can

occupy positions of command and responsibility in the army, aviation and the fleet. The Russian advisers will cease their independent operations and will be members of General Staffs, subordinate to Spanish commands. Interpreters will be provided by the Government.'

The second change recommended by the FAI was: 'Re-establishment of military discipline in all its purity. This will have the consequence of strong punishment of illegal acts and ineptitudes of commanders, whether or no they were vouched for by a particular political party.' The third was: 'Just establishment of the functions of the war commissariat, which can never undermine the attributes and responsibilities of the military command.' Finally, the FAI called for 'Radical reform of the SIM...'³²

Understandably, the Stalinists were very upset by this memorandum. Subsequently, Palmiro Togliatti claimed that it 'contained almost all the elements of a platform of the anti-Communist bloc of capitulationists and traitors'.³³

The October 1938 Plenum of the Libertarian Movement

The last major clash between the compromisers of the national committee of the CNT and the more uncompromising Peninsular Committee of the FAI came in the plenum of the Libertarian Movement between October 16 and 30 1938. This was a meeting of representatives of regional organizations of all three elements of the movement, that is, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* and the *Federación de Juventudes Libertarias*. The *Mujeres Libres* participated only in the discussion of 'auxiliary organisms of the Libertarian Movement', and its request to be admitted as the fourth fully-fledged member of the group was rejected.³⁴

The controversies in this meeting clearly indicated the arguments which were raging within the libertarian movement. However, they also clearly illustrated the quandaries which the movement had faced throughout the Civil War between its long-held principles and the necessities of compromising those principles in order to win the war and to protect their organizations.

In preparation for this meeting, the Peninsular Committee of the FAI drew up a 17-page memorandum. It recapitulated the complaints which it had submitted to the government and selected other people a couple months earlier, and added considerable material on terrorism against anarchists and others in the armed forces and civilian population.³⁵ It also submitted another memorandum entitled 'Report on the Necessity to Reaffirm Our Revolutionary Personality and to Refuse Our Participation in a Government Necessarily Fatal for the War and for the Revolution.' It consisted mainly of a personal attack on Prime Minister Juan Negrín.³⁶

During this two-week long session, there were sharp clashes between members of the national committee of the CNT and the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, which were recorded at some length in notes kept by a member of the Peninsular Committee. According to this record, Mariano Vázquez, national secretary of the CNT, made an all-out attack on the revolutionary actions of the anarchists during the first part of the Civil War.

Vázquez attacked excessive adherence of the anarchists to their traditional ideology, and attributed their weak position in the armed forces to their resistance to militarization of the militia. He criticized the urban collectives for not accepting 'official tutelage' and government financing. He attacked the behavior of García Oliver in the Largo Caballero government. He denounced the anarchist control patrols. He spoke of the 'Quijote-like positions' of the Consejo de Aragón. He defended the nationalization and municipalization of urban collectives. Finally, he defended CNT participation in the Negrín government, and that government itself. He severely criticized as 'juvenile' the FAI's memorandum of August 1938 attacking the Negrín government's military policy and denouncing Communist control of the armed forces and persecution of those who would not submit to it.³⁷

Vázquez was answered by two members of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, Germinal de Sousa and Pedro Herrera. The former took issue with Vázquez's condemnation of the FAI's August 1938 memorandum, as 'juvenile', saying that 'that had not been the opinion of various political and military personalities'.³⁸

Pedro Herrera was apparently more bitter than his colleague

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in answering Vázquez. According to the notes on the session, he said:

It is necessary to block those who condemn our principles. He who has no ideas should not be at the head of our Movement, which feels the need to appraise them together. We can absolutely not blame ourselves for what has happened. The 'doctrinal baggage' and the 'worn-out literature' which have been alluded to cannot be cast aside by the anarchists who still need them. Because, what we are we are. If anyone rejects our doctrines because they keep us from being liberal, let him leave us. We cannot be blamed for what happened in Aragón, nor for the Government's seizure of collectivized industries. The tendency to justify everything it does and to accuse ourselves, is nefarious and brings us to inelegant positions.

Herrera also insisted on telling the anarchist masses the truth, so as to avoid making in the future the mistakes of the past. In so far as the military failures were concerned, he said:

We have pointed out in our written reports a multitude of causes for them, for which we cannot make ourselves responsible, since we had nothing to do with them, as the National Committee of the CNT itself has clearly demonstrated.

Our militants have not been lacking in activity, opportunity, or agility. We cannot and should not advise them to descend to the use of procedures of duplicity, hypocrisy, intimidation, and trickery which mark the badly labelled able policy of the Communists, whom we have compared with the Company of Jesus. For our Movement, ethics is not an article of luxury, but something absolutely necessary which distinguishes us from the other sectors.

Anarchist ideas don't make impossible, but rather facilitate a clear examination of the things which we have talked about, and their resolution. We must recover our immense force working within our Organization and considering, as a temporary thing which it is, governmental action. We should not forget for a

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single moment our authentic revolutionary objectives. The Libertarian Movement must recuperate. To that end, here we must point out solutions. We are a Committee of an anarchist organization and we know what is our mission. We depend on our militants and we are not the ones who give orders...³⁹

Horacio Prieto was among those answering the Peninsular Committee. 'We are on the verge of a division. I should be happy if it could be demonstrated to the contrary, and I ask that it be shown to me. No one should give himself the exclusive right to determine conduct and ideas.'⁴⁰

In a later session, Federica Montseny denounced Negrín. She claimed that he 'presides over an absolutist dictatorship with liquidationist tendencies'. She denounced further anarchist collaboration with the Negrín regime, and attacked various of the government's specific policies.⁴¹

This plenum was characterized by José Peirats as being 'a very crude debate'.⁴² However, the plenum did adopt a number of resolutions, including one to establish a 'Committee of Liaison of the Libertarian Movement'.⁴³ The bitterness aroused during the sessions was underscored by the notes of the Peninsular Committee member, which Peirats (and I) have quoted extensively. 'On proposing adjournment, the National Committee of the CNT raised the question of its incompatibility with the Peninsular Committee of the FAI. In replying, the latter expressed its surprise, saying that on its part it felt no incompatibility with any organism, since, conscious of its responsibility, if it felt such a situation, it would immediately resign...'⁴⁴

José Peirats summed up the internal situation within the Libertarian Movement by the latter part of 1938:

The Libertarian Movement still had in 1938 a large part of its potential and influence to determine events of the country. But, as we have just seen, it was divided in two principal tendencies. That represented by the National Committee of the CNT was eminently fatalistic; that of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI represented a tardy reaction against this fatalism. But between

the fatalism of the CNT and the coughs of orthodoxy of the FAI was the tendency, not temporary but permanent, in favor of frank rectification of the tactics and principles, represented by Horacio Prieto. This tendency, which advocated turning the FAI into a political party, charged with representing the Libertarian Movement in the Government, in the organisms of the State and in electoral contests, was the fruit of all the seeds of ideological compromise which since the 19th of July had been carried out both by the CNT and the FAI.⁴⁵

Controversy Over the Centralization of the Libertarian Movement

Developments within the anarchist movement itself were subjects of controversy during the last year of the Civil War. One of these was the increasing centralization and tightening of discipline within the movement.

In the early phases of the Civil War, the traditional democratic procedures and involvement of the rank and file in decision making which had been characteristic of Spanish anarchism were generally followed. However, as early as March 1937, the POUMist periodical *The Spanish Revolution* reported that a document had been issued by the CNT national committee, with concurrence of the leading bodies of the FAI and JJLL which 'states that only the Regional Committees can declare mobilizations, give orders, etc. The Regional Committees are the only bodies empowered to act on political questions... The federations of Industries and the Committees of different branches of industry are no longer authorized to issue slogans – only the central directing body; the Regional Committee, can do this. All who do not act according to these rules and agreements will be publicly expelled from the organizations.' The POUM periodical commented: 'These steps are significant as they indicate the extent to which the CNT is changing its organization and theory in face of the present situation.'⁴⁶

The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo informed the December 1937 meeting of the International Workingmen's Association (AIT)

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that, between July 19 1936 and November 26 1937 the CNT had held 17 national plenums of regional federations. The report described the procedure for such meetings thus:

The National Committee convoked them by circular, with the appropriate agenda and report attached. The Regional Committees pass the circular to the local and *comarcal* federations, or to the *sindicatos*, depending on the subjects listed in the agenda. They call full membership meetings, in which the agenda is discussed and resolutions adopted which are afterwards defended in regional plenums of local and *comarcal* organizations, and the results of these meetings are defended by the delegations of the regional committees in the National Plenums of Regional Organizations. In this form, and always starting from the principles of anarchosyndicalism and the law of the majority, resolutions are adopted as a result of discussion and participation of the membership in all of the problems.⁴⁷

José Peirats has argued that this report of the CNT leadership to the IWMA in fact demonstrated exactly the opposite of what it purported to do:

This excess of circulars sent to the *sindicatos* by the National Committee demonstrates that the latter had become a slogan machine. It is not normal for a superior committee to relate directly and with such frequency with the base organizations and to utilize the intermediate committees as mere postal drops. The same can be said of the excess of National Plenums, above all when they did originate with the real basic group: the assembly of members. The National Committee convokes these plenums through a circular with the agenda. If that is meant to indicate that the National Committee established the agenda, we would say that that procedure is anti-federalist. The agenda normally is established according to the suggestions coming from the *sindicatos*.

Peirats also argued that even in sending out the calls for national

plenums, the national committee was discriminatory. He said that the national committee itself admitted that calls to the national plenums were sent out 'to the local and *comarcal* federations or the *sindicatos* according to the delicacy of the agenda'. That is to say, that 'if the agenda is "delicate" the circular doesn't reach the *sindicatos*'.

Peirats summed up his allegations about the uncharacteristic centralization of power in the CNT thus: 'One can say with certainty that the needs of the time required an agility of movement in organizational terms and that it was necessary to take precautions to avoid certain impertinent infiltration. But saying that these requirements require putting to one side the old federation brings us to the end of the road.'⁴⁸

Democratic procedures began to be restricted, and a kind of discipline which had not been characteristic of the movement began to be exercised. Thus the same CNT report to the AIT December meeting which we have quoted noted: 'The National Plenum of Regional Organizations meeting in Valencia on February 6, 1937, in conformity with the third point on the agenda ... decided as an indisputable norm the support by all of the membership, *sindicatos* and committees, of the decisions of the Organization, both when national decisions are concerned and when these decisions are regional or local. It was not possible for everyone to use a badly understood freedom to undermine the organic development of anarchosyndicalism. Nor was it possible to put in a false position the Committees and comrades participating in the Government.'⁴⁹

We have noted earlier the tendency to suppress opposition voices within the Libertarian Movement, including the removal of José Peirats as editor of the anarchist publication *Acracia* in Lérida, and the resolution of the CNT's national economic plenum to cut down drastically on the number of anarchist publications, apparently to limit the number of dissident voices among them. Increasingly, it was the national and regional committees who spoke for the various parts of the Libertarian Movement, and the rank-and-file anarchists had increasingly less influence on the positions adopted by the movement.

A culmination of this process was the decision of the Catalan

anarchists in April 1938 to establish an 'executive committee'. According to José Peirats, 'The Executive Committee of the Libertarian Movement had been created by a Plenum of Anarchist Groups, delegates of *sindicatos*, militants and Committees of the three organizations, CNT, FAI and FJL, on April 2 in Barcelona . . . García Oliver made a pathetic exposition of the military situation, a result of which was the Executive Committee, totally incompatible with the traditional doctrines and practices in the specific and trade-union organizations.'⁵⁰

However, there was opposition to this development. When, after the defeat of the Loyalists in the battle of the Ebro, Juan García Oliver started a campaign in the CNT press in favor of establishment of an executive committee, the Juventudes Libertarias of Catalonia argued most strongly against García Oliver's proposal, saying that it was the culmination of a wrong line of policy which started when the CNT entered the government. They said that it would lead finally to the complete transformation of the CNT into an entirely different type of organization from that which it had traditionally been. The Federación de Juventudes Libertarias issued a statement in reply to García Oliver's articles, which was published in Spain and abroad, arguing against the idea of an executive committee.⁵¹

However, the executive committee of the Catalan Libertarian Movement was established. Fidel Miró, principal leader of the Juventudes Libertarias in Spain, was named in its secretary. It sought to exercise strong discipline over the movement in Catalonia. According to the resolution establishing it, the committee 'in agreement with the committees of the Movement' was empowered to expel individuals, groups, *sindicatos*, federations and committees that do not go along with general resolutions of the movement and who in their actions produce damage to the same.'⁵²

This Catalan executive committee of the Libertarian Movement certainly represented a degree of centralization of power which had been unheard of in Spanish anarchism before the Civil War. Among its actions was to decree that several dissidents should be punished for their opposition by being sent to the front.⁵³ We have seen earlier that the executive committee of the Libertarian Movement sided with

the national committee of the CNT in its controversy with the Peninsular Committee of the FAI over the 13 Points.⁵⁴

Dissension Within the CNT

There was opposition within the CNT itself against what was pictured as the slavish subservience of the national committee to Juan Negrín and his government. This opposition was particularly notable in Catalonia.

Juan García Oliver has recounted what happened between the CNT leadership in Catalonia and the national committee.

The CNT in Catalonia received, drop by drop, the rancor of its working class and prepared itself to undertake a general movement which would overthrow Negrín and the Communists without running the risk of a general rupture of the combat fronts. That was when it broke its relations with the National Committee of the Organization, because of the latter's excessive surrender to Negrín, because of its alliance with the apocryphal UGT of the Negrínistas and with the Popular Front of the Communists.

The rupture of relations with the National Committee lasted several months, until the CNT called the National Plenum of Regional Organizations. Lamentably, the majority of the Regional Organizations, with the Center in the lead, supported the National Committee and even reinforced its pro-Negrín stand. Such an attitude, which implied the repudiation of those of us in Catalonia who were against Negrín, and in favor of a total rectification of the collaborationist line of the CNT, and sustained until after the resignation of Azaña from the presidency of the Republic.⁵⁵

The Catalan anarchists explored the possibility of a political *coup* against Negrín. García Oliver called an impromptu meeting in his house in Barcelona to discuss this idea. Those in attendance included José Juan Domenech, head of the Catalan CNT, Juan Peiró, Federica

Montseny, Francisco Isgleas and Germinal Esgleas. They agreed to try to get the support of Diego Martínez Barrio of the Unión Republicana, as well as of Luis Companys, and even of President Azaña.

However, these negotiations came to naught. When Martínez Barrio was approached, he replied: 'A very interesting initiative. But it comes too late.' President Azaña's reply was in a similar vein: 'Very interesting what you suggest to me. I had thought of a similar solution. But there is no time left to attempt it.'⁵⁶

The overthrow of Negrín had to await the collapse of the Catalan front, and would prove to be the penultimate event of the Spanish Civil War.

The Anarchists and the National Defense Council

The final participation of the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War was their cooperation in the installation and military defense of the National Defense Council (Consejo Nacional de Defensa), which overthrew the government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín early in March 1939. It ended Communist domination of the armed forces and government of the Republic, and vainly sought to reach an ‘honorable’ peace with General Franco.

Anarchist participation in the *consejo* was basic. It threw the political support of the Libertarians to the insurrection, and certainly without the backing of the anarchist-commanded troops, particularly those of Cipriano Mera’s Fourth Army Corps, the *consejo* would never have taken charge. However, CNT–FAI collaboration with Colonel Segismundo Casado, the military leader of the council, and with the political groups which also supported it, remained one of the most controversial aspects of the anarchist role in the Civil War.

Antecedents to the Junta Nacional de Defensa

The movement early in March 1939 which deposed the government of Juan Negrín did not take place in a vacuum. There were some

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earlier alleged, and other more certain, attempts to oust Negrín and the Communists from control of the Republic.

Jesús Hernández, in the book which he wrote about the Spanish anarchists while he was still a Communist, alleged that Socialist leader Julian Besteiro, who was to be a major figure in the *junta*, had for some time been plotting the removal of the Negrín regime. Besteiro before the outbreak of the Civil War, had been the leader of the Right wing of the Socialist Party – Largo Caballero being head of the Left wing, and Indalecio Prieto the chief of the Socialist center. During the Civil War, Besteiro had played little role in national politics.

According to Hernández, Besteiro went to Barcelona, where the Republican government was then located, in June 1938. Hernández claimed that there were ‘visits, banquets, speeches, clandestine lists of a new government; Señor Besteiro is the “new savior” of Spain.’¹

Hernández also alleged that after the Munich Pact of September 1938, Besteiro presented himself at the Los Llanos airport of Madrid, demanding an airplane to take him to Barcelona as the new ‘chief of government’, which an officer refused. When Besteiro got to the Barcelona aerodrome by other means, Hernández claimed that he did not meet the welcoming committee which he was expecting to greet him as the successor of Negrín.²

Hernández presented no concrete evidence or sources for his charges against Besteiro. However, there is substantial proof of the fact that during the crisis surrounding the final Franco attack on Catalonia, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica made at least two efforts to bring down Negrín.

Early in December 1938, before the beginning of Franco’s campaign against Catalonia, a delegation of the FAI, consisting of Diego Abad de Santillán, Antonio García Birlán and Federica Montseny visited President Manuel Azaña. They requested of him ‘formation of a Government of Spanish significance, which doesn’t have in fact and law, as the present one does, the hallmark of dependence on Russia, composed of men free of responsibility for all of the disastrous and irresponsible behavior which characterizes the present Government.’

According to Santillán, Azaña may well have considered removing

Negrín. However, still according to Santillán, Negrín threatened Azaña that if he was removed, Negrín would himself lead a coup against the president of the Republic ‘at the head of a movement of the masses and of the army which are with me’.³ Luis Araquistáin confirmed this account, and said that he and Martínez Barrio had been told about it by Azaña himself.⁴ In any case, Azaña did not accept the FAI’s suggestion.

Subsequently, early in the battle of Catalonia, the FAI proposed to a joint meeting of the Libertarian Movement – the FAI, CNT and Libertarian Youth – that the anarchists themselves establish a national defense *junta*. They argued that the anarchists would be able to mobilize the masses and the majority of the Republican Army in Catalonia in the defense of the region in a way that the Negrín government could not. However, the Libertarian Movement turned down this proposition, instead agreeing to continue to support the Negrín administration.⁵

The Situation after the Fall of Catalonia

After the fall of Catalonia to the forces of Franco at the beginning of February 1939, Republican Spain was confined to the central–south area. On paper, the Loyalists still had resources sufficient to continue a prolonged resistance. Jesús Hernández claimed that the central–south region had ‘an Army with about a million men; with artillery, with tanks and aviation; with a fleet superior to that of the enemy; with a territory that included a third of the country and a population of eight million inhabitants...’⁶

However, other participants in the Civil War drama have challenged the optimistic claims of Hernández. Ignacio Iglesias, who had been the principal leader of the POUM in Asturias, noted that ‘...the army of the Center, the best armed, only had 95,000 rifles, 1,600 sub-machineguns, 1,400 machine guns, 150 artillery pieces, 50 mortars, 10 tanks and 40 airplanes, whereas General Franco had thirty-two Divisions south of Madrid, with enormous quantities of artillery, tanks and at least 600 planes.’⁷

The major thing lacking, however, was a determined will to

continue the struggle. During the two additional months that the War went on, three issues were predominant in what remained of Republican Spain, all of them presaging an end to the conflict. These were the possible terms for an 'honorable peace' with the Franco forces; the search for ways to escape from what remained of Loyalist Spain; and Negrín's final decision to turn over almost complete control of what remained of the Republican army to the Communists, a move which precipitated Negrín's downfall.

Negrín himself had broached the possibility of a 'negotiated' peace even before the final fall of Catalonia. During 1938, at various times, Negrín had met with German Nazi envoys about this possibility.⁸

At the last meeting of the Republican Cortes on Spanish soil, in Figueras on February 1 1939, Negrín had presented his conditions for such a resolution of the War, about which Broué and Temime commented: 'With a defeated army and a state in the process of breaking up, there was no longer any question of negotiation between equals... There were only three points that he still considered as conditions for peace: the guarantee of independence and national integrity; the guarantee of freedom for the Spanish people to choose its destiny; the guarantee that a policy of authority would put a stop to persecutions after the war.'⁹

However, very quickly Negrín indicated his willingness to reduce even further his conditions for ending the War. Admitting in consultations with British and French diplomatic representatives that Franco was unlikely to accept his first two points, he agreed to reduce his conditions to the third one, which he summed up as meaning 'No reprisals'. As Broué and Temime commented, 'It was difficult to be more conciliatory.'¹⁰

The beginning of a search among the Loyalists for a way physically to escape from the War coincided with the defeat of Republican forces in Catalonia. Most of the leaders of the Republic who had left with the fall of Catalonia did not return to Republican territory. President Manuel Azaña resigned his position, and most of the surviving members of the Cortes remained in France.

The Return of Negrín to Republican Spain

Prime Minister Juan Negrín finally returned to the Center–South, together with Foreign Minister Julio Alvarez del Vayo and some of the Communist Party leaders. However, Azaña's successor as president, Diego Martínez Barrio, not only refused to return, but also refused to recognize Negrín any longer as prime minister.

After landing at Los Llanos Airport, near Albacete, Negrín met with the principal military commanders. He found that nearly all of the professional military men who were leaders of the Republican Army, with the notable exception of General José Miaja, argued that 'from now on resistance was impossible; they had to negotiate to avoid disaster'.¹¹

However, Negrín did not accept these arguments. He informed his military chiefs that he had accumulated in France a vast park of armaments, including 10,000 machine guns, 500 artillery pieces, and 600 war planes, and assured them that with this material the Loyalist forces in the center–south could resist Franco's forces successfully. He added that, with the failure of his attempts to negotiate with Franco to wrest any concessions from the Rebel leader, the Republicans had no alternative to resistance.¹²

The Negrín cabinet – or those members of it who had returned to Spain with him – met in Madrid on February 12. It issued a proclamation calling for continued strong resistance against the Franco forces. This call was reiterated in the Communist press in the next few days.¹³

According to Palmiro Togliatti, Negrín's relations with the Communists were rather cool immediately after his return to Spain. However, this quickly changed, and Negrín 'gave us more than we asked', and it was Togliatti who wrote a speech which Negrín was scheduled to deliver on March 6, but never did give because of the Casado *coup*.¹⁴

However, as Jesús Hernández pointed out, 'Negrín did not organize with the necessary rapidity the government apparatus or adopt the urgent ... measures.'¹⁵ On the contrary, as Hernández also indicated, Negrín 'committed the tremendous error of fixing the residence of the Government in Elda (Alicante), a place far from the vital

centers of the country and from the fronts . . . Without more available forces than the 80 guerrillas who stood guard in the improvised ministerial offices . . .'¹⁶

Ignacio Iglesias underscored the fact that the alleged 'government' of Negrín did not in fact govern in the areas still left to the Republic. 'The components of that curious Government which didn't govern, wandered, then, from city to city and from village to village, without having anything to do, without participating in anything without knowing what was proposed by Negrín, whom they censured bitterly in private although being silent in his presence . . .'¹⁷

For several weeks after the fall of Catalonia, there was only modest military activity in the center-south area. One reason for this was the need for the Franco forces to regroup, in preparation for their final push to crush the Republic. However, it is also likely that Franco and his associates held back waiting to see what would happen within the remaining Republican area, in the hope that they might be able to march into the center-south Republican area, without having to fight any further major battles, as in fact took place.

Mera, Casado and Negrín Before the *Coup*

While the defeated Republican troops in Catalonia were still crossing the border into France, Colonel Casado, commander of the army of the center, summoned Cipriano Mera, the anarchist head of the Fourth Army Corps, to his headquarters in Madrid. The two men discussed the possible alternatives facing the remaining Republican military forces in the center-south.

Both men agreed that the capture of Madrid by the Franco forces was almost inevitable. However, they had different ideas about how to confront that situation. Colonel Casado suggested the possibility of regrouping some 80,000 Loyalist soldiers in the area of Cartagena, where the fleet was based, which could provide 'means of evacuation of the most compromised people'. He said that that number of men could be well supplied with arms from the remaining stocks in the

center-south region, and could probably maintain resistance for an appreciable amount of time, until the outbreak of a general European war would totally change the Spanish picture.

Cipriano Mera had another proposal. He urged: Concentrating all our reserves in a particular zone, perhaps in the South, towards Extremadura, to attack and see if the population in that area joins our troops . . . In case that this penetration is favorable, we would have to prepare from that moment the breaking up of other fronts, to transform the organized army into large guerrilla bands.¹⁸ However, neither Mera's nor Casado's approach was agreed upon at that point.

On February 11, Colonel Casado was summoned to meet Juan Negrín, who had just returned to Spain. After Casado explained to Negrín the situation on the central front, the prime minister admitted that he had been seeking negotiations with Franco but his efforts had been fruitless, and argued that in the face of that, it was necessary to resist to the end. He recounted to Casado his tale of vast new armaments in France, waiting for shipment to the Republican zone. Casado urged Negrín to call a meeting of all of the major military commanders, to expound to them his position and receive their advice on how to proceed. As a consequence, the meeting of Negrín with the military chiefs which we have already noted took place a day or two later.

Negrín also met with the leaders of the political and trade-union organizations in the Popular Front. Likewise, he met in Valencia with the leadership of the Libertarian Movement. However, little new information or specific plans resulted from any of these *pourparlers* of the prime minister. Cipriano Mera wrote many years later: 'When I learned of all this, my desolation was enormous. There was no doubt that Negrín was not disposed to tell anyone about his maneuvers and real intentions. Consequently, he did not merit the least confidence from us.'¹⁹

As a consequence, Cipriano Mera conferred with three of the four division commander of his army corps – not including the one Communist among them, Quinito Valverde, in this meeting. Mera proposed to them that they invite Negrín to confer with them, expound to him his responsibility, as prime minister, for bringing about negotiations with Franco. In the last resort they would take

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him prisoner, put him on a plane, and go with him directly to Burgos, Franco's headquarters, and demand negotiations. Even if Negrín and the Fourth Army Corps leaders were all shot by Franco, they would have demonstrated for all the world to see their desire for an honorable peace.

With this plan agreed upon, Mera presented it to Casado, who quickly approved of it. However, when Mera told the CNT Defense Committee of his plans, and the Defense Committee passed the word to the national sub-committee of the Libertarian Movement, it ordered Mera not to proceed, telling him that plans were under way for the removal of Negrín.

However, Mera and Casado went ahead with an interview with Negrín in Mera's headquarters, for which plans had already been made. At that meeting, Mera first warned Negrín against Communist Party attempts which were clearly under way to seize complete control of what remained of the Republic's armed forces. He then told the prime minister that he considered it 'a grave error' for Negrín to continue to proclaim that resistance was to be organized, particularly in the light of the fact that many of those calling most loudly for resistance were sending their families to France and preparing their own departures.

Mera then outlined to Negrín the alternative plans for resistance which he and Colonel Casado had discussed. He added that if Negrín was not willing to accept either of these – or some other one – that the fourth alternative 'would be for the government to face the responsibility of negotiating with the enemy to put an end to the war and save honorably as many lives as might be in danger in the face of the victory of the adversary.'

When Negrín once more told of the armaments he had ready in France, Mera asked him, 'Do you sincerely think that you can get it to Madrid?' To this, Negrín replied, 'I think so.' Mera's rejoinder was "I think", you tell me. That is to say that you are not sure.²⁰

Subsequently, Negrín began to take steps to depose the major non-Communist military commanders. He summoned Colonel Casado to his headquarters Yuste, ordering him to turn over his command to Colonel Ortega, head of the Third Army Corps, a Communist. Casado went to Yuste, but left his chief of staff rather than Colonel

Ortega in charge of the central front. It became clear to Casado and General Matallana, who had also been summoned, that Negrín was preparing to turn over full control of the armed forces to the Communists. As a consequence, as Cipriano Mera noted, ‘the non-Communist military chiefs and various representatives of the Republican, Socialist and Libertarian organizations agreed not to permit the fulfilment of the plans outlined by the megalomaniacal doctor and his Stalinist allies.’²¹

The Communist *Coup d’Etat*

On March 2 1939 there appeared in the *Diario* of the ministry of defense the series of military destitutions and appointments which were to provoke the downfall of the Negrín government. As Jesús Hernández wrote: ‘Among them figured the naming of Miaja as Inspector General of the Sea, Land and Air Forces, depriving him of the faculties of Supreme Chief of all land forces; dissolution of the Group of Armies and distribution in various places of the members of its General Staff . . . the *Diario* listed the ascension to general of a series of significant Communist colonels, the destitution of military men of significance politically adverse to the Communists, and designation of various other Communists to take over those commands. Also, the Chief of the Naval Base of Cartagena was removed and a Communist was designated to occupy the post.’²²

Cipriano Mera gave additional details on these decrees:

All of the Communist military chiefs were promoted, they were given the most important commands and the other people were given merely honorific posts, pending the time when they could be jailed. Modesto and Cordon, for example, were made generals, and Lister, Francisco Galán, Barceló, Manuel Márquez and various others, colonels. As to assignments, Córdón became secretary-general of National Defense, and Galán took command of the Naval Base of Cartagena; at the same time there were named military commanders of Alicante, Murcia and Albacete, Etlvino Vega, Leocadio Mendiola and Inocencio

Curto, respectively ... it was said that in the next *DO* (*Diario Oficial*), there would be confirmed the naming of Modesto as chief of the Army of the Center; Lister of the Levante, and El Campesino of that of Extremadura.²³

According to Jesús Hernández, Negrín's measures (as minister of defense) were taken 'at the demand of the Political Buro, which in turn obeyed orders of Togliatti and Stepanov', the two remaining Comintern 'delegates' in Republican Spain.²⁴ Certainly Cipriano Mera was correct when he wrote that these decrees 'tended to transform the Popular Army into a blind instrument of the Communist Party ...'²⁵

However, Jesús Hernández's description of the impact of the March 2 1939 decrees of the ministry of defense was most apt. According to him, they constituted 'an authentic *coup d'état* of the Communist Party'.²⁶

Palmiro Togliatti commented on the significance of these command changes, as far as the Communists were concerned: 'What Negrín did not accept was to name Modesto commander of the army of Madrid and remove and arrest Casado. He decided to name Casado to the General Staff and designate as commander of the army of Madrid a Communist, Lieutenant-Colonel Bueno ... Insofar as Levante was concerned, he gave us the essential (Albacete, Murcia, Cartagena, Alicante). To Modesto was confided the command of an army of maneuver (in formation). To Lister the front of Andalusia. If all the moves made late by Negrín had been put in practice, the *coup d'état* of Casado would have been impossible.'²⁷

Togliatti was critical of the way in which this 'Communist *coup*' was carried out: 'All the measures taken by Negrín were made public in an extraordinary number of the *Diario Oficial*. The number contained almost exclusively decrees of promotion and appointment of Communists, starting with the promotions of Modesto and Cerdón ... to the rank of general, of Lister to the rank of colonel, etc. If they had been meant as provocations, they could not have been carried out better. The publication was used by the enemies as proof of the fact that the Communists, in agreement with Negrín, were moving to take all power.'²⁸

The Anarchists and the National Defense Council

However, a number of the Communist leaders themselves helped to thwart Negrín's move to place the armed forces totally under Communist Party control. According to Togliatti, 'Lieutenant-Colonel Bueno refused to assume the command of the army of the Center; we thus lost what would have been the key to our preventive action. Mendiola, named commander of Murcia, refused. Curto, named commander of Albacete, refused... Vega, named commander of Alicante, took over his post, but didn't take serious precautions and was arrested on the afternoon of the 6th by a small group of Assault Guards.' Togliatti blamed these actions by Communist officers on 'a connection, direct or indirect, probably of a Masonic type, with the military men who were preparing the *coup d'état*.'²⁹

The Flight of the Loyalist Fleet

When the appointment by Juan Negrín of the Communist Francisco Galán as commander of Cartagena, the main base of the Loyalist fleet, the naval commander and the local garrison chiefs agreed to refuse to turn over authority to him. For some reason, the base officers did not fulfill this promise. However, Admiral Buiza ordered the ships of the Republican Navy to take to sea, to avoid falling under Communist control.

At about the same time, a Falangista uprising broke out in the port. Republican Colonel Armentía surrendered to them, and soon afterwards committed suicide. In the meanwhile, Communist-led troops were soon sent to the port, and they succeeded in overcoming the fascist revolt.

However, the fleet did not return to Cartagena after the suppression of the Falangistas. Rather, its commanders accepted an invitation from the French admiralty to take refuge in the Algerian port of Bizerte, thus effectively putting the Republican fleet out of action. This move was to have catastrophic effects subsequently, depriving the Loyalists of a major possibility for evacuating refugees from Spain when the Republican cause finally collapsed three weeks later.³⁰

The Establishment of the Junta Nacional de Defensa

Although the *coup d'état* of the March 2 decrees was the immediate provocation for the establishment of the Consejo Nacional de Defensa, and the overthrow of the Negrín government, negotiations with this possibility in view had certainly been underway for some time. For one thing, Colonel Segismundo Casado had certainly been in contact with a Mr Cowan, a British diplomatic or consular agent in Madrid, apparently seeking his good offices in obtaining surrender terms from Franco. About the only practical result of those contacts would appear to have been the prisoner exchange of Miguel Primo de Rivera for the son of General Miaja.³¹

It is certain that in the period before the proclamation of the *consejo*, Colonel Casado was in close contact with the anarchists, particularly the Defense Committee of the Center headed by Eduardo Val. According to J. García Pradas, 'Day and night . . . the committee of defense organized the uprising. Val and Salgado, two or three times a day, communicated with Casado our accords, and in this relationship there were fixed the smallest details of the uprising . . . Segismundo had undertaken to make contact with the military elements which were needed.'³²

Cipriano Mera has given details in his memoirs of a meeting on the morning of March 4, in the private residence of Colonel Casado, of himself, Casado, Mera's chief of staff (Antonio Verardini) and Defense Committee members Val and Salgado. They discussed the membership of a proposed Consejo Nacional de Defensa to replace the Negrín government, agreeing on the names of most of those who ultimately came to compose it. They also agreed that it was necessary to act quickly, since they had word that Negrín and the Communists were planning their own coup for March 6-7.

Mera reported that those present at this meeting felt: 'The situation was clear: with us were the UGT and the political parties, except the Communists; against us Negrín represented no one, except himself, having as his only support the henchmen of Stalin who, more than supporting him were using him for their hegemonic manoeuvres. Under these conditions, we felt really free to act. It was necessary to fill the vacuum created.'³³

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At eight o'clock the next morning, March 5, Mera and his chief of staff were again summoned to meet with Casado and Eduardo Val. The purpose of this meeting was to inform Mera and Verardini that the Consejo Nacional de Defensa was to be proclaimed at 10 p.m. that same day, and to arrange for Mera to send the 70th Brigade from his command to occupy the strongpoints of Madrid in preparation for this event. Casado also ordered Mera to name someone else to command the IV Army Corps, because his presence would be required in Madrid.

Returning to his headquarters, Mera called together commanders of three of his four divisions – as well as those of three brigades in the other division (which, as we have noted earlier, was commanded by a Communist, Quinto Valverde.) In general terms, he told them what was about to transpire, and that he was naming Liberino González, head of the 12th Division, as his temporary replacement. He also gave orders to the 70th Brigade to proceed to Madrid, as quickly and inconspicuously (so as not to arouse too much curiosity among Communist-controlled troops) as possible. By 9 p.m., Mera was back in Madrid, at the ministry of finance, where the new *junta* was to be announced and to have its headquarters.³⁴

Promptly at 10 p.m., those assembled in the ministry of finance went on the air over Union Radio, to announce the constitution of the new Consejo Nacional de Defensa, which was to take the place of the government of Juan Negrín. The president of the *consejo* was to be General José Miaja; in charge of defense, Colonel Segismundo Casado; minister of state was to be Julian Besteiro; in charge of the interior was Wenceslao Carrillo; finance and agriculture were the charge of González Marín; communications and public works, Eduardo Val; justice, M. Sanandres; public instruction José del Río, and labor, Antonio Pérez. Sánchez Requena was to be secretary of the new *consejo*.³⁵

There were represented in the *junta* most of the parties and groups which had supported the Republic. General Miaja and Colonel Casado were two of the most important professional soldiers who had commanded Republican troops. Julian Besteiro was the long-time leader of the Right in the Socialist Party, while Wenceslao Carillo was a major lieutenant of Left-wing Socialist leader Francisco

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Largo Caballero. Eduardo Val had been head of the CNT Defense Committee of the Center throughout the War, and González Marín was another leading anarchist. Miguel San Andrés was a deputy of Izquierda Republicana and José del Río was a leader of Unión Republicana. Antonio Pérez represented the UGT in the *junta* and Sánchez Requena was a major figure in the small Partido Sindicalista of Angel Pestaña.

After the official proclamation of the *junta*, various of those present spoke on Union Radio, starting with Julian Besteiro, and continuing with Colonel Casado, Cipriano Mera, and the two Republicans, San Andrés and José del Río. They proclaimed the end of the Negrín regime, called for support by the people of the Republic for the new regime, and proclaimed its objective of (as Mera put it), getting 'an honorable peace, based on justice and brotherhood'.³⁶

The new councillor for justice, Miguel San Andrés, read the official manifesto proclaiming the establishment of the *consejo*, which had been written by J. García Pradas, editor of the anarchist Madrid newspaper *CNT*. It was addressed to 'Spanish workers, Antifascist people!' and denounced the inactivity and failure to fulfil its promises of the Negrín government, while also asserting that that government had lost all constitutional basis. It called on all within the Republic to do their duty, and promised that no one in the *consejo* would evade his but it was rather vague with regard to the specific tasks which the new *consejo* had set itself.³⁷

Certainly, Negrín had been expecting some move against him involving Colonel Casado. According to José Peirats, on March 3 he had sent a woman, Rosario del Olmo, to present him with 'a manifesto of unconditional support of the Government', which he was asked by Negrín to sign. As Peirats noted, 'Casado understood perfectly that this was the ultimatum of Negrín', and he refused to sign it.³⁸

Once the *consejo* had been installed, Juan Negrín did little or nothing to oppose it. Apparently there was extended discussion among the remaining members of the Negrín government concerning what action, if any, to take. But in the end, late on March 6, ex-Prime Minister Juan Negrín and his ex-Foreign Secretary Julio Alvarez del Vayo embarked on a plane for France, where they landed safely.³⁹

The Communist Insurrection

Communist-commanded troops in the Madrid area soon revolted against the new *junta*. They were put down by Cipriano Mera's Fourth Army Group only after a week's fighting and 2,000 fatalities.⁴⁰

However, before noting the details of this insurrection and its suppression, note must be taken of the sharp contrast between the belligerence of Communist-led troops in the Madrid region, and that lack of activity on the part of similarly commanded troops in other parts of the Republic, and the refusal of the national leadership of the Spanish Communist Party, and of its remaining Comintern and Soviet advisers seriously to challenge the Casado Consejo. We shall return later to the question of why the Communist leadership acted as it did.

As far as the bulk of the Communist-led troops outside the Madrid area were concerned, Pierro Broué and Emile Temime have noted: 'Troops led by Communists had been content to defend themselves'.⁴¹ Palmiro Togliatti has offered an explanation for this strange behavior on the part of the Communists.

In reporting to his Moscow superiors subsequently, Togliatti saw that in the days before the Casado *coup*, he and the Spanish party leaders discussed what to do, and he even sent a request for 'counsel' to Moscow, but got no reply. 'We would be faced with a state apparatus, civil and military, mobilized against us, whose hostility and resistance could only have been broken by force... We would have had to take power as a party... All the leadership of the party were against this... I was convinced, knowing what the party had and the distribution of forces at that moment, that we would have been defeated rapidly and absolutely, because the masses, disoriented and with the only desire for peace, would not have followed us, and not even the military forces commanded by Communists would have supported us with the energy and decision needed.'⁴²

However, later in this same report to the Comintern, Togliatti noted: 'The fall of Alicante had paralyzed all the action that we had planned... Furthermore, about five in the afternoon came the news that the head of the General Staff of the air force (Alonso, Communist) had joined Casado. With the fall of our principal point of support

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in Albacete, on the Madrid highway, we found ourselves in Elda in a kind of rat hole.⁴³

Two important Communist military-political leaders sought unsuccessfully to mobilize Communist-led troops to confront, and if possible, overturn the *consejo*. These were Jesús Hernández, who until the reshuffling of military commands on March 2 had been chief commissar of the armies of the center, and Enrique Castro Delgado, founder of the Fifth Regiment.

Hernández, being unable to get in contact with the rest of the party leadership, ordered troops under Communist control to block communications between Valencia and Madrid, and to prepare to attack Madrid itself. For some time, General Menéndez, based in Valencia, and presumably an ally of Casado, had collaborated with the Communists in Valencia, releasing those who had been arrested, and staying more or less 'neutral' in the conflict within the Republican camp. The Communists in Valencia did not have to send any troops to help Communist resistance to the Casado *coup* in Madrid, but as Palmiro Togliatti noted, 'No one had indicated to them what they should do so...'⁴⁴

Castro Delgado, after conferring with Hernández, went to Elda to try to activate the Communist Party leadership, but found them totally unwilling to take any steps to thwart the *consejo*'s acquisition of control of virtually all of what remained of Republican Spain. Rather, the principal leaders of the Spanish Communist Party, as well as their foreign advisers, were mainly concerned with escaping either to French North Africa or to France itself. Within a few days of the establishment of the Consejo Nacional de Defensa virtually all of the top leaders of the Spanish Communist Party and of the Comintern and Soviet managers of the Spanish Communist leadership had left the country.⁴⁵

In sharp contrast with this failure of the national and international Communist leaders to challenge the seizure of power by the *consejo*, Communist troops in the vicinity of Madrid did offer such a challenge. Cipriano Mera had warned Colonel Casado before the establishment of the *consejo* that they would probably do so, and had urged the colonel to remove the three Communist commanders of army corps which, along with Mera's 14th Corps, garrisoned the

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Madrid area. However, Colonel Casado had argued that that was not necessary, that these officers, although Communists, were professional soldiers, and would follow orders issued to them.⁴⁶

Mera described the circumstances in the Madrid region: 'The situation was not at all favorable. The chiefs of the I, II and III Army Corps were evasive, undoubtedly awaiting concrete orders from the Communist Party. The armored forces, Assault Guards and Airforce stationed in the Center were for the most part in the hands of the Communists. The same was true of the Guerrilla Group stationed in Alcalá de Henares, that is, at the doorstep of Madrid. In reality, we only counted on our IV Army Group...'⁴⁷

There is no doubt about the fact that the troops under Mera's command (with the exception of the one Communist division chief we have already noted) were overwhelmingly committed to the struggle against the Communists. This was true of the lower-ranking officers and enlisted men as well as the division and brigade commanders, and of Mera himself.

The reason for this was explained to me many years later by a former officer of the Spanish Marine Corps and member of the CNT, who had been stationed in the Madrid area from February 1937 until the end of the Civil War. As he explained it, the CNTers were faced in Madrid throughout the war with hostile fascist forces in front of them, and hostile Communist forces behind them, and in March 1939 'it was necessary to get rid of the Communists...'⁴⁸

However, it was not only anarchist troops who reacted against Negrín's attempt to turn total military control over to the Communists. Socialist leader Trifon Gómez wrote to Indalecio Prieto on March 5: 'We have just adopted a very grave attitude... In agreement with Republican elements of the locality, and with those of the UGT and those of the CNT, we have refused to allow the present military governor of Albacete to resign, and to allow his recently named successor to take over. We are not disposed to allow a *coup* via the *Gazette*, which such appointments represent, nor that these posts be given at the present moment, to the Communists. The same thing is being done by our comrades in the province of Murcia...'⁴⁹

In any case, as Mera had predicted, elements of the II Army Corps

revolted early in the morning of March 6. Soon afterwards, other Communist-controlled troops did likewise. At first, they were quite successful, and even captured the headquarters of the general staff, where forces under Colonel Barceló executed 'several officers, including Colonels Gazolo and Otero'. Subsequently, in reprisal, Colonel Casado ordered the execution of Colonel Barceló, the only such action taken after the anarchist-led troops supporting the *consejo* had successfully put down the Communist insurrection.⁵⁰

Cipriano Mera established his headquarters in the ministry of marine, controlled by the Military Intelligence Service (SIM), headed in Madrid, surprisingly enough, by a Socialist, Angel Pedrero, which had its own telephone service. Communications had proven precarious on other telephone lines, but from the ministry of marine, which was attacked several times but was successfully defended by SIM troops, Mera was able to keep in constant touch with units of his IV Army Corps.

Although the Communist troops were at first able to penetrate deeply into Madrid itself, as well as occupying Alcalá de Henares and part of Guadalajara, they were turned back after several days' fighting. The troops of the IV Army Corps were reinforced by air-force troops led by Colonel Gascón, by 'a republican unit commanded by Colonel Armando Alvarez, made up of heterogeneous forces' and by the anarchist-commanded 83rd Brigade which had been rushed in from the Levante.

The Communist troops received a serious moral blow on March 8, when they heard of the flight not only of ex-Prime Minister Juan Negrín, but also of most of the national leaders of the Communist Party. By March 11, Communist resistance had been reduced to a group of new ministry buildings under construction at the end of La Castellana boulevard on the outskirts of Madrid. That day, these edifices were overrun by troops loyal to the *consejo* and the Communist insurrection was over. Some 20,000 prisoners had been taken by the IV Army Corps and its allies.⁵¹

Although there may have been some marginal activity on the part of the Franco forces during these days of fighting behind the Loyalist lines, there was no major effort on their part to mount a general attack in the Madrid region. Cipriano Mera has written that 'the

enemy looked on, hoping that the Communist insurrection, provoking slaughter among the antifascists, would hand them Madrid on a silver platter.⁵²

The Failure of the Junta's Negotiations With Franco

No serious attempt to negotiate peace with Franco could be undertaken by the *consejo* until the Communist insurrection against it had been put down. By then, whatever possibility there might have been for the *consejo* to have achieved an 'honorable peace' had disappeared. According to Cipriano Mera, 'the uprising of the Communists impeded the National Defense Council from negotiating with the enemy in advantageous conditions, or even in less precarious ones.' He added that what had remained of Negrín's government 'was incapable of negotiating that inevitable peace; the Council had better possibilities of achieving it, but for that purpose it had to represent a homogeneous front; the Communist rebellion was a stab in the back.'⁵³

Once the fighting with the Communists was over, the *consejo* presented an eight-point peace proposal to Franco, including no political vengeance on the vanquished, a period of time for people who wanted to do so to escape from Spain and 'respect for the lives, liberties, and careers of professional soldiers'.⁵⁴

However, it soon became clear that Franco had no intention of settling on the *consejo*'s terms. As Broué and Temime have written, the *consejo* 'wanted negotiations; Franco wanted a capitulation. It wanted a treaty; Franco did not wish to sign anything.'⁵⁵

Although two delegations went from Madrid to Burgos, ostensibly to negotiate with Franco's people, nothing came of these negotiations. Finally, Franco ordered merely that the Republican troops raise the white flag and surrender to his forces.⁵⁶

In view of the failure of the attempt to negotiate with Franco, the decision was taken by the *junta* to evacuate troops from the Madrid front. Those under Cipriano Mera's command were the last units to leave their positions, it was hoped, en route to the Valencia region, on March 28. Although Mera had intended to stay with his troops

until they had all been successfully evacuated from their posts, he was ordered by Colonel Casado to go, with his principal subordinates, to Valencia. As he wrote many years later, 'It must have been ten-thirty on March 28 when we left. At that hour, except for ours, all the fronts had collapsed; that was a comfort for me and even a reason for pride.'⁵⁷

However, soon afterwards, the Republic totally collapsed. According to Broué and Temime, 'Here and there, a few hundred combatants were killed or took their own lives. A few hundred thousand had abandoned the front, but the vast majority were eventually captured.'⁵⁸ It is to be presumed that these generalizations applied to the predominantly anarchist troops of the IV Army Corps as well as to the rest of what had been the Republican Army.

The Problem of the Refugees

As the Republican cause collapsed, there was little possibility of any escaping but the top leaders of the government, the political parties and other organisations who were caught in the center region of the Republic. This was the fact in spite of Prime Minister Negrín's fulsome promises of aid.

Ignacio Iglesias has discussed this problem:

It was necessary, then, to bring to the ports of the Mediterranean still in the power of the Republicans, the largest possible number of ships. It was not done. Negrín still disposed of the fleet of twelve ships of 'France Navigation', a company which has been created with money given by him and administered by the French Communists; of a fleet with a cargo capacity of more than 150,000 tons belonging to the 'Mid Atlantic Shipping Co.', an entity of complete confidence of the Republican Government... of Spanish merchant ships which were in French ports, like the *Darro* of 2,609 tons which was in Marseilles, *Escolano* of 3,058 tons which was in Port-Vendres, the *Motomayor* of 5,724 tons which was in Le Havre and the *Saturno* of 3,450 tons which was in Casablanca, all taken over by the government of

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General Franco. Other ships of the Spanish merchant fleet – belonging to the Ibarra Company, to the Transmediterranean, to the Naviera Pinillos, to Sota y Aznar, etc. – in place of receiving orders to go to the Mediterranean ports in the power of the Republic, were sent to Soviet ports; thus, at the end of the Civil War, there were a dozen of those ships in Leningrad, some in Murmansk and various in the Black Sea, which then changed their names and became, pure and simply, part of the Soviet merchant marine.⁵⁹

After the collapse of the Republican military, there were few ships available to take off refugees. These included *American Trader*, which took ‘some thousands of anti-Francoites, two other ships which took more than 500 each’. Iglesias noted, in addition, that ‘there came at the last moment the *Stanbrook*, acquired by the Council of Defense, which took away 3.500 people, and a few other smaller ships which took a few other people.’⁶⁰

The Libertarian Movement Before and During the *Junta* Period

The executive organs of the anarchist movement continued to function in the center–south area after the fall of Catalonia. Indeed, they continued to hold meetings almost until the liquidation of the Republic.

Right after the return of Negrín to Republican territory, the peninsular sub-committee of the Federación Anarquista met. At that point, it decided that although ‘the Government was a cadaver, it was not opportune to overthrow Negrín, but rather to submit his action to control of the organization.’⁶¹

A liaison committee of the Libertarian Movement was established. Soon thereafter, on February 10–11, there was a plenary of the Libertarian Movement. Reports were made there concerning consultations of the anarchist leaders with various military leaders, particularly General Miaja, who had been named supreme commander of the forces of land, sea and air. There were protests against Miaja’s

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appointment, because of his long association with the Communists since the battle of Madrid.⁶²

This plenum also sought an interview with Negrín where the anarchist leaders intended to present a number of demands to the prime minister. They obtained this interview on February 11. However, Negrín put the anarchist leaders on the defensive by refusing to talk with José Grunfeld, an Argentine who was at that moment secretary of the FAI, because he was a 'foreigner'. Apparently, they did not, as a result, present the issues which they had intended to raise with Negrín.⁶³

On February 15, a further meeting of the principal leaders of the FAI, CNT and Libertarian Youth was held in Madrid. It noted the return to Republican Spain of Segundo Blanco, the CNT member of Negrín's cabinet, and his report that, although Negrín had bought a large quantity of arms from the Russians during the battle of Catalonia, for some reason most of those had not been delivered, and those that had arrived in France, had been held up by the French authorities. Blanco had also delivered to the anarchist leaders in Spain a letter from Pedro Herrera and Mariano Vázquez, secretaries of the FAI and CNT respectively, urging major emphasis on finding ways of getting key personnel of the anarchist movement out of the country, and promising help from France to facilitate that.⁶⁴

The next day, February 16, a further meeting of the liaison committee of the Libertarian Movement dealt particularly with an 'attitude' of Cipriano Mera which 'could have dangerous and counterproductive results for the things sought by the Organization'. Although, in his memoirs, Mera does not indicate that he appeared before the anarchist leadership, it was apparently at this meeting that his proposal to seize Juan Negrín and make him go (with Mera and others) to Burgos to force General Franco to negotiate peace, was rejected. The discussion at this meeting was apparently heated, although Mera made it clear that he was a disciplined member of the movement, and would conform to the liaison committee's decision.⁶⁵ As we have seen earlier, Mera did not go ahead with his idea to force Negrín to seek peace.

In the last meetings of the combined anarchist leadership before the establishment of the National Defense Council they put forward

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the demand that Colonel Casado be made chief of the central general staff. In the meeting of March 3, Segundo Blanco reported to the leadership for the last time: 'Insofar as the possibility of a definitive victory is concerned, no one who has any common sense any longer can think of it.'⁶⁶ He thus seemed to contradict Juan Negrín's continuing call for last-ditch resistance.

The anarchist leadership continued to function for some time after the establishment of the National Defense Council. Its meetings were frequently marked by the persistent conflict between the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo on the one hand, and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica and the Libertarian Youth Federation on the other, which we have noted in an earlier chapter.

On March 7, a new National Committee of the Libertarian Movement, with Juan López of the CNT as secretary-general, and José Grunfeld of the FAI as vice-secretary, together with Avelino G. Entrialgo, José Almela and Lorenzo Iñigo, was formed. This group held meetings on March 11, March 16, March 17, March 22, March 24 and twice on March 27, when apparently it met for the last time. On several occasions, the two anarchist members of the Consejo Nacional de Defensa, Eduardo Val and Manuel González Marín, participated in the meetings of the Libertarian National Committee.

As late as March 22, the National Committee issued a message 'To the Combatants, to the Workers in General', insisting that if it proved impossible to obtain an 'honorable' peace agreement with Generalissimo Franco, the Republican forces would have to 'resist to the end'. The two anarchist members of the Consejo de Defensa likewise reported to their CNT-FAI-FJJLL colleagues that they had insisted strongly in the *consejo* that a last-ditch defense be organized.

A meeting of the Libertarian National Committee on March 22 also passed a resolution demanding the return to the central-south area of many of the anarchist leaders who had fled to France with the collapse of Catalonia. However, whatever Eduardo Val, González Marín and the other anarchist leaders might have liked to occur, it is clear that during the last week of the existence of the National Committee of the Libertarian Movement, the discussions of its meetings centered principally on the need and the feasibility of evacuating from Spain the 'compromised elements' of the anarchist

movement and the other Republican elements. Val and González Marin, after first resisting the idea, finally agreed to the National Defense Council's decision to establish evacuation committees in each of the remaining Republican armies.

However, in the face of the total collapse of the Loyalist army during the last week of March 1939, and the almost complete failure of ships which Juan Negrín had presumably contracted for in France to appear at Valencia, Alicante and other evacuation points, only a relative handful of the principal anarchist leaders were able to make good their escape. In this regard, the situation of the anarchists was not significantly different from that of the other parties and groups which had supported the Republic. The evacuees were numbered in the hundreds rather than the tens of thousands which had originally been planned.⁶⁷ A one-time Republican soldier, Martias González graphically described 40 years later, the chaos of those seeking fruitlessly to escape during the last days of the Republic.⁶⁸

Why Did the Communists Not Resist the *Consejo*?

One final question remains concerning the Consejo Nacional de Defensa and the anarchist participation in it. This is the explanation for why the Communist Party, in spite of its key positions in control of much of the Republican Army early in March 1939, did not resist the establishment of the *consejo*.

One can do little more than speculate on this. However, it is clear that the Soviet military and civilian personnel remaining in Republican Spain, as well as the Comintern agents who were still there, both groups certainly subject to direct orders from Stalin, made no serious effort to organize resistance to the *consejo*'s seizure of power. Indeed, the former group left the country as quickly as possible, followed not long afterwards by most of the remaining Comintern agents.

One can only conclude that Stalin had no real interest in the continuation of the Spanish struggle. Víctor Alba has suggested: 'After the Munich Conference, Stalin wished to enter into negotiations with Hitler. He considered that abandonment of Spain would

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be interpreted in Berlin as a guarantee of good faith... What was involved for Moscow was to terminate the war in Spain, as a gift to Hitler, without incurring the responsibility of apparently participating in the defeat.⁶⁹

Ignacio Iglesias has cited Manuel Azaña to the effect that for six to eight months before the fall of Catalonia to the Franco forces, the Republic had not received 'even a kilo of Russian material'.⁷⁰ This would seem to indicate that Stalin had totally written off the cause of the Spanish Republic.

In all likelihood, much the same kind of thinking motivated the behavior of the Spanish Communist leaders as well. Knowing that the Republic was lost, they were quite content to have some one else bear the historical responsibility for the final collapse of the Loyalist cause.

Ignacio Iglesias interprets the Stalinists' objectives in these same terms: 'It was evident that for the Communist party, for the International, and above all, for Stalin, it was not an issue of struggling, but of getting out of the Spanish adventure... It was not only a question of saving the best cadres of the Communist organization, but also of provoking in some way the other anti-Franco sectors, particularly the Republican military, to rise against the phantasmagoric Negrín Government, and bear the indefensible blame for the final capitulation. That was the meaning of their conspiracy and not, as some believe, to try to foster resistance against all odds.'⁷¹

This interpretation is borne out by Enrique Castro Delgado, the Communist leader who, as we have seen, fruitlessly tried to get both the domestic and foreign Communist leaders to organize an effective resistance to Casado and the *consejo*. Many years later, he wrote, ironically, 'Thank you, thank you very much, Colonel. Without your uprising those who would have had to capitulate would have been us. That would have been grave. Very grave. But you were a great man, you saved the honor of the Party so well that we could not have done it better ourselves. Thank you, thank you very much, Colonel.'⁷²

Almost certainly, the Republican cause was lost after the fall of Catalonia. Even though Juan Negrín and his close associates may have continued to have the forlorn hope of continuing the Spanish

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Civil War until the outbreak of a general war in Europe would force the British and French to intervene in Spain against Hitler's and Mussolini's ally, Francisco Franco, such intervention on behalf of the Republic even under these circumstances seems dubious, at least in retrospect.

Pierre Broué and Emile Temime have explained the unlikelihood of Western intervention in the war. They have noted that during the Munich Crisis 'the diplomatic efforts of Nationalist Spain were aimed at getting the Western powers to agree first to keep the Spanish affair separate from the impending European war, and afterward to accept the Nationalist government's neutrality, which would be equivalent on their side to a final refusal to support the Spanish Republic ... the British and French governments showed satisfaction of the promises made directly by the Caudillo and passed on to Paris and London...'⁷³ They add that 'From this point on, in fact, the great powers' first preoccupation was to put an end to the Civil War.'⁷⁴

So, with the defeat of the Loyalists in Catalonia early in February 1939, the issue was no longer whether the Republican cause would finally collapse, but rather who would bear the formal responsibility for that collapse. Although the Communists, in the name of 'resistance to the end', persuaded Juan Negrín to turn over complete control of the Republican armed forces to them on March 2, their behavior after Colonel Casado's *coup* would seem to indicate that they were quite happy to have their enemies within the Republican camp bear the responsibility before history of having led the Loyalist cause to its ultimate inevitable defeat.

One of the supreme ironies of the Spanish Civil War is that the anarchists shared that responsibility with Colonel Casado. Motivated by a determination not to allow the total control of the Republic and its armed forces by the Communists and (as they undoubtedly foresaw it) their own total annihilation at the hands of the Stalinists, the anarchists enthusiastically supported the Consejo Nacional de Defensa. Indeed, without their support it could not have been established. Thus, the Libertarian Movement, which had been more responsible than any other element in the Republic for overcoming the original Rebel uprising in July 1936 in most of Spain, and which throughout the conflict had provided the largest contingent of the

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Loyalist soldiery, took upon itself the responsibility for the final Republican government, which was totally unable to prevent the complete collapse of the Loyalist cause.

Part Six

Conclusion and Appendices

Conclusion

The Spanish Civil War was the only period (and place) in which anarchists were in power for any considerable period of time. When they found power thrust upon them as a result of their role in putting down the Rebellion of July 18–19 1936, the Spanish anarchists found that their ideology and program had not adequately prepared them for the situation.

The anarchist leaders and many of their followers were more or less acquainted with the ideas of Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin and other philosophers of international anarchism, and with the Utopian sketches of the future libertarian society which Spanish anarchist thinkers had developed in the decades before the outbreak of the Civil War. However, there was no general agreement on the nature of that society, and certainly no generally accepted blueprint for how to reorganize Spain once they were given the opportunity to do so.

But, the nearly three-quarters of a century during which the Spanish anarchists had propagated their ideas had laid the basis for the Revolution which took place after July 19 1936. That Revolution came from the grass roots of the anarchist movement rather than from its leadership. It was the rank-and-file leaders and members of the movement who took over the factories and the farms, and who seized control of villages, towns and cities throughout the areas in which workers and peasants had defeated the military rebellion and secured them for the Republic.

But the Revolution had taken place in circumstances over which

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the anarchists had little control. They were faced with the fact that they were participating in a Civil War. This meant immediately that they had to collaborate with other political and social elements which were also supporting the Republican cause against the Franco forces. They made the decision to accept that collaboration only a few days after the outbreak of the Civil War when the Catalan anarchists, who at that point had almost total political power in their hands, on July 23 1936 decided to collaborate with other pro-Republican elements in the prosecution of the War. Their colleagues in other parts of the Republic took a similar decision, although not in such a dramatic way.

This decision led the anarchists quite quickly to agree to participate in the governments of the Republic, Catalonia and other Spanish Republican regions. When this occurred, the French anarchist Sebastian Faure pointed out the dangers this involved: 'To separate oneself, even in exceptional circumstances and for a short time, from the line of conduct which our principles have indicated, is to commit an error and is dangerously imprudent. To persist in this error implies committing a fault the consequences of which lead, slowly, to the provisional abandonment of principles and, with concession after concession, to the definitive abandonment of the same...'¹

History shows, of course, that Sebastian Faure was right. However, it does not indicate what viable alternative the anarchists had in the circumstances of the Spanish Civil War.

It took somewhat longer for the anarchists to accept the idea that in a modern war they had to agree to the organization of the Republican military on traditional lines. In much of Republican Spain, the anarchists and other political groups had originally organized militia units composed of workers with experience in urban insurrection, but who had little knowledge of, or experience with, modern highly mechanized warfare. However, it soon became apparent that those militia units were not sufficient to confront a regular army.

But the traditional anti-militarism of the anarchists made it difficult for them to accept the idea that it was necessary to have regular army to defeat the traditional Spanish army – supported by Italian

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and German regular army troops – in the Civil War. Their tardiness in reaching this conclusion put them at a disadvantage politically *vis-à-vis* their opponents within the Republic, because many of the anarchists had grave reservations about becoming ‘regular’ officers in the Republic’s Popular Army. The upshot was that the anarchists were greatly outnumbered in the officer ranks of the Republican army, in spite of the fact that the largest contingent in the Republican military consisted of anarchists until the end of the Civil War.

The Revolution brought about by the anarchists in the Spanish Republican economy also suffered from their ideological, programmatic and organizational deficiencies. The principal handicap was the failure of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo to establish before the Civil War a full panoply of national industrial unions, which might have been the core around which they could have attempted to reorganize the national economy. However, because the establishment of such national unions (federations) had been strongly opposed by the more doctrinaire anarchists, only a few existed when the Civil War broke out. The frantic efforts of the CNT to establish such constituent organizations during the War were not sufficient to provide the anarchists with a framework around which they might have reorganized the national economy.

However, in spite of deficiencies in specific doctrine and in organizational structure, the Spanish anarchists (frequently in alliance with Left-wing Socialists) carried out a remarkable transformation of the society, economy and polity of Republican Spain during the first months of the Civil War. Virtually throughout the half of Aragón rescued from the Franco forces, and extensively in Catalonia, the Levante, the Center, and those segments of Andalusia and Extremadura which the Republic retained, anarchist peasants established their own kinds of rural collectives. Although these collectives varied much in their organizational structure, and their degree of ‘utopianism’, most of them provided their members with levels of living and a feeling of self-respect which they had never before enjoyed. Many of them considerably increased the output of the land under their control.

In the cities and towns of Loyalist Spain, the workers took over most of the factories and large workshops in which they worked,

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many of which had been abandoned by their former owners, and put them back into operation. Those collectivized plants continued throughout the Civil War to provide the civilian population with textiles, processed foodstuffs and other consumer goods, and in Catalonia and other parts of the Republic they established a war industry where none had existed before, an industry that provided a substantial part of the material used by the Loyalist forces throughout the War.

On a political level, with the breakdown of nearly all established authority with the outbreak of the War, the anarchists played a major part in re-establishing public order, putting an end to the kind of personal vengeance-taking and pillaging which was inevitable in the circumstances. They showed a willingness to discipline their own members who engaged in outrageous activities under the guise of 'the Revolution'.

However, the deficiencies of the anarchists particularly handicapped them in their conflict with the Stalinists within Republican Spain. The Stalinists had a clear idea of the kind of society they wanted to establish, that is, a mirror image of what their leader and model, Joseph Stalin, had put in place in the Soviet Union. They sought a dictatorship of their own party, which would organize a totally government-owned and centrally planned economy. Their strategy and tactics throughout the War were designed to bring about this kind of a regime and society.

From its inception, the Communists opposed the Revolution which the anarchists and Left-wing Socialists had wrought. They did so in part because it was not their Revolution, and in part because any obvious social revolution in Spain did not fit the needs of Joseph Stalin's policy, which was to portray the Spanish Civil War as a simple struggle between fascism and democracy, in the hope of winning support of the Republic by the French and British, and strengthening his own ties with those two Western governments.

In pursuance of his objectives, Stalin (after receiving most of the Spanish gold supply, one of the world's largest at the time) gave the Republic the military supplies they needed to continue – but not win – the war. But, in addition, he gave powerful support to his own followers within the Spanish Republic – in the form of a Comintern

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delegation, military and GPU 'advisers', and outright blackmail to force the Republican government to adopt policies wanted by, and which strengthened, the Stalinists within Loyalist Spain.

The Spanish Stalinists, opposing the Revolution, sought to build support among those economic and social groups which were also opposed to it – the small businessmen, landowning peasants (and larger landlords), career military officers, government bureaucrats and others. Those elements flooded into the Stalinist parties in the first months of the war, increasing their numbers twentyfold. They received few recruits from the working class, or from landless peasants, who were supporters of the anarchists and Largo Caballero Socialists.

The Stalinists also allied themselves with all other political groups which sought to undo the Revolution which the anarchists and Left-wing Socialists had brought about with the onset of the Civil War, and with those which had traditionally represented the country's petty-bourgeois elements. These included not only the Spanish Republican parties, but also the Catalan regionalist parties, and even the socially and religiously conservative Basque Nationalists. They also included the Right-wing Socialists who had for long fought against the faction headed by Francisco Largo Caballero.

As all of these 'allies' of the Stalinists found out to their own regret, the Stalinists' objectives in working with them were not only to use them to eliminate the supporters of the Revolution, but to reduce the allies themselves to impotence. As we have noted, the Communists had succeeded in destroying most of the supporters of the Revolution, as well as destroying the power of their erstwhile 'allies'. Only in the penultimate phase of the Civil War, in March 1939, did nearly all other Republican factions join forces to oust from power the Stalinists and their remaining collaborators of the Negrín regime and to establish the Council of National Defence.

In the last phase of the Civil War, the only surviving significant opponent of the Stalinist drive to absolute power was the Libertarian Movement, the anarchists. However, even they found it increasingly difficult to prevent the emasculation of their control of significant parts of the economy, to preserve some influence in the armed forces of the Republic, and even to defend the lives of their own members.

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The movement was also severely divided over the tactics and strategy which should be followed to prevent the acquisition of absolute power by the Stalinists and the annihilation of their own organizations.

Nearly 60 years after the end of the Spanish Civil War, it is difficult to know what lessons can be drawn from the Spanish anarchist experience between 1936 and 1939. However, periodically since the break of the Tito regime of Yugoslavia with Stalin in 1948, and its alleged attempt to establish workers' controlled collectives, there has been interest in various quarters in the idea of 'workers' control', and 'workers' self-government'. Such ideas were particularly prevalent during and after the uprisings of 1968, on both sides of the then Iron Curtain. Subsequently, experiments in this direction were made in Sweden and other countries, including even – in one way or the other – in the United States.

Those people and groups interested in such ideas might have much to learn from the experiences of the Spanish anarchists more than half a century ago. Those experiences can present both examples of how to succeed and how to fail in such experiments. In any case, what happened in Republican Spain during the Civil War under the aegis of the anarchists was certainly one of the major social experiments of the twentieth century.

Postscript:
*Why Didn't the Anarchists Come
Back After Franco?*

After the death of dictator Francisco Franco in November 1975 and the subsequent evolution and solidification of a democratic regime in Spain, the anarchists did not re-emerge as a major, or even significant, actor in the country's organized labor, politics or general life. In view of the major role which they had played during the Civil War, as I have indicated in what has been recounted in this volume, and the major part they played for many years in the underground struggle against the Franco regime, this is a somewhat remarkable fact. Trying to explain it constitutes an appropriate afterward to the bulk of the present study of their role during the Civil War.

In the years immediately following the death of the dictator, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo did re-establish itself with substantial membership. In Catalonia and other regions of Spain, many older workers had positive memories of its role before and during the Civil War, and when they had an opportunity, joined its ranks. Many younger Spaniards had doubtless heard favorable information from their elders about the anarchist labor movement, and also joined its ranks.

It is doubtful that there are reliable figures on how many workers joined the CNT during the first four or five years after the death of

Franco. However, from CNT sources, we heard estimates ranging from 140,000,¹ to 350,000 workers in 40 national unions.² Even the larger of these figures was substantially smaller than the numerical strength of the CNT during the Civil War, among a working class which had grown much larger in the interim.

However, by 1984, the CNT, by then split into two rival groups, had shrunk drastically. Even if one accepts the figures given by the two factions – each claiming 25,000 or a few more members – the anarchist labor movement had been reduced to a marginal group among the Spanish workers, most of whom did not belong to any trade union confederation, and those who did were largely split between the Communist-controlled Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), and the Socialists' Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT).³

The Fundamental Reasons for the Failure of the Anarchists to Come Back

There were two basic reasons why the Spanish anarchist movement was not able to return as a major element in the labor movement and body politic after the death of Francisco Franco. The first was the fundamental change which the Franco regime had brought about in the economy of Spain, and consequently in its society. The second was the still lingering shadow of the Civil War, and the consequent rejection of both Left- and Right-wing extremes by the great majority of the body politic. There were also other subsidiary factors in the behavior of the reborn anarchist movement which reinforced more basic reasons for the failure of the anarchists to revive on anything approaching the scale they had achieved before 1939.

After the Second World War and particularly after the commencement of United States' aid to Franco in the early 1950s, the Franco regime undertook an extensive program of industrializing the country. The government's Instituto Nacional de Industria (INI) undertook the financing of a wide range of manufacturing firms. There was also substantial foreign investment, and many new private Spanish industrial firms appeared.

By the end of the Franco regime, Spain had ceased being an

overwhelmingly rural country. The majority of the population was urban. Industry was no longer confined largely to Catalonia and the Basque country; Madrid and other cities had important concentrations of manufacturing enterprises, which were scattered around the country. Even the nation's agriculture had to a large degree been transformed, with the introduction of considerable mechanization and technical modernization.

As a consequence of these economic changes, the society of Spain had also been transformed. The stark contrast between the very wealthy and the very poor had been changed, with the emergence of large elements of economically and socially middle groups.

These changes were even visible in the streets of Spanish cities. Whereas, at the time of the Civil War, manual workers were clearly differentiated from white-collar workers and upper class people by the way they dressed, after Franco, it was difficult, if not impossible, to tell from looking at them what the people walking in the streets of Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia did for a living.

The significance of such changes as these had been seen by Franz Borkenau during the Civil War. He wrote that 'the CNT could not have succeeded had the Spanish proletariat ever undergone the *embourgeoisment* which is characteristic of the industrial proletariat all over the world.'⁴ He also commented that 'had the spirit of capitalism permeated the nation, anarchism would be at an end'.⁵

Both of these things had come to pass by the end of the Franco regime, a fact expressed to me in 1984 by a leader of the post-Franco CNT when he said that the Spanish workers had been 'corrupted'. When he was asked what he meant, he explained that they now had cars, television sets, and consequently didn't have the 'class spirit' which they had once had.⁶

In addition to the effect of the changes wrought in Spanish economy and society, there were the still lingering effects of the Civil War. In post-Franco Spain, there was wide abhorrence of anything that might provoke any kind of renewal of the bloodletting which had taken place between 1936 and 1939. As a consequence of this, it was the Socialist Party which emerged as the principal force on the Left, not either the Communists or the anarchists. On the Right, too, the key word was moderation. Although some of the principal

leaders of the Right, including Manuel de Fraga Iribarne, Adolfo Suárez, had been important figures in the last part of the Franco regime, Suárez in particular had been of key importance in the transition from the dictatorship to democracy. The Falange all but disappeared.

The attitude of the revived CNT in the face of this situation quickly undermined it. The organization rejected all cooperation in the collective bargaining machinery established under the new regime. Rather, it concentrated on organizing street demonstrations and other potentially explosive activities. There were various incidents of violence which were attributed to the CNT, most notoriously an explosion in a popular theater in Barcelona, in which three workers were killed. Whether or not it had anything to do with these incidents, the events served quickly to alienate workers from the CNT.⁷

Furthermore, the refusal of the CNT to participate in the collective bargaining system established in post-Franco Spain led many workers to see the anarchist labor group as largely irrelevant. Under the system, enterprise councils were elected periodically, with the local affiliates of the various national labor groups – UGT, CCOO, and in the Basque area, the Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos – competing for positions in these councils. It was the councils that conducted collective bargaining with the employers.

With the CNT not competing in these elections, because of their traditional opposition to State intervention in labor relations, the anarchist unions had little role in the workers' relations with their employers. Although some local CNT groups were able to set up informal grievance procedures for their members, their ability to do so depended entirely on the willingness of the employers to allow it. The CNT unions had no legal right to negotiate anything. This issue was perhaps the major cause of the splits which took place in the CNT in the years following the end of the Franco regime.

Other Causes of the Failure of the Anarchists to Come Back

There were other factors which contributed to the failure of the

anarchist labor movement to revive as a significant element in Spanish politics after the death of Franco. One of these was certainly the decimation of its forces inside Spain during the Franco period. From the end of the Civil War until the early to middle 1950s, the anarchists were able to maintain a substantial underground organization. However, the Franco regime bore down particularly heavily on the CNT underground. Fifteen or more successive national committees of the organization were arrested, and one anarchist estimate was that somewhere between 160,000 and 180,000 CNTers were killed between 1939 and the end of the regime. As a consequence, there were relatively few people of the older and middle generations left in the anarchist ranks when they could again operate openly.⁸

Relatively few of the members and leaders from the Civil War period returned after 1975. Many had died in exile, others had grown old, their offspring were more French, or Mexican or British than they were Spaniards, so they did not make the move back to their native country, except perhaps to visit. Even Federica Montseny, who had for most of the Franco period headed one of the major exile factions of the CNT, continued to live in Toulouse, only returning to Spain for occasional short visits.

Of course, the other pre-Franco political groups suffered from many of the same disabilities as the anarchists. However, aside from the fact that the anarchists were probably the most severely persecuted and completely decimated opposition group during the Franco period, the libertarians suffered from other handicaps.

In contrast to the Socialists and Communists, the anarchist leadership during the last decades of the Franco regime came largely from the exiles. In contrast, as the rigidity of the Franco dictatorship relaxed somewhat in the 1960s and early 1970s, there had been a renewal of internal leadership of the Socialist Party within Spain, with a species of *coup d'état* of the underground leaders against those in exile, principally in France. In the case of the Communists, they had some success in penetrating the Franco regime's *sindicato* structure, and established a base among the workers – something which in the nature of the case, the anarchists refused to do.

Another significant, although regional, group, the Basque Nationalists, had another kind of advantage. Throughout the Franco regime,

significant portions of the clergy in the Basque region remained loyal to the Basque Nationalist Party, whatever public pretenses to the contrary they had to engage in. This fact helped to keep the Basque Nationalist underground going during the hard times and facilitated a revival of the party when the opportunity presented itself.

There was another major handicap faced by the anarchists. This was the lack of any effective international organization. Nearly everywhere else the anarchist labor movements, which still existed during the Spanish Civil War years, had disappeared by the middle 1970s. The International Workingmen's Association (IWMA-AIT) was virtually indistinguishable from one faction of the exiled CNT leadership, which had even brought about the expulsion of the Swedish affiliate, the only other segment of the IWMA which had any following.

In contrast, both the Socialists and Communists had influential friends abroad. The Socialist International and the pro-Moscow faction of International Communism, were able to give substantial help to their Spanish comrades in the waning years of the Franco regime and the transition period following the dictator's death. Enrique Marco Nadal, a CNT railroad worker in Valencia during the Civil War and secretary-general of the thirteenth underground CNT national committee captured by the Franco regime in 1947 has laid particular stress on the importance of this lack of outside support in weakening the anarchists in the underground, and in the post-Franco regime.⁹

Another handicap of the anarchists was their eternal feuding among themselves. The CNT in exile had been split into two or more feuding groups for most of the 30 years preceding Franco's death. It remained divided when it came time to rebuild the organization inside Spain.¹⁰

Once re-established on Spanish soil, the internal schisms continued, or were renewed. There were the divisions between the simon-pure anarchists, led from a distance by Frederica Montseny, and those within Spain who wanted the CNT to adapt to the realities of the post-Franco period.

As a consequence of this struggle, two splits occurred, in 1979-80 and in 1983. In both cases the dissident element wanted to have the

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CNT participate in enterprise council elections and to participate in the regular collective bargaining procedure.¹¹ Although the two dissident groups joined forces early in 1984, and had some support in Valencia, Madrid and other cities, they remained a marginal element in Spanish organized labor, and of virtually no consequence politically.

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Spanish anarchism did not revive on any appreciable scale after the death of Francisco Franco and the end of his dictatorship. Thus, the experience of the anarchists during the Civil War remained the stuff of history, with little contemporary relevance within the Spanish State. Although foreigners who were intrigued with the ideas of 'workers' control' and similar concepts might be interested in drawing lessons from what the anarchists had done in Spain between 1936 and 1939, there was little desire in Spain itself on the part of the workers and peasants for renewing what they had undertaken during those three tumultuous years.

Appendix 1

Anarchist Violence and Terrorism During the Civil War

The traditional caricature of an anarchist is that of a bearded man with a bomb in one hand, and a rifle in the other. In the popular imagination, the word ‘anarchist’ has, for more than a century, been almost synonymous with the word ‘terrorist’.

Even serious scholars have frequently tended to emphasize the violent and terrorist aspects of anarchism. Thus, the late Barbara Tuchman, in her book *The Proud Tower* starts a 50-page chapter on the European anarchists in the quarter of a century before the First World War by saying: ‘So enchanting was the vision of a stateless society, without government, without law, without ownership of property, in which, corrupt institutions having been swept away, man would be free to be good as God intended him, that six heads of state were assassinated for its sake in the twenty years before 1914.’¹ The burden of the chapter deals principally with the violence of the anarchists and the counter-violence against them.

I hope that the present volume has indicated that this is not an adequate characterization of the Spanish anarchists. However, the question still remains of the degree to which, in addition to being a movement seeking fundamental social, economic and political change, Spanish anarchists used terrorism, particularly during the Civil War.

The Violent Tradition of Spanish Anarchism

Certainly, there is no question about the fact that there was a tradition of violence, and even of terrorism, in the Spanish anarchist movement. It perhaps had two origins, one traditionally Spanish, the other coming from the international anarchist movement which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Franz Borkenau, writing while the Civil War still under way, argued:

The revolt of the Andalusian serf in the eighteenth century took the form of widespread and indomitable brigandage, which involved the most active elements of the peasantry and was regarded by the masses not as criminal, but, on the contrary, as an enviable, honorable and even admirable profession... In Spain these elements are not covered with the opprobrium that would attach to them in countries civilized in the Western sense, any more than the revolutionary brigand is covered with opprobrium in China, or was so in Tsarist Russia. There is a profound difference, in the view of the primitive peasantry, between the man who breaks the solidarity of the peasant community itself by criminal acts and the man who, in seeking his own right against the rich and the mighty by brigandage and murder, helps the common cause of the oppressed. The former, the thief or the murderer who has killed or robbed a peasant, would be unhesitatingly delivered to the police or given short shrift by these he had damaged. The latter will be protected by the poor, throughout his district.²

However, there was another element in the historical violence of the Spanish anarchist movement. This was the adoption in the latter decades of the nineteenth century of the idea of 'propaganda of the deed' by a segment of the international anarchist movement. This was the idea that through physically attacking the key elements of the capitalist system, such as the banks and other powerful institutions, and by assassinating key figures in the existing regime, the cause of the revolution could be advanced.

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The use of violence, and particularly terrorist violence was the subject of frequent debate among leaders of international anarchism during the half-century preceding the Spanish Civil War. One such discussion was that of the Italian anarchist Luigi Fabbri, writing about the turn of the century. His ideas represented the point of view of a substantial proportion of the international anarchist leadership:

Can we conclude that anarchists always disapprove of violence, except in the case of defense, in the sense of a personal or collective attack isolated and in passing? Not at all, and anyone who wishes to attribute to us such a stupid idea would be both stupid and malignant. But he also would be stupid and malignant who from the other point of view wished to argue that we are always for violence at whatever cost. Violence, in spite of being in itself in contradiction with the anarchist philosophy, because it always implies pain and tears and is something which saddens us, maybe imposed by necessity, but if it would be impardonable weakness to condemn it when it is necessary, its use would also be nefarious if it was irrational, useless or used in a way contrary to what we are advocating.

Fabbri went on to indicate the limits of the use of terrorist violence: ‘...in Russia all the attacks against the government and its representatives and supporters are justified even by our adversaries or most moderate partisans, even when they sometimes hurt innocent people; but certainly the same revolutionaries would disapprove of them if they were committed blindly against people passing in the street or who are inoffensively seated in a café or in a theater.’³

The use of terrorist violence had its supporters within the anarchist movement in Spain. Perhaps the most famous group which carried out this strategy in the 1920s was the *Nosotros* group (at first called *Los Solidarios*), which included such leading figures as Buenaventura Durruti, Juan García Oliver, Ricardo Sanz, Francisco and Domingo Ascaso, Gregorio Jover, Miguel García Vivancos and Aurelio Hernández. Most of these people were to become key anarchist actors during the Civil War.

Appendix 1

During the 1920s the Nosotros group carried out a number of spectacular terrorist acts. One was a robbery of the Banco de Bilbao, to raise funds for the anarchist underground, carried out by Buenaventura Durruti and Gregorio Jover. Another was the assassination of the Cardinal Archbishop of Zaragoza, Juan Soldevila.

One of the most spectacular terrorist exploits of the Spanish anarchists in the 1920s was the assassination of Prime Minister Eduardo Dato in April 1922. Dato had been a particularly strong supporter of the government's attempt to crush the anarchist labor movement, the CNT.

The activities of these anarchist elements were clearly 'political', not personal. When they killed a policeman or a high government or Church official, it was not a matter of taking personal vengeance, but rather of making an 'example' against individuals deemed to be playing a particularly brutal role in exploiting the workers. When they robbed banks, it was not for themselves but for the movement. One Spanish observer with long acquaintance with the Barcelona anarchists, including people who had participated in these kinds of activities, and did not approve of such actions, commented that those who would rob half a million pesetas from a bank would continue to live humbly and very poorly in their working-class neighborhood.⁴

With the end of the monarchy, and the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic, the more extreme anarchist element, which had engaged in such things as political assassinations and bank robberies in the earlier period, turned to other kinds of activities. During the early years of the Second Republic the anarchists undertook several insurrections, designed to establish Libertarian communism in different local areas, particularly in Catalonia. They no longer used the strategy of 'propaganda of the deed', as a means of undermining the existing regime.

In any case, those within the Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movement who, even at the height of such activity, engaged in planning and executing bank robberies, assassinations and other such enterprises were a small minority, although that minority included a number of the most prominent leaders of the

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movement. The practitioners of 'propaganda of the deed' probably were at no time more than a few hundred people.

The great majority of the libertarians in Catalonia, the Levante region, Madrid and Asturias, were workers who were carrying on an often bitter struggle to improve their levels of working and living. They were inspired by the vision of the ultimate achievement of the Revolution, which would usher in a society without repressive institutions for the State, without a ruling class, a society in which cooperation would replace coercion. Certainly for the anarchists the achievement of such a new society was seen as much more proximate than was the social transformation foreseen by the basically reformist Socialists.

In parts of Spain in which the libertarian strength was in the countryside rather than the cities and towns, such as Andalusia, Extremadura and parts of Aragón, the situation was somewhat different. The brutally exploited and miserably poor peasants and agricultural workers, like their urban brethren, carried on an unremitting struggle against their exploiters, moneylenders, and local political bosses, the *caciques*. They were certainly not averse to the use of violence, if the opportunity presented itself, but the kind of violence they foresaw, and from time to time practiced, was that of seizure of control of the land and the villages. Although that process almost certainly would – and did – involve the murder of the landlords and their henchmen, such acts were not – as in the case of 'propaganda of the deed', carefully planned examples designed to arouse the working class to resistance or rebellion. They were coincidental to the basic objective of seizing control of their environment.

Even within the affinity groups of the 'pure' anarchists, those believing in and practising 'propaganda of the deed' were a small minority. This fact was even recognized by Jesús Hernández who, while still a leader of the Communist Party, wrote a violently polemical book against the libertarians. 'In these groups were encountered from dynamiters to Gandhists, including nudists, vegetarians, individualists, 'communists', syndicalists, anti-syndicalists, peripatetics, orthodox, libertarians, collaborationists, etc.'⁵

Certainly, it was not any innate proclivity of the anarchists to use

violence, terror and even murder which explains the terrible blood-letting which took place behind the lines during the Spanish Civil War.

The Nature of Violence and Terror in Republican and Rebel Areas

There was indisputably a vast amount of arson, murder, and other kinds of terrorist activities on both sides, particularly in the early months of the Civil War. However, there was a qualitative difference between what happened within the Republican area and in those parts of Spain held by the Rebels.

The situation was strikingly different between the parts of Spain which remained loyal to the Republic, and the parts where the Rebels triumphed in the first weeks of the War. On the Republican side (with the exception of the Basque province of Vizcaya), there was an almost complete disappearance of public authority. The army all but disappeared; the regular police forces either disappeared or were demoralized and lost virtually all of their authority.

In contrast, on the Rebel side, the army remained intact and in control, reinforced by paramilitary units of the Falange and the Carlists, either incorporated into, or under the general control of, the army. In almost all areas controlled by the Rebels, the Civil Guards – and even the Assault Guards – also remained thoroughly intact.

These different situations in the two parts of Spain meant that the nature of the initial violence was different in the two areas. On the Republican side it was spontaneous and individualistic, and in no sense organized from the top. In contrast, on the Rebel side, the violence and terrorism *was* organized from the top and reflected the deliberate policy of those in charge.

This difference was attested to by Francisco Portalea, who at the beginning of the War was public prosecutor of the High Court of Madrid. He was dismissed by the government for suspected disloyalty, and fled to France, with the help of the minister of justice, and thence went to Gibraltar, reentering Spain in the Rebel-held

area. He spent the rest of the War in the Franco area. Portalea told Ronald Fraser,

Let me say this quite clearly. I had occasion to witness the repression that was being carried on in both zones. In the nationalist zone it was planned, methodical, cold. The authorities didn't trust the people and imposed their will through terror. To do so they committed atrocities. In the Popular Front zone atrocities were also committed. That was the similarity between the two; but the difference was that in the republican zone the crimes were committed by an impassioned people, not by the authorities. The latter always tried to prevent crimes; my own case of being helped to escape is only one of many. It wasn't so in the nationalist zone. There more people were shot, it was scientifically organized.⁶

Frank Jellinek paraphrased the 'definite instructions' issued to the rebel officers by General Queipo de Llano:

The main factor to ensure victory, these instructions ran, was the destruction of the enemy's morale. To accomplish this, the first thing to do on occupying a town was to execute all the notabilities who could be found, or if they had fled, their families. The executions were to be public and as impressive as possible. The best way to discover these persons was to ask the local priest. Hesitation to obey these orders would be rigorously punished and 'an excess of zeal is better than humanitarian mildness'. Members of Falange Española might be enlisted as officers to see that the troops did not fail to carry out the executions and to denounce any such hesitations...⁷

On August 18, Queipo de Llano stated, 'Eighty percent of Andalusian families are in mourning, and we shall not hesitate to have recourse to sterner measures.'⁸

Broué and Temime have made this point with regard to what went on in Rebel territory:

The entry of the Nationalists into Badajoz was accompanied by real carnage. The Havas special agent cabled that there were corpses in the cathedral, even at the foot of the altar, and that 'the bodies of government supporters executed en masse are laid out in rows in front of the cathedral on the main square'. The correspondents of the *New York Herald* [sic] and *Le Temps* described this butchery, which the Nationalist officers tried to justify by the impossibility of holding prisoners. A column of fugitives was driven back to the Portuguese frontier, led back into the town and massacred on the spot. The correspondent of *Le Temps* referred to 1,200 executions, of 'pavements covered in blood in which helmets are still weltering', while the shooting continued to the main square... Terror was the means of putting an end to resistance by the masses. At least this was how the leaders of the rebellion saw it.⁹

General Franco himself believed in using terror, including murder, as a means of asserting his regime's control and crushing its opponents. Roland Fraser recounts an interview with Eugenie Vegas Latapie, editor of the monarchist newspaper *Acción Española* during the Civil War, who had been sufficiently outraged by the shooting without trial that he saw going on about him to take the matter up with General Franco personally. He urged that there be trials of these accused and that they be allowed to defend themselves, arguing that the current state of affairs was 'a grave discredit to the cause'. However, Vegas Latapie reported:

Franco took no notice of me. As far as the repression was concerned, he knew very well what was happening and didn't give a damn. On information I gave him later, Peman took up the case with Franco direct of the number of people who were being kept a year or more under sentence of death. Franco explained that this was necessary in order to be able to exchange them for prisoners in similar circumstances in the red zone. That was his explanation. But hardly any exchanges were authorized by the Franco regime during the war; and moreover, when the war was over there was not even this excuse, the situation

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continued exactly as before, with people being kept under sentence of death for a year, if not longer. Franco displayed the simple, cold cruelty for which he was well known in the Foreign Legion.¹⁰

This kind of terror was not confined to cities conquered by advancing Rebel troops. It also took place in those places over which the Rebels won control immediately. In Córdoba, for example, workers were rounded up on the streets and at their places of work and were shot, without any reason being given, except that they were workers. Local political leaders loyal to the Republic were also murdered on orders of the Rebel authorities.¹¹

One veteran of the Franco army has also testified to the continuing almost daily roundups of political 'suspects' in the Córdoba region long after the beginning of the War, by his own unit of the regular army. He categorized many of the arrests and executions as 'exceedingly arbitrary'.¹²

The same kind of officially organized terror existed in the largely rural province of Zamorra in Old Castille, which immediately fell into the hands of the Rebels. Virtually all leaders of the parties and organizations supporting the Republic were rounded up and executed.¹³ Undoubtedly similar things occurred throughout Rebel-held Spain.

Gabriel Jackson has commented on the terrorism in the Rebel-held areas. '... the virulence of the purge in Insurgent Spain is not to be explained by the laws of war ... The Spanish Insurgents were fighting to preserve traditional privileges of the Army, the Church, and the landlords ... The military rising of July 18 appeared to be their last chance to preserve a Spain in which their privileges would be secure ... The executions in Nationalist Spain were not the work of revolutionary mobs taking advantage of the breakdown of the Republican state. They were ordered and approved by the highest military authorities.' The same author, who made an extensive study of the subject, concluded that there were approximately 200,000 victims of 'wartime Nationalist *paseos* and political reprisals', as compared to 20,000 'Republican-zone *paseos* and political reprisals'.¹⁴

Initial Terror in Catalonia and the Levante

With the suppression of the Rebellion in Catalonia, the anarchists were in almost total control of the situation there. In the Levante, to the south, they shared power with the Largo Caballero Socialists. So, what happened in those two areas is particularly pertinent to a discussion of the role of the anarchists in violence and terror in those two regions.

There can be little doubt that in the first days and weeks of the Civil War there were many killings which took place in Catalonia. We have noted in an earlier chapter the 'disappearances' of owners of larger industries in Barcelona and of large landholders. Although many of those who disappeared fled into France, it is equally certain that many were killed, either by their workers or by someone else. There was a general search for Falangistas and others who supported the Rebels, and many of them were also killed. There were certainly many cases of people taking personal vengeance on others.

After July 19, the prisons were emptied of political prisoners, and many common criminals were also released. It is to be supposed that some of the latter went back to their old occupations, facilitated in this by the breakdown of law and order after the outbreak of the Civil War.

Paseos were commonplace in the first period of the War. This word, translated as 'walk', or 'promenade', was used to describe the activities of small groups who on their own rounded up victims during the night, and 'walked' them to their deaths.

John Langdon-Davies, an English journalist sympathetic to the Republican cause, wrote in 1937: 'The simple fact is that through July and August and for all I know since, five or six people on an average every night were taken from their beds, pushed into cars, and driven to that lonely road amid the pines beyond Tidibaldo, and executed.'¹⁵ Visiting the municipal morgue in Barcelona, he ascertained the average number of bodies brought in before July 19, and the number of bodies brought in during the month after July 19, and concluded that 'the Terror in Barcelona has led to perhaps 200 murders in over a month...'¹⁶

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None of these things took place under the direction or instigation of the anarchist leaders. And, although rank-and-file anarchists participated in them, they were not alone. César Lorenzo quoted a Falangista student of the war in Catalonia to the effect: 'In reality, the criminal activities were equal among all the parties and proportional to their membership.'¹⁷

Franz Borkenau, writing after visits to revolutionary Spain in August 1936 and January–February 1937, wrote about terrorism in the early weeks of the Civil War and Revolution, particularly in Catalonia.

I learnt that terrorism in town and village was by far the most important lever of social revolution. Executions proceeded expropriations, and fear of executions bullied the remaining rich into submission to the revolutionary regime. The suggestion that the anarchists in Catalonia owed their preponderance exclusively on their terrorist methods was wrong; they would have commanded the allegiance of a large majority of the working class without terrorism. But the other allegation that only terrorism made it possible for them to take the first steps in the direction of social revolution was true. Anarchist terrorism, in these first days, was only the most ruthless type of that terrorism which all labour class organizations exerted against the enemies of the regime all over Spain...¹⁸

Borkenau elaborated on the subject, 'The revolutionary terrorism of July, August, and September in Spain was the thing called "mass terrorism", the word carrying the double signification of terrorism exerted by the masses themselves, not by an organized police force, and against a very great number, a "mass" of victims.' He compared the situation with that in France in 1792 and in Russia in 1918: 'The mass only strikes, not so much at people who have perpetrated or tried to perpetrate any definite *act* against the regime, but at people who, by their station in life, are supposed to be the natural enemies of the regime which these masses defend. In Russia as in Spain and as in France the aristocrats were killed as aristocrats, the priests as priests, and in Russia and Spain the bourgeois as bourgeois; in all these cases,

moreover, these individuals who were known to belong to organizations inimical to the regime...'¹⁹ Borkenau also noted: 'I venture to suggest that perhaps it is not so much an anarchist but a Spanish habit to massacre one's enemies wholesale.'²⁰ However, during his second visit to revolutionary Spain in January–February 1937, he observed that the anarchists' use of force in the early period of the War had undermined their influence in Catalonia: 'Mass expropriations and mass executions have frightened to death the small owners, who are a very important element in Barcelona.'²¹

The Catalan anarchist leader Diego Abad de Santillán, writing while the war was still in progress, noted that, right after July 19 1936, there were many in Barcelona who were lawless and engaged in pillage. But he said that the Central Militia Committee, as one measure against this, organized the orderly requisition of treasure from churches, the houses of people who had fled, and deposited them in safe places.²²

Santillán wrote: 'It is possible that our victory brought the violent death of four or five thousand citizens of Catalonia catalogued as men of the Right, linked with political and ecclesiastical reaction. But a revolution has its consequences... While these events were occurring, we were those who did most to brake the instincts of vengeance of the free people.'²³

As soon as the Central Militia Committee was constituted in Catalonia, it sought to re-establish law and order. This was the task of the department of security of the committee, headed by the anarchist Aurelio Fernández, and the control patrols organized by it, in which the CNT had about half of the members.

However, César Lorenzo has noted that in addition to these official patrols, there 'existed the police forces organized by each party or trade union organization, which depended on their respective leaderships: these were the famous *chekas* which had their own secret agents, their private jails, their commandos. That of the CNT, under the command of Manuel Escorza, was the most important and the best organized.'²⁴

According to Diego Abad de Santillán, 'We made serious efforts to repress all excess, and if one thinks that those efforts did not involve everyone, we shot some of our comrades and friends who had

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overstepped their authority. Thus J. Gardenes fell, and was not saved by repenting the things which he loyally confessed he had done, knowing that we had declared that we would not be moved; thus fell also the president of one of the largest *sindicatos* of Barcelona, that of Food Workers, who was accused of having carried out personal vengeance and who was not saved by his long history as a militant.²⁵

The anarchist leaders, and a large part of the rank and file of the movement, sought particularly to fight against attempts by individuals to exploit the situation for their personal advantage. Franz Borkenau commented on this during his first visit to revolutionary Spain, less than three weeks after the beginning of the Civil War:

It is interesting to listen to what these Marxists say about the anarchists. Immediately after the defeat of the military, they explain, there was quite a lot of looting in the Ramblas, on the pretence of anarchist action. Then the CNT interfered, disclaiming any responsibility for these acts; now, the first thing that catches the eye on the walls of the houses are big anarchist posters menacing every looter with execution on the spot. But there are other tales, of a more surprising character. In sacking and burning the churches, the militia naturally made a considerable loot in money and valuable objects. This loot should properly have gone to the CNT. It did not, however; but the anarchist rank and file themselves preferred to burn the stuff wholesale, including bank-notes, in order to allay any suspicion of robbery...²⁶

This same rejection of the idea that the Revolution should be exploited to benefit individuals, rather than the working class as a whole, was also shown by another phenomenon which Borkenau reported during this first trip: 'The communists... the first day after the victory, put in economic claims, such as allowances for the widows of the fighters killed in the defense of the republic. The anarchists did not say a single word about allowances or wages, or working hours. They simply contend that every sacrifice must be made in support of the revolution, without reward...'²⁷

As early as July 30, the anarchists took energetic steps against

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paseos. The Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* of July 31 published two proclamations on its front page, both dated the previous day. One was signed by the Federación Local de Sindicatos Unicos of Barcelona and the Confederación Regional de Cataluña of the CNT, and other by CNT–FAI without other designation:

There have been taking place in Barcelona a series of house searches, followed by arbitrary arrests and consequent shootings, the majority without any cause which justifies such measures... The house searches of a private nature must cease and cannot be undertaken except on the authority of the Commission of Investigation of the Antifascist Militia Committee or by the Federación Local, Regional Committee or the Regional of the FAI, jointly. Information coming to us is that these outrages are carried out in the name of our organization without the responsible Committees having any knowledge of them, is the factor which makes us take this decision to regularize the sense of responsibility, ending the dastardly actions of unscrupulous people whom we must suppress energetically.

The second proclamation, of the CNT–FAI together, which was widely distributed, including being dropped from planes flying over the city, was even more explicit. ‘WE SHALL PROCEED AGAINST ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO it is proven have carried out acts against human rights, all individuals who have conferred upon themselves attributions of the confederal organization... We say how we shall act, and we shall act as we say.’²⁸

Anarchist Judges and Police

The anarchist-dominated Central Militia Committee soon sought to re-establish a legitimate system for the dispensation of justice. Diego Abad de Santillán noted: ‘The Palace of Justice was opened and there began to be organized the so-called revolutionary justice. Popular tribunals were formed to deal with the crimes of rebellion and conspiracy against the Republic and against the new law. Once this

function was recognized, as soon as possible popular judges were substituted for the old professional judges, more expert in their job, but who would be put at the service of the counter-revolution...'²⁹

Juan García Oliver, in his memoirs, noted: 'We left the control of the administration of justice to be exercised by the revolutionary committee which was established in the Court of Barcelona, with which were associated eminent jurists such as Eduardo Barriobero, Angel Samblancat, Juan Rosinyol and others, helped by representatives of the CNT and the UGT.'

However, the judging of the military men who were involved in the conspiracy to overthrow the Republican regime was left up to other military men who were loyal to the Republic. Duly constituted courts martial were established, which tried their military colleagues.³⁰

Diego Abad de Santillán underscored the conflict of conscience for the anarchists involved in establishing more or less regular police forces and courts:

The judges, even though they were of the FAI, the police, even though they belonged to the CNT, were not pleasant for us; these were functions which caused us a little repugnance. Nor did we see with sympathy the formation of the body called Control Patrols. We wanted to liquidate all coercive institutions in the rearguard and send them to the front...³¹

The Patrols became the subject of a dreadful legend. The majority of the militiamen were our comrades and they constituted an impediment, as such, for possible projects of political domination. The suppression of those forces was sought, and the first thing necessary was to discredit them.

It is possible that among the 1,500 men in Barcelona, some may have exceeded their functions and were guilty of condemnable transgression but even in such cases not in any greater proportion than was habitual in other repressive institutions. We don't defend the institution of the Patrols, as we didn't defend the civil guard or the assault guard. But they had a sense of humanity and of responsibility that made them loyal to the maintenance of the new revolutionary order. With time, perhaps

they would have been just another police force, but the defamation to which they were subject lacked justification. They came principally from the defamations of the Communists.

On numerous occasions we had to intervene to free people whose political neutrality gave us guarantees, and we could observe that those detained were treated as we ourselves had never been treated: as human beings. There were conspirators in our rearguard and it is natural that they would not be left with free hands to damage us. But the population which has lived the first ten months of the revolution in Catalonia will be able to testify to the difference from the repressive methods which came afterwards under the guise of 'order' established by Prieto, by Negrín, by Zugazagoitia, from the torture chambers of the Communist Party or of the Directorate General of Security, which were the same thing, with the horrors of the SIM, where were perpetrated bestialities which not even the civil guard of the monarchy would have been able to imagine.³²

Anarchist Terrorism in the Levante

In Valencia, as in Catalonia, the *paseo* was commonplace in the first weeks of the Civil War. Although popular tribunals were established in the Levante region in conformity with a decree of the Giral government, particularly to try cases of treason against the Republic, the *paseos* did not end immediately. One man, who in 1936 was a judge in Valencia, remembered many years later that each morning he would have to go out to certify the death of various people who had been killed during the night. He said that this situation continued for three to four months.³³

When anarchist leader Juan García Oliver took up his post in Valencia as minister of justice in the Largo Caballero government early in November 1936, he found that one of the first tasks was to put an end to the *paseos*. He found that the principal gang carrying out illegal arrests and murders was known as the 'Tribunal of Blood', consisting of about 20 people, drawn from 'all the antifascist parties and organizations of the city'.

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García Oliver traced the way this 'tribunal' operated: 'Every night it assigned itself the mission of carrying out certain arrests of people suspected of fascism. They judged them, and if they were sentenced to death, executed them. It was all done the same night. The bodies of those executed appeared outside the city, in the fields and gardens.'

In his address at the annual opening of the courts soon after taking office, García Oliver tried to explain how *paseos* had come about. In his memoirs, he paraphrased this explanation:

Given that the military uprising had brought the destruction of all social brakes because it had been carried out by the classes which historically maintained the social order, the attempts to re-establish legal equilibrium caused the spirit of justice to revert to its most remote and pure origin: *the people, vox populi, suprema lex*. And the peoples so long as abnormality lasted, created *arad* applied its law and procedure, that is the *paseo*. But, normality re-established with the installation of the popular tribunals of revolutionary composition, left no justification for the *paseos*; suspected elements must be turned over to the popular tribunals and be judged, with impartiality, with punishment for the guilty and immediate freedom for the innocent.

García Oliver was determined to end the *paseos*. He called in the members of the Tribunal of Blood. There was apparently a rather violent discussion, in which a not-too-veiled threat was made that García Oliver himself might be the victim of a *paseo*.

García Oliver claimed that he was successful in getting the Tribunal of Blood to cease and desist. But a couple weeks later, midnight murders were renewed, and the victims were deposited outside the Popular War School, which García Oliver had just established. García Oliver soon found that these new executions were being carried out by Assault Guards on orders from an official of the ministry of interior. He soon got an end put to these renewed *paseos*.³⁴

As the War went on, the nature of terror on the Republican side drastically altered. As Stalinist influence within the reconstituted

regular police forces and the Army grew, and so, with the help of experts of the Soviet GPU, a Stalinist secret police quite independent of the government was also established, and violence, coercion and terror were carried out on a much more organized basis. Of course, then they were used *against* the anarchists (and other dissidents from Stalinism) not *by* them.

Anarchists and Terror in Aragon

There is considerable evidence that, as the anarchist militia columns moved into Aragon, to regain about half of the region, they engaged in strong-arm activities in the areas which they reconquered from the Rebel forces. Also anarchist peasants in the reconquered areas engaged in a good deal of terror against their enemies.

Franz Borkenau, visiting Aragon less than a month after the Civil War began, bore witness to this. He recounted a conversation in a village bar in Fraga:

Most of them are anarchists. One man with a significant gesture of the fingers across the throat tells us that they have killed thirty-eight 'fascists' in their village; they evidently enjoyed it enormously. (The village has only about a thousand inhabitants.) They had not killed any women or children, only the priest, his most active adherents, the lawyer and his son, the squire, and a number of the richer peasants! At first I thought the figure of thirty-eight was a boast, but next morning it was verified from the conversation of other peasants who, some of them, were not at all pleased with the massacres. From them I got details of what had happened. Not the villagers themselves had organized the execution, but the Durruti column when it first came through the village. They had arrested all those suspected of reactionary activities, took them to the jail by motor lorry, and shot them... As a result of this massacre the rich people and the Catholics in the next village rebelled; the alcalde mediated, a militia column entered the village, and again shot twenty-four of its adversaries.³⁵

Often the executions were carried out reluctantly by the peasants of Aragón. Perhaps events in one small village were typical of what went on in quite a few others. The local revolutionary committee at first did not put anyone on trial, feeling it abhorrent to execute any of their neighbors. However, the committee, consisting of five members of the CNT and five of the UGT became convinced that if some of the fascists were not executed, they would kill the Republicans at the first opportunity they got. So the three principal fascists of the village were tried and shot.³⁶

The leaders of some of the anarchist columns which went into Aragón sought to prevent such terrorism. This was the case with Saturnino Carod, head of a column which went to the outskirts of Belchite. Many years later, he recounted to Ronald Fraser that he had gathered together the people of the village of Calaceite, after they had put the torch to their church, and had told them: 'You are burning the churches without thinking of the grief you are causing your mothers, sisters, daughter, parents, in whose veins flows Christian, Catholic blood. Do not believe that by burning churches you are going to change that blood and that tomorrow everyone will feel himself, herself an atheist. On the contrary! The more you violate their consciences, the more they will side with the church. Moreover, the immense majority of you are believers at heart.'

Fraser added: 'He demanded that all lives and all property – not only religious – be respected. The column's task was to fight the enemy in open combat, not take justice into its hands.'³⁷

The Situation in Madrid

The anarchists did not dominate Madrid during the early part of the Civil War, as they did in Catalonia and Aragón. In the beginning, the Spanish government had more control of that city than of any other part of the Republic. However, even there the anarchists had considerable influence, and to a considerable degree operated on their own during the early months of the Civil War. As I have indicated in an earlier part of this book, the CNT's Defense Committee of the

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Center continued throughout the War to have great influence in the anarchist military units operating in the central front.

Jesús de Galíndez, a Basque Nationalist, who was assigned by the government to investigate, and try to prevent *paseos* in Madrid, has noted that both the CNT and the Communist Party had their *chekas* in the early part of the War. In that period, they would enter the regular jails and take people out, transferring them to their own headquarters, and sooner or later doing away with them.

However, Galíndez commented on the different kinds of experiences which he had in dealing with the anarchist and Communist *chekas*. He said that the anarchists took people out in a fit of moral indignation and political passion, but when he would ask for a particular person and say that he would either vouch for the individual or take him back to the jail, he would be believed and could usually free the person. In the case of the Communists, however, they were working according to a plan, and they would deny that they had ever seen the man in question, even when Galíndez would have proof that the man was there.

Largo Caballero became aware of what was happening. He thereupon appointed an anarchist, Melchor Rodríguez, as head of the prisons in Madrid. Thereupon, according to Galíndez, the seizure of prisoners from the jails ceased.

The worst massacre that occurred in Madrid was the attack on the Model Prison as the Franco troops were about to start their frontal attack on the city, at the beginning of November. Jesús de Galíndez was convinced that that attack in which 600 prisoners were killed in cold blood, was organized deliberately by the Communists.³⁸

Terrorism in Asturias

The breakdown of authority in Asturias also resulted in considerable terror against enemies or supposed enemies of the Republic and the Revolution. Javier R. Muñóz has written about the region: 'In the first months of war there was carried out the largest number of

murders... Settling of accounts, reprisals, sadism, were some of the ingredients which created the macabre salad of blood which was shed in those months.'

Muñoz noted that with the establishment in September 1936 of a *de facto* government of the region based in Gijón, and organization of the popular tribunal there, 'an end was put to the previous excesses... based on known data on executions in which their date is given, one can be sure that something more than 60 percent of the total deaths were produced in the months of July to September 1936. In the following months a few assassinations occurred, the work of authentic incontrollables, until the final months of the war, September and October 1937, in which terror was let loose again, with about 20 percent of all the executions.'

The popular tribunal took up a number of cases of the 'uncontrollables'. Muñoz noted that under charges of illegal detentions the tribunal imposed three death sentences and one sentence of 30 years in jail.³⁹

Anticlericalism of the Anarchists

Special attention must be paid to the terrorism directed by the anarchists against the Catholic church, its priests, nuns, and lay supporters, particularly during the first few months of the Civil War. Although nearly all of the political groups supporting the Republic – except for the Basque Nationalists – were anticlerical, it was the anarchists who were most militantly so, and there is substantial evidence that they were principally responsible for carrying out violent attacks not only on the church buildings, but also on the clergymen and others who were associated with them.

Before looking at what the anarchists actually did during the Civil War, it is important to explore the reasons for their particularly vitriolic opposition to the Catholic Church. It was this specially strong and passionate feeling which lay behind what the anarchists did to the Church and its clergy and supporters during the Civil War.

Gerald Brenan's explanation has received considerable support

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from other analysts. Although he talked particularly about the anarchists in the rural parts of southern Spain, he did note that many of the members of the working class in Catalonia were first or second generation migrants from Andalusia by the time the Civil War broke out, and so his analysis applied to them as well:

The fanatical hatred of the Anarchists for the Church and the extraordinary violence of their attack upon it during the Civil War are things which are known to everyone... It can only, I think, be explained as the hatred of heretics for the Church from which they have sprung.⁴⁰

I would suggest then that the anger of the Spanish Anarchists against the Church is the anger of an intensely religious people who feel they have been deserted and deceived. The priests and the monks left them at a critical moment in their history and went over to the rich. The humane and enlightened principles of the great theologians of the seventeenth century were set to the side. The people then began to suspect... that all the words of the Church were hypocrisy. When they took up the struggle for the Christian utopia it was therefore against the Church and not with it...⁴¹

Dr Semprún Currea, a faculty member of the University of Madrid, a conservative politician, and contributor to the Spanish Catholic review *Cruz y Raya*, seemed to confirm Brennan's analysis in an article in the French periodical *Esprit* in 1936:

For anyone who has studied it on the spot, the deep and secret root of anti-clericalism in the Spanish people's soul, was a bitter reproach against the priesthood, not because of their being priests, but because of their failure to live up to their condition... Very frequently hatred of the priest or religious comes from the fact that he does not sufficiently conform to his calling. He is not blamed for believing in Christ, but blamed because he does not imitate Christ; he is not blamed for his vows and his rules, but for not keeping them faithfully; he is not insulted for preaching the next life and the renunciation of this, but for not

renouncing this earthly life, and for seeming to have forgotten the other.¹⁴²

Professor José Sanchez, the historian of the Church during the Civil War has cited other Spanish authorities who seemed to agree with the analysis of Gerald Brenan. He quoted Mauricio Serrahima, 'a Catalan Lawyer and active Catholic layman and political activist' to the effect: 'I always maintained that, deep down, these burnings were an act of faith. That's to say an act of protest because the church was not, in the people's eyes, what it should be. The disappointment of someone who believes and loves and is betrayed. It springs from the idea that the church should be on the side of the poor – and isn't...'¹⁴³

Sánchez also cited Manuel de Irujo, the Basque Nationalist, and Catholic, who served as minister in the Republican governments of both Largo Caballero and Juan Negrín. Irujo said: 'The burning of churches has nothing to do with anti-religious feeling; it is a protest against the state and if you allow me to say so, a sort of appeal to God against human injustice.'¹⁴⁴ Sánchez himself noted:

The question of the clergy's socioeconomic role in Spain. This role became the justification for the violence that earned the revolutionaries support and sympathy from liberals and workers abroad... Perceptions were more important than reality. The clergy were perceived and labeled as social hypocrites. It was easy to do so, especially in a country with such great social needs and with such a large and culturally powerful clerical establishment... The Spanish clergy had, for nearly a hundred years before 1936, been criticized for allying themselves with the wealthy in the always simmering class war... it is also likely that in the developing bourgeois economy of the early twentieth century with its growing class divisions and class consciousness, the clergy catered to the wealthy because they felt more at ease among those who attended their masses and aided them in their evangelical work...¹⁴⁵

Church burning certainly did not begin during the Civil War. It had

been a feature of insurrections and civil strife during much of the nineteenth century, and during the *semana tragica* of 1909 in Barcelona, 17 churches and 23 monasteries were burned.⁴⁶

Anti-Republican Position of the Church

In addition to the long-standing anticlericalism of the anarchists and other supporters of the Republican cause, there was an additional, more immediate, reason for the great hostility towards the Church during the Civil War. This was the fact that the Church hierarchy and most of the clergy – except in the Basque region – were more or less frank supporters of the Rebel cause.

José Sánchez noted: 'In most of these cases the clergy were pictured as conspirators with the military, and it was believed that they had arms hidden in their churches and rectories or else had actually fired at the enemies of the uprising.'⁴⁷

There was considerable reason behind the clergy being thus pictured. On what happened in Barcelona on July 19–20, Diego Abad de Santillán wrote: 'We did not prevent churches and convents being attacked as reprisal for the resistance carried out from them by the army and the servants of God. In all we encountered armament or we forced surrender of the forces parapeted in them...'⁴⁸

There were certainly clergymen who remained in Republican territory throughout the War, and escaped being arrested, who worked closely with the Rebel forces. A dozen years after the end of the War, Pedro Bernardino Antón Ortiz, who at the time of our conversation was head of the ecclesiastical advisory board of the *sindicato* system of the Franco regime, recounted to me his own activities during the War.

He had not been in his parish when the fighting broke out in Madrid, and so did not fall into the hands of militiamen who came looking for him. When he did return home, one of his parishioners gave him the use of her apartment, out of which she had moved when the trouble began. He spent the War there, and found work as a truck driver, a store clerk, and for six months running his own

business, making and selling souvenirs to Republican soldiers. However, he was also engaged in underground activities against the Republican forces in Madrid, collecting information, which he had means of getting across to the Rebel lines; making false papers, among others his own. At the end of the War, he was given the status of a combatant by the new regime, and was awarded the War Veteran Medal by Franco.⁴⁹

In the part of Spain held by the Rebel forces, the Church hierarchy and clergy were clearly strong supporters of the Franco side in the Civil War. José Sánchez has noted that, having proclaimed Spain officially Catholic, 'The Nationalists, although there were unbelievers and anticlericals among them, allowed the bishops to exercise power in educational, social, and cultural affairs in order to get their support and the support of believing Catholics... The bishops were thus cast into a political role whether they liked it or not. This role probably gave them an exaggerated sense of their own power. They were asked to preside at military and civil functions, to preach to troops, to serve on political committees...'⁵⁰

Finally, in August 1937, the hierarchy of the Spanish church, with the exception of two bishops, issued a collective letter, 'addressed to their fellow bishops throughout the world':⁵¹ 'Having defended the uprising as just and shown the revolutionaries to be directed by foreign conspirators... announced the bishops' support of the Nationalists, who it said represented the Spanish nation and had established a regime of law, order, and justice and had even "released a current of love for the fatherland."... As for the charges that the Nationalists were barbarous in their treatment of captured Republicans, the letter did not defend these "excesses" but said that there was no comparison between the "outrages against justice" on the Republican side and the orderly administration of justice by the Nationalists.'⁵²

The bishops' endorsement of the Rebel cause was certainly unequivocal: 'We affirm that the civic-military rising has taken a double hold on the depths of the popular conscience, that of the patriotic sense, which has seen in it the only means of raising up Spain and of avoiding her definite ruin; and that of the religious sense which considered it as the forces necessary to reduce to impotence the enemies of God, and as the warrant of continuity for her faith and

the practice of her religion... For the moment there is no hope in Spain for the reconquering of justice and peace and the blessings that derive from them, other than the triumph of the Nationalist Movement.⁵³

Extent of Terror Against the Church

José Sánchez has written that ‘The anticlerical fury of 1936 has a special meaning and significance. It was the greatest clerical bloodletting in the entire history of the Christian Church. No other fury in modern times approaches the Spanish conflict in the total number of clerics killed, or the percentage of victims of the total, or in the short time openly involved.’⁵⁵

‘The stark facts, and they are the best recorded among the many deaths in the Spanish War and its associated terrors, are that nearly seven thousand clerics were killed, most of them within the six-month period from July to December 1936.’ He paraphrased Antonio Montero Moreno to the effect that ‘4,184 were secular (diocesan clergy, 2,365 were male regular clergy – those belonging to a religious order or congregation), and 283 were nuns, all together for a total of 6,832.’⁵⁶ Thirteen bishops were killed.

There were at the time almost 30,000 secular priests, 3,500 seminarians, of whom 12 percent were killed. There were about 20,000 ordained and unordained and novice clergy of the religious orders, of whom 11 percent were killed.

Sánchez concluded that ‘about a quarter of the male clergy behind Republican lines were killed... In addition to these deaths an incalculable number of lay persons were killed because of their religious associations, either as well-known churchgoers, members of fraternal and charitable religious organizations, or as the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and friends of clerics. Some were killed because they professed their faith by wearing some outward symbol of belief, perhaps a religious medal or scapular...’⁵⁷

Professor Sánchez continued: ‘The fury lasted some six months, through the remainder of 1936... About 80 percent of the clergy were killed in the first two and a half months of the war, from the

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beginning of the uprising in mid-July to October 1. Another 15 percent occurred in the following three months, up to the end of the year on December 31, 1936. Thus, 95 percent of the killings took place within the first six months of the war. Assassinations were sporadic after that...⁵⁸

There were apparently sometimes peculiar judgments about which priests should be murdered. According to Franz Borkenau, in the Catalan village of Tosas, 'There were two priests in the village, one fanatic and strict, the other lax in every respect and especially with the village girls. This latter one the village had hidden from arrest since the beginning of the revolution, while the "good" priest, hated by the whole village as an ally of the reactionaries, had tried to flee and broke his neck by falling from a rock.'⁵⁹

That the assassinations of clergy and others usually had a 'political' or 'anticlerical' motivation, rather than a personal one, was shown by another aspect of the situation. According to José Sánchez,

It should be noted that among all the terrible instances of torture and cruelty no nuns were sexually violated during the entire period by any anticlerical. Montero Moreno (who would be naturally sympathetic to recounting such stories if they existed) contradicts statements made during the first months of the war that naked nuns were forced to dance in public and that there were wholesale rapes by Republican militiamen. In his exhaustive examination he says that Spaniards have an inherent respect for women, and especially for virgins consecrated to God, and that when nuns were arrested and sexually threatened and there appeared no cause for hope, among the members of the committees of soldiers there would appear a spontaneous defender who would protect the nuns.⁶⁰

This conclusion of Professor Sánchez runs against the claims made by Franco's partisans during the Civil War. For instance, the Joint Letter of the Spanish Bishops endorsing the Franco cause, said: 'The honor of women has not been respected, not even of those consecrated to God...'⁶¹

After a few months, formal prosecution before a revolutionary

court largely took the place of mob action against Catholic clergy and laymen. John McGovern, an Independent Labor Party member of the British Parliament and a Roman Catholic, attended two such trials. One was of five members of the Catholic Fascist Youth Organization, accused of participating in the Rebellion in Barcelona on July 19. McGovern reported that they 'all admitted their crime', and were found guilty. 'The prosecutor demanded the death penalty. The Court was composed of a lawyer as President and twelve others drawn from the working-class organizations. They rejected the demand for the death penalty. The prisoners were sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment.'

The second trial was of four monks charged with firing on Government airplanes with a machine-gun from the roof of a small monastery. 'Three had tried to escape, the fourth had surrendered, protesting that he hadn't done anything, and was freed before the trial began, with the approval of the prosecutor. For the other three he demanded the death penalty... Three of them were found guilty and one not guilty. The one was liberated; the other three were sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment.'⁶²

Killing of clergymen and faithful laymen was not the only aspect of the onslaught on the Catholic Church on the Republican side during the Civil War. Professor Sánchez does not present any estimate of how many churches and other religious edifices were destroyed. But he noted: 'Thousands of churches were burned, religious objects were profaned, nuns' tombs were opened and the petrified mummies displayed to ridicule, and religious ceremonies were burlesqued. Indeed, practically any imaginable anticlerical act was not only possible but likely.'⁶³

Franz Borkenau, in his first visit to revolutionary Spain, described a church burning in Barcelona:

On my way home I saw the burning of a church, and again it was a big surprise. I imagined it would be an act of almost demoniac excitement of the mob, and it proved to be an administrative business. The burning church stood in a corner of the big Plaza de Cataluña. Flames were devouring it rapidly. A small group of people stood about (it was about 11 p.m.) silently

watching, certainly not regretting the burning, but as certainly not very excited about the matter. The fire-brigade did service at the spot, carefully limiting the flames to the church and protecting the surrounding buildings; nobody was allowed to come near the burning church – in order to avoid accidents – and to this regulation people submitted with surprising docility...⁶⁴

The church burners were often careful to save what they deemed to be works of art. John Langdon-Davies visited the Office of Works in Barcelona where such things were gathered. 'In the building ... there was great activity. In every corner piles on piles of saints and virgins, crucifixes and paintings and carvings; men going this way and that with new boxes of objects just arrived; women at tables typing lists of treasure sent in to the government for safe keeping...'⁶⁵

Not only churches but other religious objects were burned in the early phase of the Civil war. Borkenau recounted what had happened in the Catalan seaside town of Tosas. 'The burning of religious objects had been performed there...' A POUMist militiawoman recounted to Borkenau that 'she had got the impression that the peasant women disliked giving up their religious objects, but that afterwards they went away convinced that now Catholicism had come to an end; she heard then saying things like: *San José ha muerto* (Saint Joseph is dead). The next day the village itself abolished the greeting *A Dios* (with God) – because now there is no more God in heaven.'⁶⁶

The one part of Republican Spain in which there was no persecution of churchmen was the Basque region. The Basque Nationalists, who were strongly supported by the Catholic clergy of the region, were the predominant political force in the regime. As long as the War lasted in that part of Spain, the priests were free to conduct their religious and other affairs, although usually they did not use their clerical garb when they went out in the streets, just as a precaution. There were chaplains in the parts of the Loyalist army under the control of the Basque Nationalist Party.⁶⁷

Indeed the persecution of the priests in the Basque area came from the Rebel forces, once they had captured the region. At least 14 priests were executed by the Franco forces when they conquered the

province of Guipuzcoa early in the War, and many more were jailed by the Rebels there, and later in Vizcaya when they overran that part of the Basque country.⁶⁸

Anarchist Responsibility for Anticlerical Terror

People of quite different points of view tend to agree that the anarchists bore much of the responsibility for the anticlerical terrorism of the first months of the Civil War. According to Gerald Brenan, 'Without going far wrong one may say that all the churches recently burned in Spain were burned by Anarchists and that most of the priests killed were killed by them.'⁶⁹

For his part, José Sánchez has noted that 'most evidence points to the anarchists as forming the main ranks of the uncontrollables'.⁷⁰ 'In both Aragón and Valencia much of the killing was done by outsiders, by anarchist members of the military units moving toward the front. In Aragón the Durruti column and in Valencia the Iron Column both attacked local churches and priests who had been spared by the local populace, or agitated among rural folk with tales of conspiracy in the larger cities, or else urged them to kill the priests as enemies of the Republic and the revolution.'⁷¹

Sánchez also noted: 'Once the uprising began and the revolution was unleashed, violence became commonplace, and the anarchist press talked violence in the broadest terms.' He cited a passage from *Solidaridad Obrera* of August 15 1936: 'The Church has to disappear forever... The priest, the friar, the Jesuit, have dominated Spain, we must extirpate them... The religious orders must be dissolved, the bishops and cardinals must be shot; and church property must be expropriated.'⁷²

Given the almost total domination of the anarchists in Catalonia and Aragón, and their extensive influence in the Levante and Asturias, during the first phase of the Civil War, when the church burnings and murders of clerics and faithful laymen was at their height, there can be little doubt about the fact that the anarchists bore the major responsibility for these events in those parts of Republican Spain. However, the question remains concerning the

attitude of the anarchist leadership towards persecution of churchmen.

From the evidence offered by one of the principal Catalan FAI leaders at that time, Diego Abad de Santillán, one may conclude, perhaps, that their attitude was equivocal. In his book published a year after the end of the Civil War, Santillán wrote: 'The Church was deprived by the triumph of July of its riches and its functions. Why persecute its servants? The nuns and monks showed a desire to leave for abroad and we saw no motives to retain them against their wishes ... wasn't it better that they left rather than that they stayed permanently conspiring? How many people haven't come to us saying that they had relatives, priests, monks or nuns, in their houses and asking our advice! Has a single one heard from us a word or a gesture of opposition? Haven't we given all the maximum guarantees of respect always so long as they didn't involve themselves in the things of the new revolutionary order?'

However, then, after recounting two cases of priests involved directly in the Rebel uprising, Santillán commented: 'A church which thus fights for the worst causes has nothing to do with religion and cannot be defended against the ire of the people.' Then, perhaps a little disingenuously, he wrote: '... A revolutionary organization like the FAI has not considered, either before or after the 19th of July, that it should intervene against it, once it was deprived of its instruments of spiritual and material oppression. It respected the beliefs of all and demanded a regime of tolerance and of pacific coexistence of religions and of political and social creeds.'⁷³

The anarchists were certainly far from unanimous in carrying out, or even favoring, violent action against churchmen and church buildings. We have noted in an earlier chapter the action of Félix Carresquer, a leader of the FAI in Catalonia who, when put in charge of a large hospital in Barcelona, prevented the arrest of nuns who had served in the institution, and kept them on in their jobs.

John McGovern, the British ILP Member of Parliament, claimed: '... The working-class leaders are protecting the religious leaders from bodily harm. There was the case of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Barcelona. There was a crowd of tens of thousands, some say of nearly 100,000 outside his Palace demanding his life. Durruti, the

Anarchist leader ... came upon the scene with only twenty armed men. He addressed the crowd from the steps of the Palace... He brought out the Bishop, put him in a motor car and handed him to the Government of Catalonia, who placed him on an Italian warship. Five hundred priests and monks were placed on the same warship. Hundred of nuns were escorted over the frontier to safety...⁷⁴

There were cases in which the local anarchist leaders sought to protect clergymen, even high-ranking ones. For instance, in the town of Salsona, near the French frontier, the old bishop of the area was taken across the border by five members of the anarchist-controlled revolutionary committee. (Four of the five were executed by the Rebels when they finally captured the region.)⁷⁵

In the city of Badalona, near Barcelona, according to the wartime anarchist mayor of the town, Joan Manent, after a mob of about 2,000 people had attacked a local monastery, not only did the CNT send militiamen to prevent the burning of its library, it also sought to prevent the murder of the monks.

According to Manent, '... We were unable to prevent the crowd bringing thirty-eight monks, including the prior, down to Badalona to kill them. Two were killed and two wounded en route. Seeing men armed with pikes bringing the monks in, I thought I could see the guillotine waiting in the square, so much did the scene remind me of the French revolution.'

The CNT had gathered 200 armed militiamen in the Badalona town square, who proceeded to arrest the ringleaders of the crowd and to take the monks back to the monastery. Subsequently, they arranged with President Luis Companys to have the monks – many of whom were foreigners – sent abroad.⁷⁶

One may also note, perhaps as a curiosity, the implied criticism of excessive anticlericalism on the part of Juan García Oliver. When he set up his office as minister of justice in Valencia, in an expropriated house of an aristocrat, he refused to have the pictures, many of them religious in themes, which were hanging on the walls of the building, removed, as other ministers were doing under similar circumstances. When asked about this by the dean of Canterbury, he replied, 'It is easy to explain... The motives are various. The pictures don't bother me; on the contrary, they are agreeable for me, whether their themes

are religious, personal, military or pastoral. And when I feel very fatigued, physically and intellectually, I look at the pictures, intent on knowing the passions of their characters and, little by little I feel a wave of relaxation.¹⁷⁷

In December 1938, only four months before the end of the War, the anarchists formally modified their extreme anticlerical position. The Negrín government established a commissariat of cults which 'was the definitive recognition of religious liberty'. After a bitter debate, the national committee of the CNT finally endorsed this move of the government.

On this, César Lorenzo commented, 'A page had been turned: the anarchists who had never ceased combating bitterly the priests as well as the bishops, the faith as well as the theology, and the sincere believers as well as the dogmas ... finally perceived that it was necessary to nuance their positions dictated more by passion and resentment than by revolutionary will.'¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

There are several conclusions which one can reach about anarchist violence and terrorism during the Civil War.

First, there was certainly an element of violence and even terrorism in the tradition of Spanish anarchism. In part, this came from the social history of Spain, which was marked by many incidents of local peasant insurrections and rural brigands who robbed and even murdered local landlords, priests and rural political bosses, with the tolerance and even approval of the peasants. On the other hand, it also came from the strategy of 'propaganda of the deed' endorsed by some elements of the international anarchist movement in the two or three generations before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

In the second place, there was a spontaneous outburst of violence following the defeat of the Rebellion in much of Spain, during which workers killed their employers, peasants murdered their landlords, anticlericals assassinated clerics and lay believers, and supporters of the Republic killed members of the political groups associated with the Rebels, an outburst in which anarchist workers played a major

part. This was followed by a more organized kind of terrorism, the *paseo*, in which small groups of militants, anarchists and others, selected candidates to be eliminated and proceeded to kill them.

This problem of terrorism, whether spontaneous or in a more organized way (the *paseos*), presented the anarchist leadership very early on with one of the quandaries which would continue to face them throughout the war. They, the prime enemies of all kinds of 'authority', were forced to exercise authority in order to establish instruments – the patrols and revolutionary tribunals – which could put an end to this kind of violence. And they did so.

With the re-establishment of an element of government in the various regions of Republican Spain, popular tribunals were established, before which those accused of crimes against the Republic were brought for trial. At the same time, time anarchist leaders in the various regional governments of the Republic personally extended themselves to bring an end to *paseos*.

A fourth fact which is obvious is that some of the anarchist-controlled militia units, as they reconquered some areas, particularly in Aragón, undertook to wipe out 'fascists', or others who were miscreants from their point of view, or to get the local peasantry to do so. The Durruti Column, moving into Aragón from Catalonia, and the Iron Column entering southern Aragón from Valencia, were particularly active in this.

Fifth, the anarchists were particularly violent in their attacks on the Catholic Church, its clergy and its faithful. As in the case of other terrorist acts, the attacks on the clergy and the church buildings were largely concentrated in the first weeks of the Civil War/Revolution. They were a reflection of the deep-seated anticlericalism of the Spanish anarchist movement, and were mainly spontaneous reactions to the breakdown of law and order and the resulting opportunity to vent their ire on an institution, and its servants, which they thought had betrayed them. In this case, too, however, there were additional actions against clergy and church buildings by those who organized *paseos* and by some of the anarchist militia columns, even when the parishioners were not anxious to punish the priests or destroy the buildings.

On the other hand, there were certainly many anarchists, both of

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the rank and file and the leadership, who opposed such drastic actions against the Church. In some cases, individual anarchists undoubtedly ran considerable personal risks to try to prevent such activities. Also, some anarchist leaders tried to stop, or at least to mitigate, them.

What also seems clear is that both in the terror against employers, landlords and political enemies of the Republic, and in those against the Church, the people carrying out these attacks were generally motivated by ideological or political reasons, not by personal ones. Although there were clearly criminal elements who participated in such actions, the great majority of those involved were not motivated by any desire to enrich themselves or otherwise gain personal benefits. The anarchist leaders were particularly anxious to end any such personally motivated criminal activities, and sought to do so when they acquired the power.

Finally, two distinctions have to be made between the kinds of events we have been discussing, and other kinds of outrages which occurred during the Civil War. The first of these is the deliberate extermination organized from the highest Rebel authorities within areas under their control of all of those leading, or even belonging to, parties, unions or other organizations supporting the Republic. Perhaps with some exceptions, there was little spontaneity about these actions since there was no breakdown of military and police authority, in sharp contrast to what happened on the Republican side.

Second, the violence and even terrorism, which took place on the Republican side in the early phases of the War, in which the anarchists had a major role, must be differentiated from the kind of terror which took place on the Republican side in the last two-thirds of the War, after the May Days of Barcelona.

The arrests, tortures, murders and other kinds of terrorism carried out by the Stalinists after May 1937 – and even before that date – had nothing spontaneous about them, had no relationship to Spanish traditions, in no sense reflected the reactions of the Spanish people to historic repression and abuse. They were part of a deliberate strategy to destroy all opponents of the Stalinists' drive to gain absolute control of the Spanish Republic and to subordinate the interests of

that republic to those of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. They were ordered and planned by the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party, the Comintern, and by the Soviet GPU agents, military advisers and diplomatic representatives then in Loyalist Spain.

In contrast to the Stalinists, the Spanish anarchists, as we have noted, had made the decision during the first days of the Civil War not to try to establish their own absolutist regime in Republican Spain. Whatever might have been their ability to establish such an 'anarchist dictatorship', they clearly were not trying to do this during the War. And whatever terrorist activities the anarchists engaged in did not have that objective. They were random and spontaneous. That does not make them any less horrendous, insofar as their victims were concerned, but it does constitute a real distinction between their terrorist activities, and those carried out in the Rebel-held part of Spain, and by the Stalinists within the Republic.

Appendix 2

Spanish Anarchists and the International Movement During the Civil War

One of the great disadvantages of the Spanish anarchists in their conflict with the Stalinists and their allies during the Civil War was the CNT–FAI's lack of strong support from an international movement. Although the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo belonged to the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA or by its Spanish initials, AIT), this group was exceedingly weak, compared with the Communist International, which had 'sections' in all of the European countries, as well as in most of those of America, and many nations of Asia and a few in Africa, and which was backed and directed by a major world power, Stalin's Soviet Union.

Although the CNT had decided to join the Communist International when the Comintern was first established in 1919, it subsequently reversed that decision, and was a founding member of the IWMA, established in 1922. However, except for the CNT itself, the affiliates of the IWMA were extremely small minority elements in their national labor movements. After the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, the only country (except Spain) in which the anarchists controlled a labor group of any significance was Sweden. Even the Swedish anarcho-syndicalist organization was a small minority in the country's labor movement.

Thus the Spanish anarchists were not able, as were their Stalinist opponents, to mobilize widespread propaganda and material support for their participation in the Spanish Civil War and Revolution. However, even worse, from the point of view of the Spanish anarchists, was the fact that many of the leaders of libertarian groups outside Spain were highly critical of the compromises which their Spanish colleagues made with their basic ideology and beliefs in the process of the Civil War. This was in sharp contrast with the highly disciplined backing of the Comintern and its affiliates for every move of the Spanish Stalinists and its Comintern and Soviet supporters throughout the Civil War.

The Influx of Foreign Anarchists into Spain

As soon as the Rebels had been defeated in Catalonia, largely by the anarchists, libertarians from abroad swarmed into Barcelona, to join the CNT–FAI militia or otherwise to support the anarchist-led Revolution. At the same time, foreign sympathizers both inside the country and from abroad offered their services to the CNT and FAI.

Some of the foreigners came to enlist in the anarchists' militia. I have no information on how many such volunteers there were. However, I know something about the Italian antifascists who arrived and joined the Ascaso Column shortly after the beginning of the War. They were led by the anarchist exile, Camilo Berneri:

There were, together with the anarchists, members of the Italian Republican Party, Socialist Republican Action, the Maximalist Socialist Party and the 'Giustizia e Libertá' group, who as Berneri said, 'preferred – recognizing the great role of Spanish anarchism in the struggle against fascism – ours to the other militias'. They had their baptism of fire in the battle of Monte Pelado, outside of Huesca on the 28th of August 1936, but by December the Italian legion restructured itself in two battalions, the 'Matteoti' which was led by the Rosselli brothers and Luigi Battistelli, and that of the anarchists who, with other volunteers,

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formed the 'International Battalions', both of which were always part of the Ascaso Column.¹

On August 17, a formal 'Act Constituting the Italian Column of Barcelona' was signed by Berneri for the anarchists, Carlo Rosselli for Giustizia e Liberta, and Angeloni of the Italian Republican Party. Carlos Rama has noted that from letters Berneri wrote after becoming the delegate of the Italian anarchist section in Barcelona, to his comrades at the Huesca front: 'We know ... that he understood that not only must the other Italian revolutionary groups be accepted on the basis of equality and fraternity in the anarchist "Italian section", keeping the "Italian column" in the Ascaso Column, but that this is a kind of guarantee against the process of recuperation of the counterrevolutionary forces in the Republican camp...'²

David Porter has suggested that of the 5,000 foreigners who Hugh Thomas reported as belonging to militia units in Catalonia, 'no doubt a large percentage of these were anarchists, especially from Italy, Germany and France... French anarchists, for example, formed a 'Sebastian Faure' *centuria* (a unit of about 100 men), as part of the Durruti Column on the Saragossa front. Though indeed greatly outnumbered by non-anarchists of the International Brigades... the experience and contribution of these anarchist volunteers has been disproportionately neglected...'³

Within a few weeks of the outbreak of the War, many prominent anarchist leaders from abroad came to visit, to see the Revolution which their Spanish colleagues had brought to pass, frequently to offer advice, and increasingly to criticize. Among those who came for longer or shorter periods of time were the German anarchists Augustine Souchy and Rudolph Rocker, the Austrian Max Nettlau, the Russian-American Emma Goldman, the Frenchmen Gaston Leval and Pierre Besnard.

Although more details are given later, three of these foreign anarchists are worthy of comment at this point. Rudolph Rocker was one of the leading figures in the German anarchist movement, and had been one of the founders of the International Workingmen's Association. During the Civil War, Rocker travelled widely around

Appendix 2

Loyalist Spain, particularly observing the rural collectives organized by the anarchists in Aragón and elsewhere, and during and after the War wrote extensively about what he observed in those communities. After the Spanish Civil War, Rocker moved to the United States, where he spent the rest of his life.

Augustine Souchy was also a well-known German anarchist. He spent much of the Civil War in Spain, and wrote extensively about the rural collectives and the May Events. Many years later, after the death of Franco, he returned to Spain with a German film crew to try to recreate at least some of what had happened during the Civil War.

Gaston Leval had had a long association with Spanish anarchism. During and right after the First World War he had been a secondary leader of the CNT. He accompanied Angel Pestaña to Moscow to decide whether the CNT should join the new Red International of Labor Unions (RILU). When the two men returned, they recommended that the Spanish group not affiliate with the RILU, and instead that it should attend the congress of anarcho-syndicalist organizations in Berlin in 1922, which established the International Workingmen's Association. Subsequently, because of problems with the police in France and Spain, Leval had gone to Argentina, where he was also active in the anarchist movement.

Leval returned to Spain a few months after the outbreak of the Civil War. Like Rocker, he travelled extensively around the Republic, looking at both rural and urban collectives, and writing widely about them. At the end of the Civil War, he returned to France, where he continued to expound on what the anarchists had done during the Civil War.⁴

A number of the foreign anarchists and sympathizers worked with the publicity and propaganda apparatus established by the CNT-FAI soon after the outbreak of the Civil War. The foreign propaganda office was established in Barcelona on July 23 1936. It began immediately to publish bulletins in various languages, and a Periodical *Espagne Antifasciste* in Paris.⁵

IWMA Operations in Barcelona

A plenum of the IWMA in November 1936 decided, according to Helmut Rudiger, that 'the propaganda for CNT-FAI should be controlled by the IWMA', and this 'was accepted with approval from the CNT'. 'The propaganda would, of course, still be in the hands of CNT-FAI and correspond to the needs of the two organizations. But it referred to organized propaganda, adapted to the situation in each country by IWMA. This was because the world was supposed to get the impression that there was a deep and real agreement between CNT and international anarcho-syndicalism.'

As a consequence of this decision, in January 1937 Rudiger established in Barcelona the permanent delegation of the IWMA, 'a common organ for all representatives of IWMA sections stationed in Spain'.⁶ The delegation 'consisted of one delegate from the Polish section, one from the French - CGTSR - and one from the Swedish - SAC - with mandates directly from their respective organizations. In addition, representatives from the illegal movements, Germans and Italians, participated with representation from their respective groups in Barcelona, and naturally one delegate from CNT. Later on, we had the opportunity to increase the organization with three or four additional delegates, but at that time it was already too late, since CNT-FAI had already made our idea of a federalist and collective organization for its foreign propaganda impossible to fulfill.'⁷

This system of collaboration between the representatives of the IWMA and the Spanish anarchists soon broke down. Helmut Rudiger wrote later that this occurred not so much because of the national committee's position as of 'the systematic work of sabotage that commenced with FAI's Peninsular Committee from the very day that comrade Agustin Souchy became member of this same Peninsular Committee.' Rudiger added: 'It was by the way very unexpected that *he* in particular would become adviser to an *anarchist* organization.' (Clearly there was bad blood between these two German anarchists which predated the Spanish Civil War.)

Souchy was placed in charge of the CNT-FAI foreign propaganda work and, according to Rudiger, also took over 'those functions that were the responsibility of the IWMA. He did this with such

extremism that the common belief within the CNT was that Souchy was IWMA's secretary.' To try to assuage this situation, the IWMA representatives proposed that the FAI also be represented in the IWMA permanent delegation. However, 'FAI declined and claimed that the IWMA should not seize control over their foreign propaganda. Under the pressure from FAI's Peninsular Committee, the National Committee of CNT annulled – on April 10 – their own former decisions and made new ones.'

According to this new arrangement, 'FAI's representative Martín Sudell, whose co-workers would be the CNT's delegate Cortes and IWMA's secretary, who was appointed director and secretary of foreign propaganda. The Permanent Delegation remained only as a collection of bulletin editors who had to take and carry out orders, instead of being an organism of accredited comrades from foreign IWMA sections as it was supposed to be ... This led to a situation of distrust and made all work more difficult.'⁸

The Spanish anarchists' explanation of this problem differed substantially from Rudiger's. The CNT claimed that the secretary of the IWMA (presumably Rudiger) tried also to have himself named secretary of foreign propaganda of the CNT-FAI, to which the Spaniards would not agree. Finally, according to them, the Spanish anarchists organized a foreign propaganda secretariat, consisting of one representative of the CNT, one of the FAI, and one named by the special IWMA Spanish Secretariat.⁹ Meanwhile, because of the increasingly bitter criticism of the policies of the Spanish anarchists by *Espagne Antifasciste*, the CNT withdrew its financial support from that periodical.¹⁰

All of those working in the foreign propaganda secretariat were not necessarily themselves anarchists. For instance, a young multilingual Czech engineer, who had been working in a Catalan mine since 1933, went to work for the secretariat soon after the Civil War began. He did so because of sympathy for the anarchist movement, sympathy which had survived his being forced out of his mine job after CNT unionists took over the enterprise. He monitored foreign radio broadcasts, and read German, English and Italian newspapers and made resumé's of what they had to say about the Civil War.¹¹

Helmut Rudiger noted some of the weaknesses he saw in this foreign propaganda effort of the CNT–FAI. ‘This propaganda of the first months was allowed to portray an exaggerated optimism, and account was not taken of how complicated was the problem in both social and military terms. Also, the propaganda was limited almost exclusively to Catalonia, where it was thought that victory was in the pocket. All of this made the foreign comrades think that the Social Revolution had already advanced much more than was really true. The internal propaganda of the CNT committed the same error, which must now be dearly paid for.’¹²

Difficulties With Pierre Besnard

Quite early in the War, the CNT leaders had an embarrassing incident with Pierre Besnard, the Frenchman who was secretary of the International Workingmen’s Association. He first arrived in Barcelona while the Antifascist Militia Committee was in charge in Catalonia. Juan García Oliver, then in charge of defense for the militia committee, acted as his host. García Oliver provided him with a car and chauffeur, arranged for his living in a room in the militia committee headquarters, and provided him with spending money in pesetas. However, Besnard returned to France without indicating why he had come.

Besnard returned to Barcelona a couple of months later, after the CNT had entered the Catalan government and García Oliver had become sub-secretary of defense of the Generalidad. He was accompanied by a man he introduced as a representative of the famous international arms dealer, Basil Zaharoff. García Oliver informed him that what the Catalan armed forces most needed at that point was smokeless powder and said that, on behalf of the Catalan government, he would be glad to pay cash for any such powder delivered at the border or at any Catalan port. However, the ‘Zaharoff representative,’ according to García Oliver, ‘told me the good quality of his armaments, of which he could offer me from pistols to tanks and warships. In addition, he could offer me an apparatus of recent invention, which emitted a type of rays which

could sabotage motors of airplanes in flight, that is to say, paralyze them...?

García Oliver came to the conclusion that the Zaharoff representative was a swindler. Besnard took the man to see Durruti, who took him to see Catalan Prime Minister Taradellas, who asked for another meeting, with García Oliver present. Taradellas expressed his willingness to authorize purchase of smokeless powder, cash on delivery, and when Besnard and Durruti urged that he agree to the Zaharoff representative's terms of one-third payment in advance, Taradellas turned to García Oliver and asked, in Catalan, 'What should we do?' García Oliver replied, likewise in Catalan, 'Not a centime.'

García Oliver concluded his account of this incident: 'The meeting ended. Durruti returned to the front, and Pierre Besnard left, without saying goodbye to me.'¹³

The Role of Helmut Rudiger

A special role was played by the German anarchist Helmut Rudiger in the relations between the Spanish anarchists and the international movement with which they were affiliated. Rudiger served throughout much of the Civil War as assistant secretary of the IWMA for Spanish affairs, and spent considerable time in Spain during those years. On May Day 1937 he delivered a commemorative talk on the CNT-FAI Radio in Barcelona.¹⁴ He also attended virtually all the plenums of the CNT national committee on 'and numerous Catalan regional ones'. In May he delivered reports to the national and regional committees on 'our participation in international propaganda and about the movement's international situation'.¹⁵

Rudiger was a strong, though critical, supporter of the Spanish anarchists. He sought to defend them in the face of those elements of the international anarchist movement who severely judged and even denounced the behavior of the CNT-FAI during the Civil War. However, within the IWMA, he was also quite critical of some of the actions and attitudes of the Spaniards.

Rudiger submitted a long report to the special congress of the IWMA in Paris in December 1937. This document began with the

note, 'Attention: this information is not supposed to be published, not even partly. It only serves as internal material for discussion for the movement.' However, the Spanish anarchists shortly afterwards published as a pamphlet long segments of Rudiger's report, particularly those parts favorable to them.

Rudiger was particularly perturbed by the public attacks on the Spanish anarchists by their foreign counterparts:

The criticism of the CNT by foreign sections was explicit at IWMA's plenum in November last year, and also at its latest plenum June 11 this year. It is especially the French section of IWMA that heads towards extremism and has a publicity campaign against the CNT leaders who are accused of betraying the revolution. They do not see that CNT is in an enormous struggle for life and death, they still continue their struggle against CNT, in the open for all eyes and ears in the world, which hurts the reputation of our international movement... The discussion in public these last weeks has assumed a poisonous character on such a low level, with so little objectivity and on such personal terms, that the moment has arrived when we in the movement have to make clear to ourselves the danger and the consequences, if we continue down this road. We have to put an end to these actions, wherever they occur. I believe we can find them on both sides.¹⁶

Rudiger's document sketched the evolution of the CNT in the decades preceding the Civil War and then defended the decision of the Spanish anarchists to collaborate with other elements which were defending the Republic in the face of the military insurrection headed (ultimately) by General Francisco Franco. He observed: 'Naturally, the movement could have attempted a totalitarian realization of its objectives, at least in Catalonia. But this would have been something like a double assassination: heroic suicide for the CNT and concession of the whole people to the assassin Franco.'¹⁷

Rudiger particularly warned against attempts on the part of the simon-pure anarchists abroad to split the Spanish libertarians. 'There was discussion of an opposition in the CNT as if it was an organism

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which might even be capable of forming a new central labor group affiliated with the IWMA in Spain, in case the CNT retired from the IWMA. This detail is the proof that some comrades in the exterior have a completely mistaken vision of Spanish reality, and also of the mission of the IWMA at this time. In fact, it looks as if certain anarchist elements in the exterior want a schism in the CNT and that they foment it...¹⁸

In his document Rudiger noted the lack of precision on the part of the CNT in its attempts to reorganize the economy. This was particularly true with regard to the problem of the petty bourgeoisie:

What will be the economic relationship between the workers' *sindicato* which administers large industry and large commerce and the sector of the economy in the hands of small proprietors who have few workers or only work with their own family? What concrete form will the economic system take based on these two factors? What should be the coercive means to oblige the petty bourgeois to work in the new order if he doesn't do so voluntarily, or begins to sabotage?

One must say that many anarchists, in attempting to answer all these questions, talk as if the world was still in the Middle Ages... We say frankly, that the CNT doesn't have a program in this regard; but we admit with equal frankness that in all of the other sections of the AIT there also doesn't exist any clarity in this regard.¹⁹

Rudiger was very annoyed at what he regarded as unwarranted criticism of the Spanish anarchists by their foreign comrades:

It is totally incomprehensible to me that in certain press of the AIT they write against the CNT and publish, week after week, true or supposed deficiencies of the Spanish movement, as if these were happy times in which we have no other preoccupation than discussion who is ideologically most pure.²⁰

The mission of creating a true and cohesive revolutionary theory of international anarchosyndicalism, within which all will work, is in these circumstances a very hard task and requires

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for work of this kind great comradeship, much tact and a conscientious analysis of the realities which surround us and of the Spanish experience. How ignoble it is in these moments to come out in public with accusations against comrades that in general find themselves in a much more dangerous situation than the article writer!...

I think that it will be necessary to study, together with the CNT, our old principles to reach accord on them and obtain a clear impression of the position which each of the sections has. But after fixing the general links in which all can and wish to work, it is necessary to introduce a certain change in the statutes of the AIT, conceding, henceforward, a margin of freedom for each section in the choice of tactical methods.²¹

Rudiger was particularly critical of foreign anarchist criticism of the Spaniards' decision to collaborate with other political groups in the Revolution and Civil War: 'There were in that moment only two roads: that of dictatorship or that of collaboration... Many comrades are blinded by hatred against our adversaries, desiring to liquidate and annihilate all that are not in our own organization or subordinated to it. Although this is comprehensible as a psychological reaction against all of the persecution we have suffered, such feelings of vengeance and hatred cannot serve the road to social reconstruction. The satisfaction of these instincts would convert us into dictators, nothing more.'²²

Rudiger also defended the Spanish anarchists' decision to accept the militarization of the militia: 'Our antimilitarism was based on the belief that the armed insurrection would have more or less guerrilla character and would be for a relatively short period. But in Spain, the antifascist struggle has been converted into war. Modern armament has its own logic. It requires certain forms of organization in order to be used with efficacy. These forms are those of modern organization. Trade-union life is based on accords of general assemblies; war on command and obedience... The militarization of the columns was necessary... Instead of blindly opposing that which is inevitable, we should make of it the best we can in our own interest...'²³

Rudiger's Criticism of Spanish Anarchists

However, although Helmut Rudiger, in reporting to the special congress of the IWMA in December 1937 generally supported the positions which the Spanish anarchists had taken in the Civil War, he had his own criticisms of the way they had behaved, particularly towards their foreign comrades. Some of these he also presented in his report.

Clearly, as we have already noted, Rudiger was critical of the failure of the CNT–FAI to coordinate their foreign propaganda activities through the IWMA. He thought that these problems reflected a general isolationist tendency among the Spanish anarchists: 'There is in the Spanish movement a little too much national exclusiveness that in reality has harmed a lot. In other countries and movements, foreign comrades have been enthusiastically welcomed... In Spain the position of the foreign comrades has been very different.'²⁴

In this connection, Rudiger sensed a desire on the part of the Spanish anarchists to dominate the international anarchist movement:

We have always fought against the III International, saying that its sections are not independent revolutionary organizations, but foreign legions of Moscow, instruments of Russian foreign policy. CNT struggles in Spain against a party that every day increases its influence, and tries to put a foreign stamp on the political life of the country. Correctly, CNT states that this is against the interests of the Spanish proletariat.

But is it possible that CNT wants the IWMA to be nothing but a foreign instrument for CNT's interests? No, IWMA has to be constituted of autonomous sections, all of which do what is possible to create a revolutionary spirit in their own countries... The proletariat in these countries has been fooled and disappointed a thousand times by the imperialistic 'internationalism' of Moscow. We have to avoid that this happens once again in the name of the CNT...

The German anarchist also took his Spanish comrades to task for

not keeping their counterparts abroad sufficiently well informed: 'It is the CNT that has to supply the foreign comrades with arguments, material and documentation ... and also make sure that the comrades are truly informed. The CNT has to show the world that it is not only keeping its old position, but also that its tactics and actions have goals and objectives that are in harmony with our final goals.'²⁵

On one other point, too, Rudiger was critical of the Spanish anarchists' relations with non-Spanish libertarians, that is, their failure to come to the aid of foreign anarchists in Spain being subjected to persecution and deportation by the Negrin government after the May Events:

While there was still time, nothing was done to give these comrades Spanish rights to citizenship, and when the persecution after the May Days seriously accelerated, the comrades were totally unprotected and left in the lurch ... Among these comrades and among the foreign comrades in general the opinion is that the CNT has abandoned its prisoners - at least the foreign ones. The imprisoned POUMists in Barcelona receive food daily from their organization, while those from the CNT are left without any help at all. The Trotskyists abroad utilize this fact in their criticism of the CNT. The CNT must understand that with such behavior it is difficult to defend its reputation before the world proletariat.²⁶

Rudiger was also critical of relations he saw developing between the Spanish anarchists and non-anarchist elements in various countries:

The CNT is looking for moral and material support; therefore it is in the interest of the movement to develop as many foreign contacts as possible and use them for this purpose. My opinion is that it is understandable, and also necessary, for the CNT, but I also want to point out that the Spanish movement has to go about it in the right way if it wants real help from other countries. This real help for CNT can only come from the

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strengthening, development and creation of independent anarcho-syndicalist movements in all countries, in a positive way according to the principles of the IWMA. The CNT should not think that they can establish a network of international relations outside the IWMA and by-pass the existing anarcho-syndicalist international.

Rudiger particularly warned against contacts with Trotskyists and other Marxist groups opposed to the Communist International: 'Some Marxist parties in opposition are interested in the CNT for the simple reason that they think it is possible to change the CNT in their direction and make the CNT into a kind of receptacle for their ideas; more or less Bolshevik. The CNT should beware of the friendship of a Dutch Trotskyist party and an English Independent Labor Party. The refined Marxist politicians that lead those parties are much more clever politicians than the CNT! It would be a catastrophe for the CNT and our international movement, if they would get influence over, and started to exploit, the CNT.'²⁷

Finally, Rudiger saw problems in some examples of internal publicity and propaganda in Spain which he thought were not in harmony with libertarian ideas. He denounced 'the stupid and exalted propaganda for the USSR that *Solidaridad Obrera* used when the first Russian food-supply ship arrived. This has continued and gone further than what the political situation demands. In *Diaria de la Marina*, the port and seamen's paper of the CNT in Barcelona, an article, "We have to remember Lenin" was published August 1. That is an article that it is not possible to tolerate in the light of the ideas we defend, but is also idiotic in all possible respects.'

He also had difficulties with the Spanish anarchists' treatment of Mexico, the only other country (aside from the Soviet Union) which was giving aid to the Loyalist cause. He noted an article in *Solidaridad Obrera* which, according to Rudiger, pictured Mexico as 'the perfect democracy. The whole people is enthusiastically following its leader, General Cárdenas. The National Revolutionary Party was the responsible factor for this miracle, etc. What do these idiocies have to do with our ideas? ... The political situation must

not take us to the point where we sacrifice our viewpoints, and to an idiotic glorification of political parties, to favor authoritarianism and to defile the dignity of our own ideas.²⁸

Diverse Reactions of Foreign Anarchists

There is no doubt that the reactions of foreign anarchists to what was taking place in Spain varied widely, from person to person and group to group. These ranged from almost complete endorsement of whatever the CNT–FAI did, to denunciations of the Spanish anarchists as traitors to their own ideas and to the international anarchist movement.

Juan García Oliver sketched the situation of the foreign anarchist critics of their Spanish confrères: ‘The acid propaganda against the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists ... did not come from the rightists, who did exist in France and fought us bitterly, but was carried out by the French anarchist, syndicalist and anarcho-syndicalist groups and grouplets which fought us mercilessly for our governmental collaboration in Catalonia and in the Republican zone. Only the group of *Le Libertaire*, with Sebastian Faure, Lecoin, Odeon and some others did not fight us. They didn’t fully agree with our positions. They tolerated them and were correct in their commentaries.’²⁹

Alice Wexler has given a somewhat different view of the origins and extent of the foreign anarchist campaign against the CNT–FAI’s behavior in the Civil War. ‘The Russian emigré anarchists in Paris and others associated with the IWMA had long kept up a barrage of criticism against the CNT–FAI for its policy of collaborating with the Republican government... In addition, antimilitarist anarchists in Holland condemned the use of arms by the Spaniards, though they also provided humanitarian aid, and some American comrades threatened also to open a campaign against “betrayals” by the CNT–FAI leaders.’³⁰

However, there were other foreign anarchists who strongly supported their Spanish comrades and what they were doing during the Civil War. We have already noted the support offered to the CNT–

FAI by Helmut Rudiger in their controversies with hostile elements in the IWMA.

Apparently Max Nettlau, a well-known Austrian anarchist, was the international figure who gave most uncritical support to the policies of his Spanish comrades. Federica Montseny many years later remembered: 'For Nettlau, to defeat fascism was something so grand, so unequalled in this defeated and cowardly world, that for him that alone was the supreme value. He even feared for us, fearing that in wishing to carry the revolution too far, that would be fatal for us in the long run...'³¹

Elsewhere, Federica Montseny wrote of Nettlau: 'He was the most unconditional, the most passionate of our friends. The one who never challenged us, who always defended us even when we did things which merited censure; who to all criticisms offered the same argument: We must not criticize then, we must help them.'³²

Emma Goldman, the Russian-American anarchist, who was herself a critical supporter of her Spanish comrades, had reservations about the degree of complete backing which Max Nettlau offered to them. She wrote to her friend, the British anarchist Tom Bell; 'As to Nettlau, I am afraid he has gone somewhat gaga; he simply can't stand the least opposition to the leaders of the CNT-FAI. He once used to speak out as you do in regard to the absolute freedom anarchists must practice, and against every compromise on our part. Today he approves of every compromise. He has turned into a regular zealot who would burn every heretic at the stake. He hates us all because we do not accept 100 percent of everything done by Montseny and Oliver...'³³

However, there were also other critical supporters, aside from Emma Goldman, people who did not accept all of the policy decisions of the Spanish anarchist leadership, but none the less felt that the achievements of the Spanish Revolution, the need to win the Civil War against the Franco forces, and the principle of solidarity within the international anarchist movement were sufficiently important to prevent them from openly criticizing the Spanish anarchist leadership, thus weakening their position in the internal political struggle in the Republic. Among these was Gaston Leval.

Some foreign anarchists provided modest material support for

their Spanish colleagues. This was most notably true of the Swedish affiliate of the IWMA, the SAC. Emma Goldman noted that the Swedish organization, with a membership of only 32,000, had raised a fund of 200,000 Swedish kroner (approximately \$90,740), which it had sent to the CNT.³⁴

The Case of Emma Goldman

After the outbreak of the Civil War, the CNT–FAI established propaganda offices in Paris, London and New York. It also had a delegate in Mexico and one in Uruguay, and sent three comrades on a propaganda tour of Central and North America, and subsidized a publishing house in Argentina.³⁵

It was Emma Goldman, the Russian-American anarchist, who was commissioned by the CNT–FAI to establish an official propaganda office in London, after her first trip to revolutionary Spain in October–December 1936. She was handicapped by the small size of the anarchist movement in Great Britain which, according to Alice Wexler, only had ‘perhaps two to three hundred militants’. Goldman tried to organize an anarcho-syndicalist union in London, but, although its weekly meetings ‘often drew a fair-sized crowd’, it never attracted more than about a score of members.

Alice Wexler has sketched Emma Goldman’s activities:

She managed to launch a series of public meetings on Spain in January and February of 1937, which proved amazingly successful, in terms of publicity, attendance, and funds raised. She also spoke outside London, travelling to South Wales, Plymouth, Bristol, and Glasgow, in order to create local committees to work for the CNT–FAI. Throughout the war, her meetings attracted large enthusiastic crowds of seven or eight hundred people... By British standards they were notably successful. By the end of February 1937, she had raised £1,175 – the equivalent of about \$5,000 at that time – for women and children evacuated from Madrid (many of whom ended up in Barcelona), with nearly £100 more a few weeks later.³⁶

She also worked with Vernon Richards, a young student who published a fortnightly anarchist paper, *Spain and the World*, which had a circulation of around 2,000 and ‘made available information about anarchist Spain difficult to secure anywhere else in England’. Although her personal relations with Vernon were not always smooth, she contributed articles to the periodical, got Herbert Read, the anarchist poet and critic, to do likewise, and convinced the CNT–FAI leadership to subsidize the periodical.

Outside the anarchist ranks she worked most closely with leaders of the Independent Labor Party (the British counterpart of the Spanish POUM at the time), particularly with its general secretary, Fenner Brockway.³⁷

She continued her activities on behalf of the Spanish anarchists until the later months of 1938. Among other things, she arranged for anarchist representation in the 1938 May Day parade, spoke herself at Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park, and organized an exhibition of Catalan children’s paintings. She tried to establish a British branch of the Spanish anarchists’ relief organization, Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista, and although she recruited such people as George Orwell, Havelock Ellis, Rebecca West, Laurence Houseman and John Cowper Powys as ostensible officials of the organization, it did not prosper.³⁸

Emma Goldman also carried the messages of the Spanish anarchists to other English-speaking parts of the world, including her old home, the United States, when the opportunity to do so presented itself. Thus, soon after the May Days she wrote a long letter to the *New York Times*, protesting against its report that the anarchists had been responsible for those tragic events, making clear that it was ‘the Communist idol and his blind henchmen’ who had provoked the crisis in Barcelona. The Spanish anarchists published this letter in full.³⁹

Emma Goldman was a critical supporter of the Spanish anarchists. She had grave reservations about some of the things they did, particularly what she conceived to be their lack of sufficient reaction against Communist persecution. At one point, she had an exchange of letters with Mariano Vázquez, secretary of the national committee of the CNT, and Pedro Herrera of the FAI, who had objected to some

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of her articles strongly denouncing the activities of the Stalinists in Republican Spain, as being inopportune in view of her position as an official representative of the CNT and FAI.⁴⁰ However, she never publicly stated her doubts about the policies of the Spanish anarchists.

Goldman attended the conference of the IWMA in Paris in December 1937, held to debate the Spanish question. She went there to help the Spanish representatives present their case to the movement. Excerpts from her remarks there indicate the kind of critical support which she gave the Spanish anarchists:

I am inclined to believe that the critics in our ranks outside of Spain would be less rigid in their appraisal if they too had come closer to the life-and-death struggle to the CNT-FAI – not that I do not agree with their criticism. I think them 95 percent right. However, I insist that independent thinking and the right of criticism have ever been our proudest Anarchist boast, indeed, the very bulwark of Anarchism. The trouble with our Spanish comrades is their marked sensitivity to criticism, or even to advice from any comrade outside of Spain. But for that, they would understand that their critics are moved not by any villainy, but by their deepest concern for the fate of the CNT-FAI.⁴¹

Emma Goldman then, by implication at least, expressed her doubts about the policies of the Spanish anarchists:

The Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist and Anarchist movements until very recently have held out the most glaring fulfillment of all our dreams and aspirations. I cannot therefore blame those of our comrades who see in the compromises of the Spanish Anarchists a reversal of all they had held high for well nigh seventy years. Naturally some comrades have grown apprehensive and have begun to cry out against the slippery road which the CNT-FAI entered on. I have known these comrades for years. They are among my dearest friends. I know it is their revolutionary integrity which makes them so critical, and not

any ulterior motive. If our Spanish comrades could only understand this, they would be less indignant [and not] consider their critics their enemies.

But she even more strongly addressed the critics of the Spanish anarchists:

Also, I fear that the critics too are very much at fault. They are no less dogmatic than the Spanish comrades. They condemn every step made in Spain unreservedly. In their sectarian attitude they have overlooked the motive element recognised in our time even in capitalist courts. Yet it is a fact that one can never judge human action unless one has discovered the motive back of the action.

When I have pointed this out to our critical comrades they have insisted that Lenin and his group were also moved by the best intentions, 'and see what they made of the Revolution'. I fail to see even the remotest similarity. Lenin aimed at a formidable State machine, a deadly dictatorship. From the very beginning, this spelled the death of the Russian Revolution – whereas the CNT-FAI not only aimed at, but actually gave life to, libertarian economic reconstructions. From the very moment they had driven the Fascists and militarists out of Catalonia, this herculean task was never lost sight of. The work achieved, considering the insurmountable obstacles, was extraordinary.

Finally, Emma Goldman had a special message for the Russian anarchists: 'Strangely enough, the very comrades of the civil war in Russia who had explained every step of the dictatorship as "revolutionary necessity" are now the most unyielding opponents of the CNT-FAI. "We have learned our lesson from the Russian Revolution," they say. But as no one learns anything from the experience of others, we must, whether we like it or not, give our Spanish comrades a chance to find their bearings through their own experiences. Surely our own flesh and blood are entitled to the same patient help and solidarity some of us have given generously to our arch-enemies, the Communists.'⁴²

Emma Goldman also attended the plenum of regional organizations of the Libertarian Movement in Barcelona in October 1938, virtually the last national meeting of the anarchists in Civil War Spain. Although she sympathized, in personal talks with participants, with the FAI criticism of the CNT national committee, she apparently did not speak out publicly on this occasion.⁴³

García Oliver's and Montseny's Trip to France in June 1937

Late in June 1937, the CNT-FAI office in Paris decided to organize a mass meeting in the large Vel D'Hiv hall. The idea was to present the Spanish anarchists' cause not only to the general public, but to the French and other anarchists in the Paris area. They invited Juan García Oliver, Federica Montseny, Benito Pavón and David Antona as the principal speakers.

According to Juan García Oliver, the attendance at this meeting was a disappointment. Furthermore, two of the speakers, Pavón and Antona knew no French and their discourses in Spanish, although provoking 'polite applause', were clearly not understood by most of those present.

However, 'with Federica and me, who spoke in French – very poorly to be sure – they tried to flatten us with insulting interruptions. They didn't succeed, because both she and I denounced in detail the lack of international aid from which we had suffered from the beginning of the struggle in Spain. We weren't concerned with material aid, nor combatants, but with the total lack of a vigorous international movement of moral aid to the Spanish antifascist cause, with meetings of solidarity, demonstrations or protest, strikes and stoppages in the ports and transport. For better or worse, attacking strongly those who had come to the meeting to disturb it, we succeeded in being heard.'

García Oliver summed up the situation which the Spanish anarchists faced internationally at that time: 'The profascists attacked and insulted us. The pro-Communists attacked and insulted us. The lovers of the bourgeois regime fought us. And we were attacked,

insulted, vilified by the members of the great variety of anarchist grouplets. Who defended us?’⁴⁴

Shortly after the trip of García Oliver and La Montseny to Paris, CNT national committee secretary Mariano Vázquez issued a statement on ‘The position of Spanish Anarchism Towards Its Detractors’, addressing the foreign anarchist critics of the CNT–FAI. Among other things, he wrote: ‘... You who talk of our compromises and violations of principles, know once and for all that it is not the fault of the Spanish anarchists that there doesn’t exist an international anarchist or anarchosyndicalist movement capable of giving us the support that we need. Leave us alone, friends, to follow our route. Have a little confidence in us, who have been the soul of international anarchism; who have maintained a perpetual struggle against the State; about whom there can be no suspicions, given our antecedents of struggle and sacrifice.’⁴⁵

The December 1937 IWMA Congress

The visit of the four Spanish anarchist leaders to Paris in June 1937 was in part a move to prepare the ground for the meeting of the International Workingmen’s Association in Paris in December of that year. The Spanish question was the main item on the agenda of that meeting.

In preparation for the IWMA Congress, the Spanish anarchists prepared a long report. It not only recounted the history of Spanish anarchism, but dealt particularly with the problems and policies of the Spanish movement during the Civil War.

This document started with a discussion of the Confederación Regional Obrera Española, a contemporary of the First International, and then discussed the evolution of the Spanish anarchist movement from then until the foundation of the CNT.⁴⁶ It then traced the evolution of the CNT until the outbreak of the Civil War.⁴⁷

However, the CNT’s report concentrated particular attention on explaining and defending the policies which the Spanish anarchists had followed during the Civil War. It argued that at the time of the

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military rebellion of July 18–19, ‘In all of free Spain the CNT contributed its spirit and an experience in open struggles to a degree which the rest of the antifascist sectors could not approach. Without the suicidal action of the CNT, fascism would have triumphed completely, within seventy-two hours in all of the national territory. Where the Rebels won, it was because the CNT stood alone, and because the provincial and municipal authorities and the police forces of the Government either adopted a passive attitude or went over openly to the insurrectionists. No one but our people went into the streets to fight an army which for three years had been trained in techniques of *coup d’état*...’⁴⁸

The CNT report then presented the situation once the original rebellion had been put down in half of the country:

In Catalonia the CNT was the indisputable master of the region. The factories, commerce, banking, housing, arms, public order, were all under its control. It organized the columns which established a front in Aragón, freeing half of the Aragón region and taking its positions a few kilometers from Zaragoza. But the CNT, loyal to its ideals and its purely anarchist nature, did not attack the forms of the State, nor try publicly to penetrate or dominate it. The President of the Generalidad was tolerated in his post and none of the political or juridical institutions were abolished. The CNT showed a conscientious scrupulousness in the face of a difficult alternative: to destroy completely the State in Catalonia, to declare war against the Rebels, the government, foreign capitalism, and thus assuming complete control of Catalan society; or collaborating in the responsibilities of government with the other antifascist fractions. In Levante there occurred something similar, though in not such an exclusively CNT fashion. Also in the major part of free Andalusia, the CNT was the predominant element. In Guipuzcoa, Santander and Asturias were a considerable mass of fighters, whose capacity for decision in joint military actions no one could dispute.⁴⁹

The report explained why the anarchists had decided to collaborate instead of trying to impose themselves on the rest of the Republic.

With regard to Catalonia, it said: 'We were a force so formidably organized, and we had power so completely in our hands in Catalonia that had we wished to do so, we could have installed an Anarchist totalitarian regime with a mere lifting of the finger. but we knew well that the Revolution in our hands only would have exhausted itself, and that abroad the Anarchists would not have given us the necessary aid, nor could we expect such aid. We were faced with the choice therefore, of suicide for the Anarchist movement, destruction of the Revolution and loss of the war, or sharing the direction of the Revolution and the War with anti-fascist sectors which were moderate, constituting thus a Government.'⁵⁰

The report noted the weaknesses of the anarchists because of the original triumph of the Rebels in key areas:

Politically, geographically and militarily the Anarchist Movement had three most important handicaps on July 19, handicaps which weighed heavily on the question of the importance of our role. Sevilla, the real capital of Andalusia, succumbed to fascism; Zaragoza, the Anarchist and CNT capital, and gateway to the North, succumbed also. Galicia was likewise defeated, and although its importance does not seem extraordinary, it was important because it served as a base for strangling Asturias and the North. If we look at the map of Spain we shall see how different the conditions of the struggle against fascism would have been if the Anarchist and CNT regions such as Andalusia, Aragón and Galicia had not succumbed. We can see that it would then not have been so easy to bring troops from Morocco; the cartridge and powder factories of Sevilla, Córdoba and Granada would have been in our power...⁵¹

We had before us a sombre spectacle. It was impossible to establish libertarian communism because the majority of the population did not understand it, nor did we have available the abundance of products necessary for the just administration of wealth. Furthermore, the necessary coexistence with other sectors with a bourgeois mentality or with very timid socialistic

ideas, made prudence necessary in carrying out a program which threatened a new civil war.⁵²

The CNT report answered the claim of some foreign anarchists that the conciliatory attitude of the Spanish anarchists had been the result of Communist infiltration into the CNT:

It said that Communist penetration has determined the line followed by the CNT. We are sufficiently clear in our reports and can be so orally so that all the Sections, all the delegates attending the Congress, can comprehend that the Communist Party has no influence in the CNT and that only to think that it had would be an insult if it were not so ridiculous... If the CNT and Spanish anarchism have followed the line of which all are aware, this has been due to the circumstances in which it has found itself, and not due to the influence of other groups.

The serene analysis of the situation, the good sense of our militants who have not ceased to be anarchists, have made us decide to do what we *could* not what we *should have wanted* or what the foreign comrades dreamed. We have to work in Spain, not with illusions, theories or manuscripts, but with crude and bloody realities, which have determined what we have done and will determine what we can continue to do. Get rid of any ideas, then, that Spanish anarchism and the CNT have been influenced by the theories of dictatorial Marxism. We do what we can. But what we have done is the fruit of firm convictions placed in contact with the free air of reality.⁵³

The report also defended the anarchists' participation in various levels of government:

The people in general fervently desired that the CNT abandon temporarily its ideological position and undertake collaboration in the government. In fact, in all of the towns and provincial capitals, the CNT formed part of the official organs, in the Popular Front committees, in the Antifascist Militia Committees

all of the organisms which had been established ... in the old municipalities and provincial governments, in the Courts, in the administration of prisons, in the police stations, in struggle. This was something spontaneous, uncontrollable, superior to all desires for Puritan isolation, to which we had hitherto been loyal. The revolutionary action of the CNT masses was not held back by doubts, or by more or less theoretical arguments... The question was to defeat fascism using all of the means possible, and we acted with a mental agility and marvelous intuition which were the surprise of the rest of the antifascists. Nothing was left but to publicly, participate in the government, and this was necessary to raise the morale of the combatants and to reinforce the struggle and the hopes of triumph. This was the way the Organization understood the situation, as did the Spanish people, which greeted with joy our temporary entry into the State.⁵⁴

Finally, the Spanish anarchists stressed their commitment to international solidarity. They noted that two Portuguese anarchists had spoken to the national committee of the CNT in October 1936 and that subsequently several persecuted Portuguese Republicans told the CNT that they were willing to collaborate in an uprising against the Salazar regime in Portugal, and that the CNT had given them economic help for this attempt. Also, representatives of the underground Portuguese anarchist labor group, the CGT, had asked for support, which the CNT agreed to provide.⁵⁵

The CNT also noted that from the beginning of the Civil War, the CNT had promised to do all it could to support the fight for independence in Spanish Morocco, both during the Civil War and in case of eventual Loyalist victor. All Catalan organizations – CNT, FAI, Esquerra de Catalunya, Acció Catalana, Unió de Rabassaires, PSUC, UGT, POUM agreed – to respect the independence of Morocco after the War. This document had also been signed by two Arab representatives. The CNT had its underground representatives in Tangiers and other Moroccan centers.⁵⁶

Finally, the CNT Report complained about attacks by foreign anarchists on their Spanish comrades. The report noted that, on

August 16, 1937 Mariano Vázquez had written to the secretary of the IWMA protesting against attacks on the CNT in the foreign anarchist press and asked that they be stopped. Vázquez had again written to the secretary on October 15, objecting to an article in *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, official organ of the IWMA French affiliate, the Confederation Générale du Travail Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire, which had alleged that CNT representatives had been conferring with dissident Communist parties about formation of a new International. Again, Vázquez asked that the secretary do something 'which will end such irresponsibility and bad faith'. The report reiterated the CNT's demand that the CGTSR stop its attacks on the CNT, saying that the CNT felt that the IWMA was a disciplined organization run by the majority and should take steps to discipline the CGTSR.⁵⁷

The debates in this December 1937 IWMA Congress were bitter. However, the Spanish anarchists came out of the sessions with much that they wanted. One of the congress decisions resolved: 'To leave the CNT with wide freedom to follow, with its plan and under its own responsibility, the experience now under way. As a consequence of this decision, the Congress invites all the sections of the AIT to help the CNT in its mission, by the means they deem most adequate for the situation in their respective countries, to the end of securing as rapidly as possible the victory of the anti-fascist war and the Social Revolution in Spain.'⁵⁸

Another resolution, according to David Porter '... was to suspend all criticism of CNT-FAI policies in publicly circulated publications of the movement. This decision was adopted despite the very sharp criticisms of the CNT position made by various delegates to that meeting... As a result, such previously critical journals as *Combat Syndicaliste* and *Espagne Nouvelle* drastically modified their tone. In effect ... critics such as Voline, Schapiro and Prudhommeaux for the next year silenced their tongues in public...'⁵⁹

There was another conference of the IWMA in 1938. That meeting gave another concession to the Spaniards. It amended the IWMA Constitution by recognizing the right of national affiliates, without abjuring the fundamental principles and objectives of the IWMA to use the tactics they thought best to meet their particular national

situations.⁶⁰ Specifically, that 'additional article' of the IWMA Declaration of Principles stated: 'Loyal to its federalist traditions, the IWMA gives its Sections a vast autonomy of struggle for our ultimate goals. The methods may change, but the essence and the ultimate goals must be the same.'⁶¹

Conclusion

The handicaps which the Spanish anarchists had during the Civil War in defending the Revolution, their own organizations and members from the Stalinists and their allies within Spain were intensified by the fact that they could not count on the support of a powerful international organization such as the Comintern and the USSR provided the Communists. They were thus deprived of facilities, on the one hand, for spreading the news of the Revolution which they had wrought in the first phase of the Civil War; and on the other, for publicizing the persecution to which they were being submitted by the Communists, particularly after the May Events of 1937. They received, overall, virtually no material help from their foreign comrades.

However, even more disturbing from the Spanish anarchists' point of view, was the fact that they could not even count on the united moral and political support of the small (if not tiny) international anarchist movement. Almost from the beginning of the Civil War, the Spanish anarchists suffered from criticism and even denunciation from the ranks of the more simon-pure foreign anarchists who could not forgive the Spaniards' compromise with libertarian principles in the interest of prosecuting the Civil War.

The Spanish anarchists were correct in pointing out to their critics in the international movement that those critics had never had to deal with the practical application of their movement's principles to concrete circumstances in which they were leaders of a successful Revolution in the midst of a Civil War, in which they were forced to cooperate with other political groups which were on their side in that conflict. However, in a broader sense, the polemics between the Spanish anarchists and many of their foreign critics served to

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underscore the quandaries faced by a group of anarchists, opposed in principle to the very concept of power and authority, who had both power and authority thrust upon them under circumstances which they could not possibly have foreseen or predicted.

Appendix 3

Some Outstanding Spanish Anarchists During the Civil War

Although the Revolution in Republican Spain was very much a grass-roots affair, there were some outstanding anarchist leaders who played major roles in the military, economic and political aspects of the War and the Revolution. Although those discussed below by no means constitute a definitive list of the principal anarchist figures during the War, they will serve to identify for the reader many of those whose names appear most frequently in this book.

RAMÓN ALVAREZ, one of the principal anarchist leaders in Asturias, was a member of the Committee of War first established by the anarchists in Gijón after the outbreak of the conflict, and continued to be active in the government of Asturias and León until the defeat of the Republican forces in that area in October 1937. Subsequently, he was the principal aide of Segundo Blanco when Blanco became a member of the Negrín government in April 1938.

DOMINGO ASCASO was a member of the Nosotros anarchist group before the Civil War, together with his brother Francisco Ascaso, who was killed during the fighting in Barcelona on July 20 1936. He organized and led one of the first anarchist militia columns which left Barcelona right after the outbreak of the War to regain Aragón for the Republic. That column ultimately became the 149th Brigade of the Popular Army.

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JOAQUÍN ASCASO, cousin of Francisco and Domingo Ascaso, a pre-war leader of the anarchists in Zaragoza, served as head of the Council of Aragón from soon after the outbreak of the Civil War until it was suppressed by the Negrín government in July 1937. He was then arrested and charged with various crimes, but the charges were soon dismissed and Ascaso was set free.

JAIME BALIUS, an anarchist journalist, who before the May Events in Barcelona had mainly been noted for the radical articles he published in *CNT*, the Madrid anarchist newspaper, was head of the Friends of Durruti. This dissident CNT element urged anarchist and POUM seizure of power during the May Events, and continued publishing an underground newspaper for some time after the May 1937 crisis in Catalonia. The Friends of Durruti were repudiated by the CNT and the FAI. They never became a significant force within the anarchist movement.

SEGUNDO BLANCO was the most outstanding leader of the Asturian anarchists. He headed the war committee they established in Gijón right after the War began, and subsequently was first vice-president of the Inter-Provincial Council of Asturias and Leon. Shortly before the fall of Asturias he went to Valencia to seek aid from the Negrín government for the beleaguered area. In April 1938, he became the one anarchist member of the Negrín government, as minister of education, a post he continued to hold until the overthrow of the Negrín regime early in March 1939.

ANDRÉS CAPDEVILA, first delegate-president of the Catalan Council of Economy, also served for several months as councillor of economy of the Generalidad, just preceding the May Events. After that, he returned to the post of delegate-president of the council until forced out by the Stalinist councillor of economy Juan Comorera. However, he continued to be a member of the Council of Economy until the end of the War in Catalonia.

HIGINIO CARROCERA, probably the outstanding anarchist military leader in the Asturias region. Originally a metal worker, he organized one of the first militia units in the region. He became a brigade commander in the Popular Army, was awarded the Republic's Medal of Liberty for leadership of troops resisting the drive of the forces of General Mola from Santander into Asturias.

Appendix 3

He was referred to by Diego Abad de Santillán as an 'authentic hero'.

JUAN DOMENECH was organizer of the supply Committee under the Central Committee of Antifascist Militia in Catalonia, and subsequent to the entry of the anarchists into the Catalan Generalidad, he was councillor of supply. After the December 1936 Catalan governmental crisis, he became councillor of public services, continuing in that post until the May Events of 1937.

BUENAVENTURA DURRUTI, a member of the Nosotros anarchist group before the Civil War, undertook to organize and lead the first Catalan anarchist militia group and reconquered much of the southern half of that region for the Republic, but failed to recapture Zaragoza. As the siege of Madrid began early in November 1936, he organized and led a Catalan militia unit to help in the fight for the capital. He was killed there on November 19 1936, and his funeral in Barcelona a few days later was marked by an outpouring of hundreds of thousands of mourners.

DIONISIO EROLES of the Grupo Nosotros before the Civil War, organized the Catalan council of workers and soldiers during the period of the central committee of militia and headed it as long as it existed. He was regional secretary of the CNT in Catalonia immediately after the May Events.

GERMINAL ESGLEAS was the companion of Federica Montseny, by whom she had a daughter, and although at the beginning of the Civil War he was a secondary leader of the Catalan anarchists (although he served shortly as regional CNT secretary) his status increased considerably during the conflict. By the end of the War, he was an important leader of the movement. He was chosen as a member of the executive committee of the Libertarian Movement formed late in the War. During the Franco period, Esgleas was the long-time secretary of the CNT-in-Exile.

JUAN P. FABREGAS, who became councillor of economy as one of the three representatives of the CNT when the anarchists formally entered the Catalan government in late September 1936, had only joined the CNT after the Civil War began. He was largely responsible for enactment of legislation which legalized the urban collectives which the anarchists had established in Catalonia at the outset of the

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Civil War. After the May Events, Fabregas seems to have played no other significant part in the CNT or in public affairs generally.

AURELIO FERNÁNDEZ had been a member of the Nosotros anarchist group before the Civil War. With the establishment of the General Militia Council in Catalonia right after the beginning of the war, he was put in charge of internal order by the council. Then, when the anarchists entered the Catalan government, he became sub-secretary of the councillor for public order. He was unable to prevent the reconstitution of the regular police forces, the Civil Guard and Assault Guards, although until the May Events, he did keep in existence the patrols which had been established at the beginning of the War, and functioned as a parallel organization to the old police forces. He served as a member of the executive committee of the Catalan Libertarian Movement in the latter phases of the Civil War, representing the FAI.

JUAN GARCÍA OLIVER, a member of the Nosotros group, unsuccessfully tried to get the anarchists to seize power formally in Catalonia in the CNT regional plenum of July 23 1936. Subsequently, he became a member of the General Council of the Antifascist Militia, in charge of the military, and was *de facto* chairman of the body. When the anarchists formally entered the Catalan government, he became sub-secretary of the councillor of defense, remaining in control of the Catalan militia. Then early in November, he became one of the four anarchist members of the government of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, as minister of justice, and member of the inner war council. He was an early anarchist supporter of militarization of the militia, and apparently worked out with Largo Caballero the conditions under which this would take place. He developed closer relations with Largo Caballero than any of the other anarchist ministers. He played a key role in trying to get the workers of Barcelona to lay down their arms in the May Events of 1937. In April 1938, when Prime Minister Negrín offered the CNT a post in his cabinet, García Oliver refused to allow his name to be one of the three submitted to the premier. It was reportedly on his suggestion that the executive committee of the Catalan Libertarian Movement was established. On two occasions – one of them the IWMA Congress of December 1937 – he went to Paris to try to

explain to the international movement what the Spanish anarchists were doing and why they should support their Spanish comrades. During the Franco period, he was a leading figure in the Spanish anarchist exile group in Mexico.

JESÚS GONZÁLEZ MALO was a leader of the CNT port workers in Santander before the outbreak of the Civil War. When the War began, he led the CNT workers who, together with the Civil Guards and Assault Guards, put down the Rebellion in that region. Subsequently, he became the principal leader of the Santander militia who fought against the troops of General Mola. During the Franco period, he was the principal leader of the Spanish anarchist exiles in New York.

PEDRO HERRERA was one of the principal leaders of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, although he apparently held no governmental post of any kind during the Civil War. Although an early supporter of the compromises with anarchist ideology made by the Spanish movement, he took the lead in the increasingly critical attitude of the FAI towards the 'collaborationism' of the CNT national committee with the Negrín government.

FRANCISCO ISGLEAS first organized the commissariat of coastal defense for the province of Gerona for the General Militia Council of Catalonia. After the December 1936 crisis in the Catalan government, Isgleas became the councillor of defense in the new cabinet. However, at the time of the May Events, he apparently played no part, and during that crisis, his sub-secretary, the CNTer Juan Molina, took charge of the Catalan military. Subsequently, Isgleas was the last regional secretary of the CNT of Catalonia before the conquest of the region by the Franco forces.

LORENZO IÑIGO was the leader of the Libertarian Youth in Madrid at the beginning of the Civil War. He became its representative on the Junta de Defensa organized to run civilian affairs in Madrid after the Republican government had abandoned the city. Iñigo was largely responsible for organizing the old capital's defense industry.

GREGORIO JOVER was a member of the Nosotros group before the Civil War. He helped organize one of the first militia units which was sent from Catalonia to retake as much of Aragón as possible. He

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remained at the front during most of the War. During the Franco period he went to Mexico, where he became one of the few important Spanish anarchist leaders to go over to the Communists.

JUAN LÓPEZ SÁNCHEZ was the principal leader in Valencia of the Treintista split-off from the CNT in the early 1930s, and served on the Treintista national committee. After reunification at the Zaragoza congress in May 1936, he was the most important CNT leader in the Valencia area. He served on the Popular Executive Committee of Valencia after the outbreak of the Civil War. When the anarchists joined the government of Francisco Largo Caballero, López became one of the four CNT members of the cabinet, as minister of commerce. He did his best during his time as minister to help the anarchist collectives obtain the raw materials they needed from abroad, and supported the CNT-UGT organization which handled the sale of the citrus fruit crops of the Levante region. After leaving the government, he went on an extended propaganda tour in America, attempting to arouse support for the anarchists in Spain, and generally for the Republican cause. Upon his return he was the last national secretary of the CNT in the center-southern area after the fall of Catalonia to Franco.

AVELINO G. MALLADA was one of the principal libertarian leaders in the Asturias region. During the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, he served for a time as secretary of the national committee of the CNT when it was located in Gijón. Just before the Civil War, he was publisher of the newspaper *CNT* in Madrid, but was soon back in his home region. During most of the duration of the War in the north, Mallada was head of the municipality of Gijón, where he began a process of rebuilding certain parts of the city, an effort which was continued after the War by the Franco regime. After the end of the northern front, Mallada was sent on a propaganda tour of the United States, where he died before the Civil War had ended.

FRANCISCO MAROTO was a principal leader of the anarchists in the Málaga region. At the beginning of the Civil War, he organized one of the major militia columns in that region. After the fall of Málaga to the Franco forces, Maroto was arrested on charges of having contributed to the fall of the city, and having been in contact with the enemy. His case became a *cause célèbre* as a case of

persecution of an anarchist leader by the Stalinists and their allies. He was ultimately exonerated and freed.

VALERIO MAS was a CNT textile workers' leader in Catalonia before the Civil War. With the outbreak of the War and the establishment of the Supply Council, headed by CNTer Juan Domenech, under the Central Militia Committee, Mas became the CNT delegate on the Council. Sometime later, he became Catalan regional secretary of the CNT, and held that post at the time of the outbreak of the May Events. When, during that crisis a four-person government was established, with representatives of the CNT, UGT, Rabassaires and Catalan Left Party, Mas became the CNT member of that short-lived government, charged with the councillorships of economy, public services and health. That administration lasted only until the end of June 1937, when the anarchists were maneuvered out of the Catalan government.

CIPRIANO MERA was a leader of CNT construction workers in Madrid before the Civil War, and was in jail because of a strike of his union when the conflict began. Upon his release, he organized a militia column which retook Cuenca and its environs for the Republic. Subsequently, his unit played a significant role in the defense of Madrid, particularly during the battle of Guadalajara. Mera was a strong supporter within anarchist ranks for the militarization of the militia. He ultimately became the commander of the 4th Army Corps, covering the Madrid area during the latter phases of the War. He participated in the plotting which led to the overthrow of the pro-Stalinist government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín and the establishment of the National Defense Council in early March 1939, and it was troops under his command which defeated the attempt of Communist-led troops to depose the council.

FIDEL MIRÓ was the principal leader of the Juventudes Libertarias (FJL) during most of the Civil War. He first led the FJL in signing a pact with the youth organization of the dissident Communist POUM, and then a similar arrangement with the Stalinist Juventudes Socialistas Unificados. In the latter part of the Civil War he was the secretary of the executive committee of the Libertarian Movement. In the Franco period, he was one of the leaders of the Spanish anarchist refugee group in Mexico.

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JUAN MANUEL MOLINA (JUANCHO) was a leading figure in the FAI before the Civil War, having been secretary of its Peninsular Committee and editor of its paper *Tierra y Libertad*. He was a purchasing agent in France for the Catalan government during the first weeks of the Civil War, succeeding in getting some arms and War materials into the Republic. After the Catalan government crisis of December 1936, he became sub-secretary of the military councillor (Francisco Isgleas) who also belonged to the CNT. During the May Events in Barcelona, he was in charge of the Catalan armed forces, and turned control of those forces over to General Pozas as demanded by the Republican government, after receiving authorization to do so by the regional committee of the CNT. Subsequently, he served for a year as regional secretary of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.

FEDERICA MONTSENY was the daughter of Federico Urrales and Soledad Gustavo, who before the Civil War were leading anarchist writers, editors and theorists. She herself was one of the principal leaders of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, and had a certain reputation as an orator. When the anarchists entered the Republican government of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero she became one of the four CNT-FAI members of his cabinet, as minister of health. She and Juan García Oliver (then minister of justice) were sent by Largo Caballero's cabinet to try to help to diffuse the civil strife of the May Days in Barcelona, and appealed passionately to her anarchist colleagues to lay down their arms. At the time of the trials of leaders of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista late in 1938, she was one of the witnesses appearing on behalf of the POUMists. Going into exile when the Franco forces overran Catalonia, she was the major leader of the hardline anarchist exiles who opposed any further compromises with other political elements in the Spanish exile community, and criticized *ex post facto* the compromises the anarchists had made during the Civil War.

ANTONIO ORTÍZ was one of the first Catalan anarchist leaders to organize a militia column to try to retrieve Aragón for the Republic. He continued as a major anarchist military leader throughout most of the Civil War in the Aragón-Catalonia region.

JOSÉ PEIRATS was the leader of the Federación de Juventudes

Libertarians in the Catalan provincial city of Lérida during the Civil War. He published there a periodical which opposed the entry of the anarchists into the Republican government and other compromises with their basic philosophy. Although not a major leader of the anarchists during the War, he was of considerable significance as one of the most obvious opponents of the 'collaborationist' policy followed by the anarchists throughout the conflict. In exile, after the Civil War was lost, he wrote a three-volume account of the CNT's role in the War, as well as several other books on the subject.

JUAN PEIRÓ was the long-term leader of a cooperative enterprise of glass workers in Catalonia before the Civil War. He was also a principal leader of the CNT in the 1920s and early 1930s, and a principal figure in the Treintista dissidence in the CNT. When the anarchists entered the government of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, he was named minister of industry. His main accomplishments in that post were his efforts to provide financing for some of the urban collectives which his anarchist comrades had established in various parts of Loyalist Spain. After the anarchists were driven out of the Republican government, Peiró returned to his position as a worker in the glass workers' cooperative to which he had belonged for many years. At the end of the War, he fled to France, was turned over to Franco by the Vichy regime, and was executed after he refused to participate in the Franco regime's *sindicato* system.

HORACIO PRIETO was the secretary of the national committee of the CNT when the Civil War broke out. He was the principal architect of the entry of the anarchists into the government of Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, and resigned his position soon after that had been achieved. Subsequently, he became the principal advocate of the Spanish anarchists' abandoning permanently their opposition to participation in the Spanish State. He pushed forward the idea that the Federación Anarquista Ibérica should become the political party of the Libertarian movement, and have a relationship towards the CNT like that the Socialist Party had with the Unión General de Trabajadores. In the Franco period, Prieto became a minister in the Republican exile government of José Giral, thus provoking a split in the Spanish exile anarchist movement.

ANTONIO ROSADO, a pre-war leader of anarchist peasants in

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the province of Seville who, during the Civil War, organized and led the Federación Regional Campesina de Andalucía. He spurred the organization of peasant cooperatives in the southern parts of Republican Spain, as well as trying to help them standardize their records and procedures, and obtaining legal recognition for them. He organized substantial exchanges of products of the Andalusian collectives for goods from other parts of Loyalist Spain. He was probably the most important civilian anarchist leader to emerge in that part of the Republic during the Civil War. Many years later he wrote an account of his wartime experiences.

DIEGO ABAD DE SANTILLÁN, whose real name was Sinesio García Fernández, had spent many years in Argentina, where he was also active in the anarchist movement, returning to Spain only a short time before the outbreak of the Civil War. He became a major leader of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica. He served some time as economic councillor of the Catalan government, and played an important role in getting the anarchists to lay down their arms in the May Events of 1937, although later regretting having done so. Subsequently, he retired from politics for a short period, during which he published a book defending the anarchists' position and sharply criticizing the Stalinists and other opponents of the anarchists. In his postwar book *Por Qué Perdimos la Guerra (Why We Lost the War)* he expressed surprise that he had not been prosecuted by the Negrín government for that earlier work. He was one of the principal figures in the Peninsular Committee of the FAI in criticizing the conciliatory attitude of the CNT leadership towards the Negrín government at various times during 1938. He also served in 1938 as a FAI member of the National Committee of the Popular Front. With the collapse of the Republic, Santillán returned to Argentina where, for more than 30 years, he had a successful career as an author, editor and publisher. He returned to Spain shortly before his death in 1983.

RICARDO SANZ was a member of the Nosotros group, the only member of that organization to stay in Spain throughout the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. With the outbreak of the Civil War he became an official of the defense sector of the Central Militia Committee, and then with the defense councillorship of the Catalan government. At the time of the death of Buenaventura Durruti in

Madrid in November 1936, he was chosen by the anarchist leadership to succeed Durruti as head of the column. Finding the members of the column greatly demoralized he succeeded in restoring their morale, secured reinforcements from Catalonia, and led the column during the most crucial phases of the battle of Madrid. Early in 1937 the Madrid segment of the Durruti Column was transferred back to the Aragón front, and Sanz became the commander of the whole column. Throughout the remainder of the War he successfully resisted efforts of the Stalinists to infiltrate the unit, converted into the 26th Division of the Popular Army. It played a major role in the Aragón campaign and the ultimate battle for Catalonia. When Ricardo Sanz led the remnants of the 26th Division, in strict military order, across the border into France, he received appropriate military honors from French troops on the other side of the frontier.

EDUARDO VAL was head of the CNT defense committee of the Center throughout the Civil War. In the early phases of the conflict, he directed recruiting of anarchist militiamen and dispatched them to recapture cities in the central part of the country. Subsequently, he played a key role in obtaining needed equipment for anarchist troops on the Madrid front, and organizing medical and other facilities for them, as well as giving political direction to the anarchist commanders. In the last phase of the War, he was a member of the National Defense Council which overthrew the Negrín government, in charge of communications and public works.

EUGENIO VALLEJO was a CNT metal workers' leader before the Civil War. With the outbreak of the conflict, he was put in charge of developing a war industry in Catalonia. He worked closely with Prime Minister Taradellas, and was credited by him with having done an extraordinary job of converting plants and workshops which before the War had not produced any military material into a major war industry. He and Taradellas fought unsuccessfully to prevent the Republican government of Prime Minister Negrín from seizing control of the Catalan war industries.

MARIANO VÁZQUEZ (MARTIENET) was Catalan regional secretary of the CNT when the Civil War began. With the resignation of Horacio Prieto a few months later, he was chosen to be secretary of the national committee of the CNT, and remained in that post

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until after the end of the War. He strongly supported the continuing compromises of the CNT with its rivals within the Republican camp, particularly its entry into and remaining in the government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín. The leaders of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica and other opponents of the CNT's collaboration with Negrín became increasingly hostile to Vázquez. With the loss of Catalonia by the Republic, Vázquez sought refuge in France. He drowned a few months later in an accident which some of his Spanish anarchist comrades thought to be suspicious.

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