Review of The CNT in the Spanish Revolution by José Peirats

Anarcho

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The Meltzer Press should be congratulated on producing Peirats classic history of the CNT. It is a wonderful book and a vital resource on the history and politics of the CNT. While its cost may put people off buying it, all I can say is that it is worth the money. It is a goldmine of useful information and facts, presenting an honest and comprehensive account of the CNT from its founding in 1911 to approximately the end of 1937.

In this classic work you will find in full the CNT’s concept of libertarian communism as agreed at its congress in May, 1936. It is a truly beautiful document and, regardless of the claims of Liberal and Marxist historians, hardly utopian. Indeed, it is useful to finally have the resolution available in English — it means we are no longer dependent on historians selectively quoting from it. For example, Hugh Thomas (in his work The
Spanish Civil War) states “there was no sign that anyone [at the congress] realised that there was a danger of fascism; and no agreement, in consequence, on the arming of militias, much less the organisation of a revolutionary army as suggested by Juan Garcia Oliver.” He fails to tell the reader that Oliver’s motion was defeated by one favouring the idea of guerrilla warfare. Nor do the selections he quotes from the resolution itself includes its argument that “permanent army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution ... The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed by exertions from within or without ... Each Commune should have its arms and means of defence.” To co-ordinate defence of the revolution, “Confederal defence cadres” would exist (based on the CNT’s existing “defence committees”).

Hugh’s omission is extremely serious — it gives a radically false impression of anarchist politics. His comments could led a reader to think that anarchists, as Marxists claim, do not believe in defending a revolution. As can be seen from the actual resolutions of the Saragossa conference, this is not the case. Given that Thomas quotes from the resolution on libertarian communism we can only surmise that he forgot to read the section entitled “Defence of the Revolution.” Such is the level of reporting on anarchism and Spanish anarchism in particular. Having Peirats work in English means we have another resource with which to refute the spurious nonsense as regards our Spanish comrades that passes for history.

Also of interest is the discussion of the CNT’s role in the October revolt of 1934. Periats account effectively and easily destroys Trotskyist claims that anarchists abstained from the revolt in Catalonia (in fact, the first shots of the revolt were directed by the Catalan rebels towards CNT members trying to take part in the revolt in an organised fashion by opening their union locals). As he states, the “absurd contention according to which the confederal proletariat of Catalonia allegedly betrayed their brethren in Asturias melts away in the face of a truthful nar-