

The Foreign Legion of the revolution

**German anarcho-syndicalist and volunteers in anarchist militias during the
Spanish civil war**

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Only after Ken Loach's film "Land and Freedom" the wide public heard about what had been deliberately ignored or forgotten for decades : The Spanish Civil War was not only a clash between democracy and fascism ; also did it start a social revolution unprecedented for this century. With the Spanish Revolution also the foreign volunteers were forgotten that had not fought in the International Brigades but on the side of the anarchosyndicalist CNT-FAI and the POUM. These volunteers were losers of the Spanish Civil War in two respects. Not only did they lose the war but they were also inferior in the battle against the anti-revolutionary forces in the republican camp.

In my essay I examine the history of the about 250 Germans that were engaged on the side of the CNT-FAI as propagandists, journalists or as armed fighters in the militias. Only a minority of these 250 volunteers had joined anarchosyndicalist organizations in Germany. In the lee of the CNT-FAI the German anarchosyndicalists too enjoyed a "short summer of anarchy." For a short time the DAS [Gruppe Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten im Ausland (Group of German anarchosyndicalists in exile)], that was founded in 1934 and had played a minor role till the Civil War, was the politically most influential German exile organization in Barcelona. Because of the repression of the stalinist communists the activities of the DAS came to an abrupt end in June 1937.

The defeat during the War and the experience of the stalinist repression eclipsed the fundamental political differences that had existed between the CNT-FAI and the international anarchosyndicalist movement. In memoirs and memories of the German anarchosyndicalists this conflict was either ignored or idealized. That is why I outline in the first chapter first of all the relations between the CNT-FAI and the international anarchosyndicalist movement. In the second chapter the activities of the German anarchosyndicalists in Spain before and after the Civil War are described and in the third chapter the engagement of German volunteers in the militias of the CNT-FAI.

I. The CNT-FAI and the international anarchosyndicalist movement

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, the CNT-FAI had only marginal contacts with the international labour movement. The CNT had been affiliated with the anarchosyndicalist IAA (International Workmens' Association) since 1923. In the thirties the IAA had long since passed its political peak. Except for the CNT and the Swedish SAC, that had about thirty thousand members, the other sections of the IAA in Europe were nothing but small propaganda organizations and exile groups. The IAA appeared hardly any more in public and basically the SAC bore its very limited financial resources.¹

The office of the IAA - with the Dutchman Arthur Lehning as full-time secretary - moved in 1933 from Berlin to Madrid and in 1934 to Barcelona. Lehning's letters from Spain vary from enthusiasm for the revolutionary spirit of the Spanish movement to bitter criticism of its organizational and theoretical shortcomings. He particularly criticized the insurgent tendency of the Spanish movement, that the militant cadres of the FAI embodied and their absolute disinterest in

¹ On the IAA see Wayne Thorpe : "The Workers Themselves". Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1919-1923, Dordrecht 1989 ; ders. : Syndicalist International before World War II, in : Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe : Revolutionary Syndicalism. An International Perspective, Aldershot 1990, pp. 237-260

international issues. The CNT was a “movement without brains and intelligence,” which showed an “absolutely hostile attitude,” and that did not fulfill its “financial commitments.” The CNT had considered each statement of the IAA as an interference in Spanish affairs.² The German anarchosyndicalist and later to become secretary of the IAA, Helmut Rüdiger, who had been living in Barcelona since 1932, commented similarly. He characterized the CNT as a “national socialist movement” that had in common with the international anarchosyndicalism only the “terminology of the common program.”³

The CNT was hardly comparable to the other sections of the IAA. The dues were very modest, there were no strike funds and only very few paid union officials. Organizational structures at national level were only little developed. International issues were practically of no importance.⁴ At the Congress of the IAA in Paris in 1935 the delegate of the CNT reduced the international self-image to the concise formula : “We make the Revolution at home, copy it ; that is our Internationalism.”⁵

Therefore the CNT-FAI not even basically had an international propaganda apparatus at the beginning of the Civil War. A few days after the revolt in Barcelona, the German anarchosyndicalist Augustin Souchy was appointed leader of the International Department from the Regional Committee of the CNT. Souchy, who was secretary of the IAA in Berlin from 1923 to 1933, was acquainted with the Spanish conditions due to several trips and he personally knew the leading CNT-FAI union officials.⁶ The American Martin Gudell and since January 1937 the exile Hungarian Paul Partos were amongst his closest colleagues. The International Department looked after the numerous journalists, politicians and writers that came to Barcelona. In addition, Souchy made a lot of trips to the European foreign countries as a kind of ‘Foreign Minister’ of the CNT-FAI, where he tried to enlist solidarity with Spain. The International Department periodically published an information bulletin, that appeared at times in nine languages. The bulletins informed about the events in Spain from the point of view of the CNT-FAI. They were predominantly official statements and translations of the libertarian press. Apart from that, the bulletins contained articles that were orientated to the specific conditions of the respective countries. In France, the magazine *L’Espagne Antifasciste* (CNT-FAI-AIT) was published additionally. The radio program of the CNT-FAI broadcast three hours each night in foreign language. The editors of the bulletins were mainly members of anarchist and anarchosyndicalist organizations of the respective countries, that had come to Barcelona or that had already been living there in exile.⁷

The foreign propaganda of the CNT-FAI was restricted by three deciding factors. First, the prejudices against the CNT-FAI were widely held in the international labour movement and in

² Lehning to Rudolf Rocker, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam (IISG), Rocker Archive, Nr. 144. To the relations between CNT and IAA see also Alexander Schapiro, Bericht über die Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) und den Aufstand in Spanien 1933, in : Claudio Pozzoli (ed.), *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung*, Bd. 4, pp. 159-194.

³ Rüdiger to Rocker, 11. 7. 1936, IISG, Rocker Archive, Nr. 188.

⁴ For an overview see Antonia Bar, *The CNT. The Glory and Tragedy of Spanish Anarchosyndicalism*, in : Thorpe / van der Linden, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, pp. 119-138.

⁵ Cited in Fritz Benner : Stellung zu dem Artikel „Überflüssige und notwendige Kritik des Kam. H. R., IISG, Rocker Archive, Nr. 82.

⁶ See Augustin Souchy, „Vorsicht : Anarchist !“. Ein Leben für die Freiheit. Politische Erinnerungen, Darmstadt 1977.

⁷ Concerning the bulletins and the editors see Gudell to National Committee of the CNT, 7. 5., 3. 12. 1937, IISG, FAI-Archive, *Popaganda-Exterior* (PE) film 74.

liberal circles. Second, it was inferior to its rivals of the republic camp in the international propaganda. Particularly the Communists, but the Socialists and republicans too, censored all the information about the social revolution in Spain.⁸ Third, the CNT-FAI did not have a clear international strategy and its allies were too feeble outside Spain to form an effective counterbalance to the communist and the social-democratic labour movement.

The CNT-FAI's entry to the Regional and Central Government symbolized its far-reaching break with the anarchist tradition. A large number of foreign anarchosyndicalists harshly criticized this policy of the CNT-FAI. This was one of the reasons why the CNT, despite initial acceptance, was no longer willing to put its foreign propaganda in the hands of the IAA. But it was more important that the CNT-FAI was looking for political alliance partners beyond the small organizations of the IAA. Souchy was one of the architects of this policy.⁹ In November 1937 the CNT-FAI founded its own relief organization, independent of the IAA : the SIA (International Antifascist Solidarity), that collected money for the Spanish battle in the foreign countries, stressing antifascism and not anarchosyndicalism.¹⁰

A large number of the foreign anarchosyndicalists personalized this conflict by holding Souchy responsible for the tension between the IAA and the CNT. There was not a complete break between the CNT and the IAA, like Rüdiger had feared in August 1937, but this did not change the fundamental political dilemma. The sections of the IAA were politically too weak to generate an effective solidarity work for the CNT-FAI, whereas the CNT-FAI was obliged to withdraw to an antifascist position. The extent to which the CNT-FAI was willing to conform out of tactical considerations is shown by the fact that at the end of 1937 the CNT even considered an alliance with the Communists against the republicans and Socialists.¹¹

In practice, this led to incompatible conflict of interests. When after the May days a large number of foreign anarchosyndicalists were arrested in Spain, the CNT distanced itself in public from the "Relief Action Committee for the Victims of the Spanish Counter-Revolution" founded in Paris. Its work was judged to be an "insulting and irresponsible propaganda" because the CNT-FAI could protect the comrades arrested in Spain "single-handedly and by own means."¹² The CNT-FAI did support its foreign comrades, but not very vigorously. The "entire propaganda about the Communist's power in Spain and the persecution of revolutionaries," said the secretary

⁸ See George Esenwein / Adrian Shubert, *The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931 - 1939*, Harlow, Essex 1995, pp. 243-250.

⁹ See Partos to Karl Korsch, 13. 4. 1937, IISG ; Paul Partos papers. To the relationships of the International Department to foreign labour organizations see Gudell to National Committee of the CNT, 1. 6. 2. 6. 1937, IISH, FAI Archive, PE film 74.

¹⁰ In France this strategy had a relative big success and the SIA claimed 45.000 members there. (XXX = letzte Passage verändert) See Dave Berry : *Solidarité Internationale Antifasciste : Les Anarchistes français et la Guerre Civile d'Espagne*, in : Jean Sagnes und Sylvie Cancanas (ed.), *Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne. Actes du colloque de Perpignan*, Université de Perpignan, 1992, pp. 78-88. In England Emma Goldmann organized the SIA. See Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldmann in Exile. From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 224-225.

¹¹ For this conflict see Thorpe, *Syndicalist Internationalism before World War II*, pp.252-257 ; Wexler, *Emma Goldmann in Exile* 218 - 222 ; Pierre Besnard, *Rapport Moral, présenté au Congrès de l'AIT de décembre 1937*, IISH, IWMA Archive, Nr. 21, S. 64-66 ; Circulaire du groupe DAS, in : IISG, *Rocker Archive*, Nr. 536 ; Helmut Rüdiger, *Rapport du Secrétariat de Barcelone pour le Congrès de l'AIT, à Paris, le 7 Décembre 1937*, in : IISH, *Archive IWMA*, Nr. 22 ; Rüdiger to Rocker, 23. 11. 1937, in : IISG, *Archiv Rocker*, Nr. 188A. Souchy, *Déclaration*, IISG, FAI Archive, PE film 23 ;

¹² *Manifest des Auslandssekretariats der CNT-FAI*, in : *Informationsdienst der CNT-FAI*, Nr. 67, December 1937.

of the National Committee of the CNT, Mariano Vázquez, on the Congress of the IAA in October 1938, damaged “only the solidarity movement for the antifascist Spain in the foreign countries.”¹³

II. German anarchosyndicalists in the Spanish Civil War

1. German anarchosyndicalists in the Spanish exile from 1933 to 1936

Spain was the preferred place of exile for the German anarchosyndicalists after 1933.¹⁴ Out of a total of sixty-six anarchosyndicalist emigrants, twenty-two had been living in Barcelona before the Civil War. For two reasons the German anarchosyndicalists felt drawn towards Spain. Firstly, because of the liberal asylum rights : It was relatively easy to obtain a residence permit, and there existed no general employment restrictions for emigrants. Secondly, because of the powerful anarchosyndicalist movement : The Spanish movement symbolized the revolutionary hope of the handful of German anarchosyndicalists. In 1932 the FAUD (Free Workers Union of Germany) had only 4307 members left, and could not have a deciding influence on the political development in Germany. In the press of the FAUD the Spanish movement took first place. When the CNT could operate legally again in 1931, a regular ‘revolutionary tourism’ to Spain began. For the writer Etta Federn-Kohlhaas and her two children, as well as for three anarchosyndicalists from Upper Silesia, Spain had already become a country of exile in 1932.¹⁵

Because of the high unemployment it was difficult for the emigrants to settle down economically. Helmut Rüdiger wrote about that to a comrade in 1935. This situation was not new to most of the emigrants. In Germany too, they had lived in poverty and suffered many privations during the world economic crisis. The linguistic and mental adaption to the host country and the relations with the CNT were also difficult. One felt “often like an ‘undesirable alien’,” wrote Rüdiger about the relations with the Spanish comrades. “It’s tragic that even as a refugee you don’t get the least aid or support in obtaining jobs from the Spanish movement.”¹⁶

With that Rüdiger indirectly looked back on the solidarity of the FAUD with its persecuted Spanish comrades during the dictatorship of Primo de Riveras. Therefore the emigrants assessed the Spanish movement in various ways. Some remained isolated and without contact to their Spanish comrades. Those who succeeded in adapting linguistically and mentally were enthusiastic. “They saw the comrade in me, not the German, the alien. In a word-I was one of them,” remembered Karl Brauner, who had been living in Barcelona since 1934.¹⁷ Due to “the example of the Spanish comrades,” wrote the Berlin anarchosyndicalist Rudolf Michaelis, the “feeling of the defeat suffered in Germany” was increasingly becoming less important for him.¹⁸ The po-

¹³ Helmut Rüdiger, Kurzer Bericht über den Kongreß der IAA 1938, IISG, Emma Goldmann Archive, XXXVI Annex, pp. 25124 -25135.

¹⁴ On the resistance and exile of the German anarchosyndicalists see Rudolf Berner, Die unsichtbare Front. Bericht über die illegale Arbeit in Deutschland (1937). Herausgegeben, annotiert und ergänzt durch eine Studie zu Widerstand und Exil deutscher Anarchisten und Anarchosyndikalisten von Andreas G. Graf und Dieter Nelles, Berlin 1997, pp. 71-129.

¹⁵ For Etta Federn-Kohlhaas and her relations to the anarchist Free Woman in Spain see Marianne Kröger (Hg.), Etta Federn, Revolutionär auf ihre Art, Gießen 1997.

¹⁶ Rüdiger to Steimer, 3. 5. 1935, in : IISG, Senja Fléchine/ Mollie Steimer Archive.

¹⁷ Dieter Nelles, „Außen abgekühlt, doch voller Glut im Inneren“. Karl Brauner (1914-1994), in : Schwarzer Faden, Nr. 51 (1994), pp. 64-63.

¹⁸ Michaelis to Rocker, 30. 6. 1936, in : IISG Rocker Archive, Nr. 161.

litical activities of the emigrants were largely limited to discussions in private circles. Only the victory of the Popular Front Parties at the elections in February 1936 led to a certain revival of the group activities, because now they could appear in public. In April 1936, the DAS became a member of the FAI in Barcelona. But only the outbreak of the Civil War should mean a big change for the German emigrants.

2. The DAS during the Civil War

Side by side with the Spanish comrades, the German anarchosyndicalists were involved in the armed insurrection against the rebelling military, in the course of which they were confronted with Nazis, that had intervened in the battles on the side of the military. Together with Spanish comrades a group of the DAS stormed the German Club in the Calle Caspe-Lauria. Not only did they take a machine gun and other arms, but also the membership list and numerous documents of the Nazis in Spain. On 19 July 1936 the German anarchosyndicalists not only paralyzed “a powerful foreign organization of the Nazis in Spain”¹⁹, as Michaelis wrote in retrospect, but also the “model organization” of the foreign Nazi party organizations.²⁰ On 24 July the German Consul General told the Foreign Office that under the “direction of German Jews and Communists, German institutions, German firms and houses” had been “searched, destroyed and raided completely at random.”²¹ In reality the DAS had systematically collated documents about the activities of the Nazis in Barcelona during the searches. The Nazi party had covered all Spain with a web of party cells and subsidiary organizations, observed systematically the Germans living in Spain, in closest cooperation with the Spanish right circles and methodically exerted influence on the policy and the economy of the country.

The Central Committee of the Antifascist militia, of which the political key positions were filled by the CNT-FAI, entrusted the DAS with the control of all the german-speaking foreigners in Barcelona. This included the control of frontier, post, harbour and railway. The DAS systematically made searches in houses of Germans who were suspected of sympathizing with the National Socialists.²² The German Consul General reckoned that the DAS had confiscated 60-70 flats and premises up to the beginning of November 1937.²³ The confiscated objects were handed over to the revolutionary committees and militias. After the eviction of the German Consulate General in November 1937, the DAS took over its rooms. All the Germans that had not left Barcelona needed a control certificate of the DAS. At that time an estimated 400-500 Germans still lived in Barcelona.

Under the decisive political influence of the DAS the International Committee of Antifascist Emigrants (ICAE) Antifascist Emigrants (CIDEA) was founded in August 1936. The CIDEA took over the money and the house of the Jewish Relief Action Committee for Emigrants, that had already existed before the Revolution. To the Committee belonged besides three representatives of the DAS two representatives of the KPD and German members of the POUM. Isidor Aufseher,

¹⁹ Rudolf Michaelis, *Es geschah 1936 in Barcelona*, Berliner Zeitung, 17.7. 1966, p.3.

²⁰ See Donald M. McKale : *The Swastika outside Germany*, Kentside University Press 1977, p. 81.

²¹ German Consulate General to Foreign Office, 24.7. 1936, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn (PAAA), Pol..III. (32), Bd.2.

²² See Gustav Doster, *Gruppe DAS*, in : *Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv och Bibliotek*, Stockholm (ARAB), Rüdiger Archive, vol. 12 ; *Protokoll über die Tätigkeit der DAS-Gruppe im Monat Juli-August*, IISG, Rocker Archive, Nr.550g ; *Historial del Grupo DAS de Barcelona*, in : IISG, FAI Archiv, PE film 3.

²³ German Consule General to Foreign Office, 6. 11. 1937, in : PAAA, Pol. III (51), Bd. 21.

a member of the DAS, was appointed secretary. A saddler and tailor collective for unemployed emigrants was set up, where 30 persons worked. There were produced pieces of equipment for the militia. In addition the DAS managed a restaurant and a bookshop, of which the former proprietors had been National Socialists, as collective enterprises.

A further task of the DAS was the charge and the political control of the German-speaking volunteers in the International Group of the Durruti Column. Since November 1937 Michaelis was Political Delegate of the International Group and at the same time negotiator of the Front Group of the DAS. The Front Delegates of the DAS managed two soldier homes in Barcelona, that were set up in villas of former National Socialists. For those militiamen that for different reasons no longer could or wanted to serve at the front, the DAS got jobs in the Emigrant's Collectives or in industry.

In the International Department of the CNT-FAI, Rüdiger was appointed leader of the German language propaganda. He edited the weekly published Information Service of the CNT-FAI, and wrote the articles for the short-wave transmitter of the CNT-FAI, that broadcast three times per week in German. Together with a German Communist Rüdiger edited also the German language information service of the Catalan Government. In the propaganda department of the National Committee of the CNT in Valencia and the Regional Committee in Madrid worked as well members of the DAS. Besides the propaganda for the CNT-FAI the DAS also came to the fore journalistically. In Barcelona the ASY publishers, that had already been run by the FAUD under this name in Berlin, was refounded. From January to June the ASY publishers put out the paper *Soziale Revolution* and two brochures written by Rüdiger, which were translated into several languages. The "Black-Red-Book, Documents of the Hitler Fascism" has to be considered undoubtedly as a journalistic achievement published in June 1937. In it the documents were published the documents that had been taken from the Nazis in Barcelona.²⁴

Altogether 45 people were members of the DAS. The vast number of the anarchosyndicalists emigrants had come to Catalonia after the outbreak of the Revolution. In Spain the DAS took on 14 new members. Only those could become members which had already been organized in anarchosyndicalist groups. That is why most of the new members were emigrants that belonged prior to the CNT. In January 1937 a sympathizer organization was founded for the approx. 50 to 80 German emigrants that had affiliated with the CNT due to their sympathies for the revolution : the ASYK (Anarchosyndicalist Action Group)

The DAS had advanced from a small, isolated group to the politically most influential German exile group in Barcelona. But the political influence on Barcelona remained restricted. Publications of the DAS got only little response in the German exile. The DAS was lacking both the financial resources and the members needed to promote its ideas in the most important centres of the exile. But the sudden and unexpected upturn of the DAS had its dark side. After the first euphoric months of the Revolution it was obviously difficult for some DAS members to accept that their political scope of action was more and more restricted. On the one hand because the political influence of the CNT-FAI in the republican camp declined. On the other hand because the DAS only had a very limited influence on the political decisions of the CNT-FAI, even if it came to German issues.

²⁴ The Black-Red book was published 1937 in Spanish. The planned English and French version was not realized. See Gudell to Mark Mratschny, 27. 8. 1937, in : IISG, Rucker Archive, Nr. 542.

That was clearly recognizable when in January 1937 Ferdinand Götze left the DAS and founded a competitive organization together with three other emigrants : the SRDF. The SRDF wanted to concentrate all non-Communist German volunteers into a separate military unit, by consulting former Russian officers and opposition National Socialists.²⁵ The plans of this in actual facts absolutely unimportant group obviously met with a certain sympathy with some union officials of the CNT-FAI. For despite protests of the DAS, Eugen Scheyer, a member of the SRDF, was at times military adviser of an anarchist unit at the Aragon Front and of the anarchist youth in Barcelona. Not without good reason the DAS characterized Scheyer as “political adventurer.”²⁶

But the SRDF was relevant to the DAS also because Elli Götze, Ferdinand Götze’s wife, was chairwoman of the DAS. Although she did not sympathize with the SRDF, this line-up had to lead to great tension in the DAS. That is why Elli Götze as chairwoman of the DAS was voted out in April 1937. Michaelis was designated her successor. But he attached to his election the condition that the DAS had to “enter the CNT’s service” and bow to its policy.²⁷

Shortly afterwards the reorganization of the DAS came to an abrupt and dramatic end. Especially the DAS was affected by the communist repression, that began immediately after the May Events and was aimed above all at the “Trotskyist-Fascist” POUM.²⁸

Except for some, all members of the DAS and emigrants that were politically close to the DAS were arrested. The DAS members were partly put in state prisons, partly in communist private prisons. They were accused of “espionage” and the participation in the May Events. The interrogations were led by German and Russian communists. The prisoners were questioned about their activities in Spain, but also intensively about their illegal work in Germany. They had not been directly tortured, but they were at the mercy of humiliating and long questionings as well as extremely lousy prison conditions. Out of about thirty arrested members of the DAS and the ASYK, four still were in the Carcel Modelo in Barcelona and eight prisoners in a prison in Segorbe at the beginning of January 1937. Out of the latter, five were freed in April 1938 - inter alia Michaelis- the others stayed in prison till the end of 1938.²⁹

The representatives of the German communist party (KPD) in Barcelona were of a central importance at the arrests of the DAS. Since October 1936 the KPD had built up a secret intelligence service in Barcelona, that was in contact with sections of the Catalan authorities controlled by the PSCU, and the Russian secret service NKWD.³⁰ Since the beginning of the Civil War there had always been arguments between the DAS and the KPD. In August 1936 a group of German communists around Hans Beimler, that were accommodated in the Bakunin barracks, had incurred the Spaniards’ displeasure because of their military exercises - “the drill according to old Prussian

²⁵ See Aufruf zum Volkssozialismus, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv Zürich, Sammlung Sozialrevolutionäre Deutsche Freiheitsbewegung (335/71b/16) ; Gudell an Nk, 12. 3. 1938.

²⁶ DAS to Regional Committee of the CNT, 12. 1. 1937, IISG, FAI Archive, PE film 3 ; Willy Brandt, who knew Scheyer from Norway characterized him as an „extremely unsolidary and partly insane person“. Brandt to SAC, 7. 7. 1937, ARAB, SAC Archive, F I, Vol. 1.

²⁷ Michaelis to DAS, 9. 4. 1937, in : Centro de Documentación Historico-social, Barcelona.

²⁸ On the May Events see Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War. Revolution and Counterrevolution , University of North Carolina Press 1991, pp. 429-461.

²⁹ On the imprisonment of DAS members are numerous sources to be found in the archives of Rocker, Rüdiger and the FAI Archives. (XXX das Wort arrestations gibt es im englischen m. W. überhaupt nicht, habe den satz verändert, vgl dein Original)

³⁰ See Peter Huber, Stalins Schatten in der Schweiz. Schweizer Kommunisten in Moskau : Verteidiger und Gefangene der Komintern, Zürich 1994, S. 321-340 ; Patrik von zur Mühlen : Spanien war ihre Hoffnung. Die deutsche Linke im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936 bis 1939, Bonn 1983, pp. 168-177.

pattern.³¹ At the instigation of Abad de Santillan, the responsible CNT-FAI union official for the militias, the DAS members Michaelis and Willi Winkelmann tried to persuade the Communist volunteers to join the anarchist militias. They succeeded in winning over six of the approx. 80 volunteers, with which they formed the machine gun unit Erich Mühsam, that affiliated with the Los Aguiluchos Column.³²

In October 1936 further twenty German volunteers left the Communist Centuria Thälmann and affiliated with the International Group of the Durruti Column. Hans Beimler, the KPD representative in Barcelona, had dismissed the negotiator Kurt Lehmann, who had been elected by the volunteers and dictatorially appointed a political delegate of his choice. Lehmann had come from Antwerpen to Barcelona with a group of seven seamen of the ITF (International Transportworkers Federation) and had joined the KPD till the beginning of 1936.³³ “With an armed group” of the anarchists, remembered Lehmann, “we got back our passports out of the Hotel Colon that the communists were not willing to hand over to us voluntarily. It worked without difficulty ; the communists were in the minority at that time and could not afford any clashes.”³⁴

For the KPD these activities of the DAS were an outrageous provocation. Because the DAS occupied in Catalonia a political territory that the KPD claimed as their own as if it were the most natural thing in the world.³⁵ But till the May Events the position of the communists had been too weak to risk an open confrontation with the DAS. But in August 1937 the KPD paper *La Llibertad* announced triumphantly in Barcelona that the “counter-revolutionary activity of Trotskyist and other pirates” in the emigrant’s work had “thoroughly been finished.”³⁶ The DAS was no longer existent in Barcelona and the buildings and collectives which they had managed were now in control of the KPD.

III. German volunteers in the militias of the CNT-FAI

1. Foreign volunteers in the militias of the CNT-FAI

There are no exact numbers concerning the international volunteers in the militias of the CNT-FAI. Souchy estimated their number to be not more than three thousand.³⁷ According to the existing source material there were not more than two thousand volunteers. In the Historic Archive in Salamanca can be found index cards from about 1200 foreign volunteers out of which 335 were exiled Spaniards. The others comprised out on the following nations : 513 Italians, 169 Frenchmen, 32 Germans, 29 Bulgarians, 20 Belgians, 17 Swiss, 15 exile Russians and 13 Dutchmen. The rest

³¹ See Rüdiger to Rocker, Barcelona 25.9. 1936, in : IISG, Archiv Rocker, Nr. 188.

³² Dieter Nelles, Willi Winkelmann : “Der Rote Konsul von Barcelona”. Ein Name und dessen Konsequenzen, in : *Tatort Duisburg 1933-1945. Band II, Widerstand und Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus.* hg. von Rudolf Tappe und Manfred Tietz für die Geschichtskommission der VVN / Bund der Antifaschisten, Essen 1993 ; pp 512-520.

³³ Vgl. Dieter Nelles, ITF resistance against nazism and fascism in Germany and Spain, in : Bob Reinalda (ed.), *The International Transportworkers Federation 1914-1945. The Edo Fimmen Era*, Amsterdam 1997, pp. 174-198.

³⁴ Interview Kurt Lehmann with Jan Foitzik, 10. 2. 1979. Copy in possession of the author.

³⁵ See the memoirs of the representative of the KPD in Barcelona Karl Mewis, *Im Auftrag der Partei. Erlebnisse im Kampf gegen die faschistische Diktatur*, Berlin 1971, p. 151.

³⁶ *Die Betreuung der Emigranten*, *La Llibertad*, Nr. 3, August 1937. (*Llibertad* ? xxx)

³⁷ See Augustin Souchy, *Nacht über Spanien. Anarcho-Syndikalisten in Revolution und Bürgerkrieg 1936-1939. Ein Tatsachenbericht*, Grafenau 1986, p. 181.

consisted out of twenty further nations.³⁸ The list is incomplete, but represents an approximate tendency except for the German volunteers.³⁹ Out of the German members of the militia 192 are (188 men and 6 women) known by name. Their total number did probably not exceed 230, for all the relevant archives had been analysed. '

Italians, Frenchmen and Germans provided by far the largest contingent of the foreign militiamen and formed own sections in the militias. The first foreign volunteers in the militias were recruited from emigrants and several participants in the Worker Olympics in Barcelona. Already on 28 July two trains with 600 foreign volunteers- exiled Spaniards, Italians and Frenchmen - arrived in Barcelona. They were welcomed enthusiastically and admitted to the militias of the CNT-FAI.⁴⁰ Approximately 1000-1500 volunteers came to Catalonia in the first weeks of the Civil War.

On Carlos Rosselli's initiative, the founder of the movement *Guistizia e Libertá*, the first organized foreign unit was founded in a militia of the CNT-FAI. In August 1936 Rosselli came to Barcelona with 130 Italian volunteers. The group formed an Italian section in the Ascaso Column, to which belonged 250 members at the beginning of October.⁴¹

In the Durruti Column the foreign volunteers were united in an International Group. The Frenchman Louis Berthoumieu was elected General Delegate ; a former artillery captain, that had already lived in Spain for several years. In October 1936 about 200 foreign volunteers belonged to the International Group. There was a French and a German section, which formed each a *centuria*.⁴²

Till the end of 1936 there still was a larger International Group of the 150 foreign volunteers, 120 of whom were Frenchmen, in the Ortiz Column. Exact details concerning the size of each group are difficult to fix. Only in spring 1937 the CNT-FAI started a central registration of the foreign volunteers. Without the Italian section in the Ascaso Column there still were at that time about 300-400 volunteers at the Aragon Front.⁴³

For the CNT-FAI the foreign volunteers were not of great importance. In September 1936 the CNT-FAI declared in the libertarian press in the foreign countries that arms were needed, but no further volunteers. Durruti asked the French comrades in one of his last letters to restrict their "visites de touriste." The solidarity work in France was more important than to fight at the Front.⁴⁴ Nevertheless foreign volunteers were admitted in the militias of the CNT-FAI without problems till the beginning of 1937.

³⁸ See Patrik von zur Mühlen : *Spanien war ihre Hoffnung. Die deutsche Linke im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936 bis 1939*, Bonn 1983, p. 103.

³⁹ A list that was from drawn up in 1938 contains 162 names of french volunteers. See *Sección Francesa de Propaganda. Lista De Franceses Llegados A España Despues Del 19 De Julio 1936. Entragada el 18 de octubre de 1938*, IISG, FAI, PE film 106.

⁴⁰ See Informationsdienst der syndikalistischen CNT und der anarchistischen FAI, Nr. 2, 28. 7. 1936, p. 13.

⁴¹ See Stanislao Giambattista Pugliese, *Carlos Rosselli : Socialist heretic and antifascist exile*, Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1995, pp. 301-325 ; Margaret Jane Slaughter : *Italian Antifascism : The Italian Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mexico, 1973, pp. 52 -59.

⁴² See Abel Paz, *Durruti. Leben und Tode des spanischen Anarchisten*, Hamburg 1994, p. 472 ; Dave Berry : *French Anarchists in Spain*, in : *French History*, Vol. 3 (1989), Nr. 4, pp. 427-465 ; *Liste de Miliciens*, IISG, FAI Archive, -PE film 23 ; 12. Bericht aus Spanien von Ende Dezember 1936 (Ernst Galanty), : *Arbeyderrölsens Arkiv* Kopenhagen, Bestand Willy Korbmacher, Kasten 4.

⁴³ See Bericht von der Frontreise (Paul Partos) 20.-23.2.in : *Archivo Histórico Nacional/Sección Guerra Civil, Salamanca (AHN)*, Sección P.S. Barcelona, Nr. 1040.

⁴⁴ See Berry, *French Anarchists in Spain*, p. 430.

2. German volunteers in the militias of the CNT-FAI

The first German militia unit was the Erich Mühsam Group, that went to the Aragon Front with the Los Aguiluchos Column on 27 August 1936. The Group had its position at the cemetery of Huesca.⁴⁵ In November 1937 the Group was disbanded and partly given a place in the International Group of the Durruti Column. Michaelis and Winkelmann accounted for this change by reason of the many communist volunteers in the International Group that in their opinion meant a potential danger to the libertarian essence“ of the Spanish Revolution. This danger could be confronted by „special propaganda“ of the German anarchosyndicalists. Most of the volunteers did not act out of evil intention, but did simply not understand that there could be a „revolutionary policy“ other than the Communist one.⁴⁶

The overwhelming majority of the German volunteers fought in the Durruti Column. From August 1936 to April 1937 altogether 150 German volunteers belonged to the International Group. But there were never more than 100 German volunteers at the Front at the same time. The International Group had the character of a storm troop and had a part in battles involving heavy losses till the end of 1936. During the battles for Perdiguera in October 1936, 37 international volunteers, that had been blocked off from the rest of the Column, were killed. During this event, the murder of four nurses, amongst them the only 19-year-old German Auguste Marx, caused a stir.⁴⁷

After the militarization of the militias, the International Group was renamed International Company of the 26th Division (Durruti). From January to April 1937 the International Company was not involved in any clashes. For this period of time between 120 and 140 volunteers belonged to the Company, out of which about half were Germans. On 13 April 1937 the International Company was deployed in the battles on the strategically important Ermita de Santa Quiteria next to Tardienta. There it suffered military disaster, like before the Communist Centuria Thälmann in October 1936. The International Company counted 16 dead, 23 injured and four missing persons.⁴⁸

In the Sacco and Vanzetti Battery a group of German militiamen fought, out of which ten are known by name. The anarchosyndicalist Paul Chacon, who had been living in Barcelona since 1932, and who called himself in Spain Maximo Mas, was commander of this artillery unit. As military adviser Ernst Günther, a former Communist and officer of the First World War, stood by his side. The Sacco and Vanzetti Battery was part of the Tierra y Libertad Column, to which

⁴⁵ See Hans Bronnen [Rudolf Michaelis], Mit der 'Centuria Erich Mühsam' vor Huesca. Erinnerungen eines Spanienkämpfers, anlässlich des 100. Geburtstages von Erich Mühsam, Berlin 1996.

⁴⁶ Nelles, Dieter : Willi Winkelmann : "Der Rote Konsul von Barcelona", p. 516.

⁴⁷ See Willi Borostowki : Als Internationaler an der Katalonienfront, in : Brigada Internacional ist unser Ehrenname ... Erlebnisse ehemaliger deutscher Spanienkämpfer. Ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Hans Maaßen, Berlin (DDR) 1974, Bd. 2, pp. 16-17 ; Oskar Heinz : Bei der Kolonne "Durruti", ibid., Bd. 1, pp. 51-54 ; Paz, Durruti, p. 539-541 ; Robert Schreiber : Wir setzen über den Ebro, in : Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt (ed.) : Der rote Großvater erzählt, Frankfurt/Main 1974, pp 193-201 ; Erinnerungsbericht Alfred Berger, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SPMO), Bestand Erinnerungen (EA), Nr. 1706 ; Informationsdienst der CNT-FAI, Nr. 24, 16. 11. 1937.

⁴⁸ See Bronnen, Mit der 'Centuria Erich Mühsam' bei Huesca ; Heiner Spiess (ed.) : " ... (xxx merkwürdige Zeichen, tauchen irgendwo noch mal auf) dass Friede und Glück Europas vom Sieg der spanischen Republik abhängt." Schweizer im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg, Zürich 1986, pp. 79-80 ; Karl Peutl an Otto Bauer, 5. 7. 1937, in : Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands (ed.), Für Spaniens Freiheit. Österreicher an der Seite der Spanischen Republik 1936-1939, pp. 274-276 ;

belonged especially chosen members of the Catalan FAI. In September 1936 the Column fought in Madrid and in the spring of 1937 in Cuenca at the Teruel Front. After the militarization the Column formed the 153th Brigade of the People's Army.⁴⁹

In the Italian section of the Ascaso Column there was also a group of German volunteers. The Social Democrat Otto Albrecht wrote about 28 Germans that had gone with him to the Front. About the military activities of this group several letters of the Social Democrat Otto Albrecht are preserved, as well as an article of the former Communist Willi Lai. In the course of the reorganization of the militias, some members of this group went over to the International Company of the Durruti Column in March 1937.⁵⁰

In the International Group of the Ortiz Column fought twelve Germans, about which no-one knows more than that.⁵¹ In addition here and there were Germans in other militias of the CNT-FAI: A small group of Germans and Swiss in the Hilario Zamora Column, that affiliated with the International Brigade in November 1936.⁵² Two volunteers in the Iron Column, that defended itself most strongly against the militarization⁵³; Two volunteers in the del Rosal Column in Madrid, out of which the socialdemocrat Carl Oster made it to commander of a battalion.⁵⁴

There were other volunteers with military experience like Oster who had military functions in the militias and later in the People's Army. José Maria Oster was commander of a brigade in the 28th Division (Ascaso), the writer Carl Einstein was technical director of a front sector nine kilometres long in the Durruti Column, and Johann Vinzenz Eberle advanced to the instructor of the cavalry in a sector of the Aragon Front and later had the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.⁵⁵

3. The militarization of the militias and the International Group of the Durruti Column

"Militiamen yes! Soldiers never!" With this slogan the CNT-FAI at the beginning of the Civil War opposed the militarization of the militias that claimed the Government, i. e. their submission to uniform military headquarters and military discipline. In November 1937 the leadership of the CNT-FAI accepted the change of the militias into divisions of the People's Army. After that, the militarization of the militias went on relatively quickly, but was only completely finished in the summer of 1937. The militias of the CNT-FAI kept a certain independence. Their units changed

⁴⁹ See Paz, Durruti, S. 522; José Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 315; Informationsdienst der CNT-FAI, Nr. 11, 31. 8. 1936, Günter to Souchy, 14. 10. 36, in: IISG, FAI Archiv, PE film 80. On Szakon (stimmt der Name so? xxx) see also Dieter Nelles, *Die Unabhängige Antifaschistische Gruppe 9. Kompanie im Lager Gurs. Zur gruppenspezifischen Aktion nach dem Spanischen Bürgerkrieg*, in: Helga Grebing / Christl Wickert (eds.), *Das „andere Deutschland“ im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, Essen 1994, pp. 56-85.

⁵⁰ See Otto Albrecht an H., 4. 2., 14. 4. 1937 und an M., 11. 3. 1937, in: IISG, Nachlaß Hertz, Leitzordner 1a; Albrecht-Hansen an Vorstand der SPD, 6. 6. 1939, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn, Bestand Sopade, Mappe 50; Ein deutscher Miliciano (Willi Lai), *Kampf in Aragon, Soziale Revolution*, Nr. 10, 1937.

⁵¹ Bericht von der Frontreise (Paul Partos).

⁵² See Adolf Frank, *Von der „Columna Hilario Zamora“ zum Thälmann-Bataillon*, in: Max Schäfer (ed.), *Spanien 1936 bis 1939. Erinnerungen von Interbrigadisten aus der BRD*, Frankfurt am Main 1976, p. 98.

⁵³ See the Gestapo file on Erich Robst, Bundesarchiv, Zwischenarchiv Dahlwitz-Hoppegarten, Z/C 12886.

⁵⁴ See Oster to SAC (1939), in: ARAB, Bestand SAC, F I, Vol.2.

⁵⁵ See Nelles, *Die Unabhängige Antifaschistische Gruppe 9. Kompanie im Lager Gurs*, p. 64; Marianne Kröger: *Carl Einstein und die „Grupo Internacional“ der Kolonne Durruti. Ein Beitrag zur Auseinandersetzung Carl Einsteins mit der Realität des Spanischen Bürgerkriegs*, in: Klaus Kiefer (ed.), *Carl Einstein-Kolloquium 1986*, hg. von Klaus Kiefer, Frankfurt am Main 1988, pp. 261-271.

into Brigades and Divisions of the People's Army. And they were not placed in mixed brigades, like the Communists had demanded. It was not only the political pressure of the government that led to this radical change of direction of the CNT-FAI, but also the obvious lacks of the militia system. "In view of the suffered defeat that could have been avoidable," wrote Cipriano Mera, the commander of a CNT Division in Madrid in a manifest in March 1937, "all our fighters must call united : militarization !!!" Mera claimed for a "relentless discipline," that had to be imposed "by all means".⁵⁶

In the militias of the CNT-FAI at the Aragon Front, the resistance against the militarization was much more visible than at the Central Front in Madrid. At the beginning of January it came to a split in the Durruti Column during a meeting of the delegates in Gelsa. While the biggest part of the Column decided in favour of the militarization, a minority insisted on its rejecting its point of view. The leadership of the CNT-FAI did not accept its proposals for a reorganization of the militias, and so about 1000 militiamen left the Front at the beginning of March 1937.⁵⁷

The International Group also splitted because of the militarization of the militias. Most of the French volunteers rejected the militarization and left the Front. But the Germans widely accepted it. The approx. 75 Germans, wrote the volunteer Ernst Galanty, were in favour of a "complete reorganization and formation of the militias." The catastrophic "leadership and organization" of the military actions had provoked a "major disenchantment among the milicianos." Galanty criticized the "absolute incompetence and irresponsibility of the headquarters, the missing of officers that are capable to lead the company, the lack of arms and the inadequate instruction of the people".⁵⁸ In a resolution of the German volunteers in the International Group, written by Galanty, the militarization imposed from above was criticized, but was accepted temporarily until the creation of a new military law. The German volunteers claimed the abolition of the obligation to salute, equal pay for officers and soldiers, the freedom of the press and of discussion and the creation of soldiers' councils.⁵⁹

The claim for soldiers' councils and their competences led in the International Company to heavy debates between the Political Delegate Michaelis and a group of Marxist volunteers, to the spokesmen of which belonged Galanty and the Swiss Paul Thalmann. In contrast to the Spanish units the International Company was divided into four sections, that elected a delegate (soldiers' council) each. Together with the Political Delegate, that had been elected by the militias and had to be a member of the CNT, the section Delegates managed the administrative and political affairs of the Company. In the event of a tied vote or in the case of objection of the Political Delegate the General Meeting of the Company decided.

After a debate with Michaelis Galanty stepped down from his position as Section Delegate at the beginning of February. The group criticized from a revolutionary point of view the policy of the CNT-FAI. Its joining of the government and its excessive willingness to compromise in their relationships to the communists undermined the revolutionary forces. In contrast, Michaelis

⁵⁶ Anarchisten für das Volksheer, in : Informationsdienst der syndikalistischen CNT und der anarchistischen FAI ; Nr. 37, 1. 3. 1937.

⁵⁷ See Hans Schafranek/Werner Wögerbauer, „Nosotros, Agentes, Provocadores“. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte der „Amigos de Durruti“, in : Bochumer Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstands und der Arbeit, Nr. 8 (1987), pp. 33-51.

⁵⁸ 12. Bericht aus Spanien von Ende Dezember 1936 (Ernst Galanty).

⁵⁹ Resolution der deutschen Genossen der Gruppe International, Columna Durruti, Soziale Revolution, Nr. 2, 11.1. 1937.

defended the official point of view of the CNT-FAI. The conflict escalated at the beginning of March, when Michaelis prevented to vote on a request of the Marxist Group to advertise also in writing for their position. As a result nine volunteers left the International Company.⁶⁰

Michaelis reproached his adversaries of not having understood “the spirit and the forms of the revolutionary movement in Spain”.⁶¹ On the one hand this criticism was quite justified. On the other side Michaelis particularly knew that “the identity between the military leader and the negotiator of the soldiers” that he noticed in the militias of the CNT-FAI already was a thing of the past. Internally, he admitted frankly that the decisions in the Division had only been made by a small “inner circle,” which “knows about the real course of events and determine the same”.⁶² He himself considered the creation of a “revolutionary army” at that point of time no longer to be possible : “It would have been better if the creative powers, that we do not have, had created an own type of the People’s Army, that had on the one hand embodied the liberal spirit of our movement and on the other hand a military effectiveness.”⁶³

The acceptance of a stronger military discipline and hierarchization by Michaelis and parts of the International Company were not only determined by general political points, but also by their concrete experience at the Front. Many comrades had still not realized that the “Revolution Romanticism” had come to an end, wrote the seaman Hans Krause. The war could only be won if it would be „waged under exclusively military considerations“. ⁶⁴ The everyday life of the volunteers consisted only of military exercises from January to April. That was why some volunteers left the Front for different reasons. At the beginning of April Michaelis wrote to the military leader Manzana that it was a mistake that in the Durruti Division no obligations for foreigners existed at all. Everyone had come as volunteer, but a minority claimed for things that “corresponded neither to the self-discipline nor to the needed discipline” that were asked of the CNT soldiers. No day went by without incident that did not demonstrate the wrong interpretation of the “voluntary of the foreigners.” The Durruti Division should get separated from the small minority that did not have the necessary fighting spirit and was the source of the demoralization. All the others should have the same rights and duties as the Spaniards.⁶⁵

A few days later the International Company got almost completely wiped out at battles for the Ermita Santa Quiteria. In Barcelona the rest of the International Company got reorganized in the “Batallion IAA,” that included two foreign Companies and two Companies of members of the Anarchist Youth of Catalonia. The French regular soldier Alexis Cardeur, who had also been military leader of the International Company since March 1937, was appointed commander.⁶⁶ The Battalion IAA went to the Aragon Front again on 7 June, where it got mixed up in heavy encounters a few days later. The Batallion IAA was not accepted by the command of the People’s Army, because the Spanish Government had given an edict to transfer all the foreign volunteers

⁶⁰ On the conflict see Clara and Paul Thalmann, *Revolution für die Freiheit. Stationen eines politischen Kampfes*. Moskau/Madrid/Paris, Freiburg 1974, pp. 179-181 ; 4. und 5. Flugschrift der „Grupo International“, Wochenbericht vom 28. 2. - 7. 3. 1937 der Frontgruppe DAS, in : Hans Jürgen Degen / Helmut Ahrens (ed.), „Wir sind es leid die Ketten zu tragen...“. Antifaschisten im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg, Berlin 1979.

⁶¹ 4. Flugschrift der „Grupo International“, *ibid*.

⁶² Michaelis to Rüdiger, 28 .3. 1937, IISG, CNT Archive, Film 166.

⁶³ Michealisto Rüdiger, 9.3. 1937, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ Krause to Hans Jahn, 14.2. 37, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick Library, ITF-papers, 159/3/C/a/ 97.

⁶⁵ Michaelis to Manzana, 6. 4. 1937, Centro de Documentación Historico-social, Barcelona.

⁶⁶ Rüdiger to Besnard und Galve, 12. 5. 1937, IISG, FAI Archive, PE film 27.

in the International Brigade. And Ricardo Sanz, the commander of the 26th Division, no longer wanted any foreigners in his Division. Finally, the Battalion IAA got disbanded on 22 July 1937 after having refused to attack with absolutely insufficient weapons.⁶⁷

One part of the foreign volunteers left Spain, another part changed to the International Brigades and few changed individually to Anarchist military units. The about 20 volunteers that changed to the International Brigades were in a strictly controlled by the comunistically dominated SIM. Everyone was suspected of having participated in the May Events. As long as they did not openly express their political opinion, this did not have direct consequences. One volunteer was put straight before a firing squad due to refusal to obey orders and others were temporarily taken into custody or moved to punishment units, but this was in rare cases directly connected with their past as militiamen.⁶⁸

4. The social and political background of the German volunteers

The German volunteers in the militias as well as in the International Brigades mostly were German emigrants. Here and there were also former Foreign Legionnaires, deserter of the German army and members of National Socialist organization among them. 75% of the volunteers were workers and tradesmen. Six German women, that worked as nurses, belonged to the militias. After the militarization of the militias women were no longer admitted to the International Brigades. Compared to the International Brigades there was a major position of emigrants among the German volunteers of the militias that had already lived in Spain before the War. They had an approx. 15% share. The Communist volunteers in the Interbrigades had only a 1% share. In comparison only a few volunteers had come directly from Germany to Spain ; 6% of the militiamen, 14% of the Communists.⁶⁹

The number of anarchosyndicalists in the militias was very large. Nevertheless those were just a minority amongst the German volunteers. Only 22 had joined the FAUD before 1933. More than half the volunteers had joined Communist organizations in Germany. Though a lot of them had already detached themselves from the party in exile or were in opposition of their political line. For just six volunteers changed to the International Brigades till the summer of 1937, whereas about 40 volunteers from Communist militias or the International Brigades came to the militias. More than 50 volunteers that had belonged to socialist or communist organizations in Germany, became a member of the CNT in Spain. But this did not mean that this motivated them to become anarchosyndicalists therefore. What fascinated the volunteers was the social revolution, which was in clear contrast with their experiences in Germany. Many of them, like the communist Robert Schreiber, had waited in vain in 1933 for a „sign, an order“ for the armed insurrection against Fascism.⁷⁰ The passive defeat of the German labour movement, the imprisonment in concentration camps and the years in exile had provoked a feeling of political disillusionnement, helplessness and lack of dignity at many activists. That is why the battle in Spain worked as

⁶⁷ Spiess, : „... dass Friede und Glück Europas vom Sieg der spanischen Republik abhängt, pp. 84-98.

⁶⁸ See Politische Einschätzungen über deutsche Teilnehmer des nationalrevolutionären Kriege des spanischen Volkes, SAPMO, I 2/3/86-91.

⁶⁹ See Kommission der ausländischen Kader beim ZK der KP Spaniens. Deutsche Freiwillige im Republikanischen Spanien, in : SAPMO, I 2/3/85, pp. 8-18.

⁷⁰ Robert Schreiber, Für die Einheitsfront (1929-1931), in : Wolfgang Emmerlich, Proletarische Lebensläufe, Reinbeck pp. 293-298.

catharsis for the volunteers. Now they could finally offensively fight against Fascism and at the same time combine this with a social-revolutionary perspective.

When he saw the „anarchist mass movement,“ wrote the Austrian Socialist Karl Peutl, he had regained „belief in the masses as a revolutionary element.“⁷¹ Peutl shared this experience with many German volunteers in the anarchist militias. The German journalist Hans-Erich Kaminski wrote about the motivation of a group of foreign volunteers : „Basically, everyone wants nothing but to participate in the Revolution and set an example for the proletarians of the whole world.“⁷² It was the experience of the revolution by which the volunteers of the militias differed from those of the International Brigades. The volunteers of the International Brigades were often not even aware of the Revolution. First, many of them had come to Spain only at the beginning of 1937, and second, they lived too isolated and under restricted conditions to understand Spanish society and politics.

Conclusion

For the German anarchosyndicalists Spain had not only been a safe country of exile but also a place for a short time where they took an active part in the realization of their revolutionary ideals. The defeat in Spain to them had even more dramatic consequences as in Germany 1933. Under tightened conditions they were confronted for a second time with the misery of exile as passive victims and without own scopes of action. After their experiences in Spain they did no longer have hope that the European Labour movement could overcome Fascism by one's own efforts. With the defeat of the Spanish Republic and the outbreak of the Second World War also the conflicts between the CNT-FAI and the international anarchosyndicalist movement lost importance. It was no longer a „matter of 'Social Revolution'“, as Rüdiger wrote in 1940, but of „continued existence of the Labour movement in Europe“.⁷³ And especially for the anarchosyndicalists it was also a matter of bare survival.

After the occupation of Western Europe 21 of the emigrants fell into the hands of the German occupying forces and were taken into custody in concentration camps and prisons. 29 emigrants survived the end of the War in exile. The survived German anarchosyndicalists came to very different political consequences of their experiences in Spain. Whereas a majority became convinced anticommunists, a minority decided to live in the GDR. Despite many reservations, wrote Michaelis in the seventies, he took the GDR „for a decisive step forward in German History.“⁷⁴

But beyond these political options of the post-war time, by which broke long-standing friendships, 'Spain' remained for many the obsession of their life, as nightmarish experience as well as experience of public happiness.

⁷¹ Peutl to Bauer, 8. 7. 1937, in : Für Spaniens Freiheit, p. 276.

⁷² Kaminski, Barcelona, p. 62.

⁷³ Helmut Rüdiger, Antinazismus - die Lebensfrage der Arbeiterbewegung 1940, in : IISG, Rüdiger Archive.

⁷⁴ Michaelis to Margarete Sachs, 10. 6. 1974. Copie in possession of the author.

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