

One Hundred Years of Workers' Solidarity

The History of “Solidaridad Obrera”

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Contents

Solidaridad Obrera 1907–1939: Notes towards a history of CNT journalism	3
Paris-Barcelona	3
A newspaper for the city of bonfires	5
Along comes the confederation	7
In time of war	9
Tit for tat	13
1931: Expectations	15
Uprising!	17
Sirens...	19
...And siren songs...	21
Notice	23
Catalunya, a Catalan-language “Soli”	24
Solidaridad Obrera, clandestinity and transition, 1939–1987	26
Exile	26
Further exile	30
Reconstruction	32
Solidaridad Obrera 1976–2006: A look back at the history of CNT journalism over the last 30 years	35
Different phases	35
Content	38
Other Solidaridad Obreras	40

Solidaridad Obrera 1907–1939: Notes towards a history of CNT journalism

When he came to Barcelona back in November 1868, Giuseppe Fanelli could scarcely have dreamt how successful his mission was to prove. The fact of the matter is that Bakunin's envoy, sent to bring the good news of the International found a Workers' Movement that was already beginning to flourish: in fact, his arrival in the city coincided with significant advances in labour combination. Ferrán Aisa tells us that "The 'Glorious' revolution with its whiff of freedom made it feasible for workers' societies to organise themselves. On 1 October 1868 the Barcelona workers' associations federated with one another to form the General Directorate of Barcelona Workers' Societies [...] 13 December saw the holding of the Catalan Workers' Congress."¹

By the time Fanelli showed up, the Ateneo Catalán de la Clase Obrera (Working Class's Catalan Athenaeum) was already up and running; it was the embryo of what would become the Spanish Section of the International Working-Men's Association, launched on 20 May 1869. Soon the trade union option would prevail over other avenues to combination such as workers' cooperatives. At the same time, Bakunin's views, rather than Marx's, would inspire much of popular politics. Iberian anarchism's prolific life was just starting.

Paris-Barcelona

The turn of the century brought the Federación Regional Española de Sociedades de Resistencia/ Spanish Regional Federation of Resistance Societies, a failed venture that survived fitfully until 1905. Those were five years of tough organizational crisis arising out of the failed general strike of 1902.

The debate surrounding the general strike tactic had recently been raging in France and there was also some question surrounding the chances of its spreading across Europe and around the globe; in 1902 one erupted in Barcelona, sponsored by anarchists but boycotted by socialists. After barely a week's struggle, the numbers of workers killed (some sources speak of 100) and wounded (somewhere between 100 and 300) at the hands of the army, as well as around 500 tossed into jail², forced a return to work without a single one of the strikers' demands conceded, even though Barcelona had been brought to a standstill. The 1902 failure came as a hard blow to the anarchists, for whom the general strike was the corner stone of their revolutionary practice; consequently, what with reprisals and loss of following, the collectivist anarchism which ruled the roost in those days was brought to a low ebb.

¹ Ferrán Aisa, *Camins Utòpics. Barcelona 1868–1886* (Edicions de 1984, Barcelona 2004, p. 31). This and the other quotations from Ferrán Aisa and Susanna Tavera have been translated from the Catalan.

² Figures taken from Xavier Cuadrat *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña. Los orígenes de la CNT* (Ediciones de la Revista del Trabajo, Madrid 1976) p. 82

This set-back did not stop the spread into Catalonia of the revolutionary syndicalism emanating from France. Although little mention is made of it, some sources point out that Catalan anarchists had earlier had some influence on the French model: on this point, historian X. Cuadrat notes: "Anselmo Lorenzo said that, in the light of the crisis and organizational disarray in which the workers' societies found themselves – in the wake of the 1902 strike – syndicalist thinking seeped into Spain, most especially into Catalonia, bringing not some brand new idea, but rather returning to us in a corrected, expanded and perfectly sleek form that which we Spanish anarchists had inspired in the French through Acracia and El Productor debating with La Révolte over whether some revolutionary vigour should be injected into the resistance societies"³

By 1904 the statutes of the Local Union of Workers' Societies, operating in the Barcelona metropolitan area had been fixed; it was to be the embryo of a modern trade union central, Solidaridad Obrera (SO). The Union's project took off and on 3 August 1907, just five years after the fiasco of 1902, it was transformed into a local confederation, Solidaridad Obrera. At a time when group identities were sharply defined, the choice of the title Solidaridad Obrera/ Workers' Solidarity, a name that would shortly be adopted also by its press mouthpiece, might be regarded as a class response to the recently created Solidaritat Catalana/ Catalan Solidarity which was an umbrella for the bourgeoisie; be that as it may, the very notion of solidarity was by then and would remain a watchword and an organizational principle.

Into the SO flowed socialists, anarchists, syndicalists and republicans. So that they might all co-exist with one another, the SO fought shy of any ideological label. That original vagueness, plus the presence of the socialists as a driving force behind the launching of SO, were to lead to misgivings and criticisms from the orthodox anarchists. As X. Cuadrat writes "tensions between the 'pure' or orthodox anarchists and the strictly syndicalist elements, would repeatedly be resolved in the favour of the former, especially following the March 1923 murder of Salvador Seguí."⁴ Actually those tensions have always been bubbling under within the anarcho-syndicalist movement and have lain at the root of fall-out after fall-out and behind the splits that have occurred since 1979. Despite attacks from the libertarian orthodoxy, Anselmo Lorenzo and Francisco Ferrer i Guardia threw themselves into an enthusiastic campaign to encourage anarchists to get involved in SO, as indeed they would. On the other hand and thanks to some money from a substantial legacy, the educationist Ferrer had already funded the newspaper La Huelga General which started publishing in 1901, plus the Biblioteca de La Huelga General series of pamphlets. As regards SO, Ferrer would not restrict himself solely to funding the launch of Soli, but would also contribute towards the funding of a great workers' centre, the SO premises in the Carrer Nova de Sant Francesc. In fact his support for the Catalan central was one of the pretexts upon which the indictment that ended with his being sentenced to death relied; and a number of Lerrouxist informers were actively implicated in securing that conviction and sentence.

³ Cuadrat, op. cit. p. 106

⁴ Cuadrat, op.cit., p. 177

A newspaper for the city of bonfires

Work began immediately on equipping the newly created organisation with a mouthpiece. Adopting the press model of the earliest Spanish IWMA⁵ chapters, and, it seems, thanks to funding from Ferrer i Guardia, the very first edition of *Solidaridad Obrera* was to appear on 19 October 1907. It was a weekly and boasted four pages: it carried the sub-title “organ of the workers’ societies” and cost 5 céntimos a copy. It is our belief that its very first director was Jaume Bisbe, a close associate of Ferrer i Guardia. In addition to strictly news items, there was evidence even at this early stage of articles dealing with matters tactical and organisational. This new paper soon came to be known popularly as simply *Soli*.

Low membership figures and the onerous burdens placed upon them led to the recently launched paper’s being shut down from 30 November 1907 to 13 February 1908. In September 1908, the move was made from the paper’s original editorial offices in the Calle Mendizábal (today the Carrer Junta del Comerç) to the organisation’s brand new premises at Carrer Nova de Sant Francesc, 7, 1°. That same year, the Workers’ Congress at which SO decided to upgrade to a regional organization was held on those same premises.

1908 was disfigured by a curious terrorist campaign which, although attributed to the anarchists, was most likely an instance of state terrorism; its aim was to justify a flurry of anti-labour legislation just months apart. In this context, the man who would soon become the director of *Soli*, the printing worker Tomas Herreros, played an ambiguous part. According to X. Cuadrat:

Quote:

Romero Maura contends that from 1905 to 1909, Tomas Herreros directly or indirectly briefed the Barcelona authorities on Lerroux’s terrorism and revolutionary (?) plans [...] In so doing, Herreros may well have had several purposes in mind: 1) clearing anarchists of the blame for the terrorist outrages being credited to them; 2) preventing government crackdowns – a significant factor in the dis-organisation of the Barcelona proletariat – from targeting the workers’ movement at a particularly delicate point in the reorganizing of the unions; and 3) focusing the government’s attention and directing possible reprisals at the Lerrouxists who were chiefly to blame for the crisis and confusion afflicting the proletariat in the capital of Catalonia ... [...] Then again, it looks as if it was Herreros who exposed [Joan] Rull’s nefarious intrigues and Rull’s double life as a terrorist and confidant of the governor, which actually placed Herreros in great danger. Herreros’s unblemished personal integrity has been acknowledged and proclaimed by all who knew him, ranging from Ossorio y Gallardo to Diego Abad de Santillán. Herreros’s role in exposing and pointing a finger at the real terrorists, thereby erasing and eradicating the suspicions that had been hanging over anarchists, accounts for his status as an ‘informant’, a label which proves to be wildly inaccurate as applied to him.⁶

We ought to make it clear that Alejandro Lerroux’s mind was firmly made up to see SO dead and buried. Actually the Radical Party leader, a shady, rabble-rousing, corrupt figure, had turned

⁵ We should mention as one possible fore-runner *La Solidaridad* (Madrid 1870–1871), driven by Anselmo Lorenzo.

⁶ Cuadrat, *op.cit.* pp. 169–171

the workers' movement into his fishing ground for votes; anything that might encourage worker autonomy posed a threat to his catch of votes. Small wonder, then, that the war between SO and Lerroux and his goons was a long and bitter one.

The recovery by anarchist forces proceeded against this muddled and turbulent backdrop. June 1909 saw the opening in Barcelona of the Ateneo Sindicalista, signalling that anarchists were increasingly coming around to the trade union option. But those were troubled times and that very same month saw a revolt against the shipment of recruits to the war in Morocco. Seven days of fighting by the people, known as Tragic Week, would trigger a horrific repression. SO felt the impact of defeat and, according to José Prat, its membership plummeted from 15,000 to a mere 4,418.

Besides, Soli was suspended. Between then and when it was forced underground in 1939, suspensions, confiscations and censorship of articles would be a consistent feature in Solidaridad Obrera's history.

The organisation's response to the silencing of its mouthpiece in 1909 was to bring out an Asturian edition of the paper. Some 32 editions of the Gijón-published edition of Soli appeared between 1909 and 1910. Later, other Solis would follow (in Gijón, Bilbao, Vigo, Seville and La Coruña) although these were prompted, not by the need to fill the gap left by the closure of the Catalan edition, but rather by the natural growth of the CNT's regional confederations and their need to launch mouthpieces of their own, to which end they often turned to a name that had become emblematic in the history of the Spanish Labour Movement. Paradoxically, after 1936, when conditions in the republican zone looked as if they had never been better, the Catalan edition found itself the only publication carrying this name.

Be that as it may, the Gijón Soli experiment was reenacted on several occasions. Given the volume of disputes waged by the Catalan regional confederation of the CNT, some of them disputes of great political import, and given the news and organisational demands that these created, the Confederation was unable to cope without some propaganda organ of its own. Backed into a corner by a number of suspensions imposed upon Soli, especially the more prolonged suspensions, the CNT of Catalonia was obliged to resort to a variety of solutions. Whereas in 1909 it had had to relocate publication of the CNT's paper to Gijón, it had to repeat the exercise between 1919 and 1923, but this time virtually the entire editorial team went with it and Valencia was the chosen site from which to continue publication; similarly, a sort of a "syndication" arrangement had to be worked out with the Madrid-based daily España Nueva whereby that republican newspaper made space for its articles. At other times short-lived titles such as Solidaridad, Acción or La Voz Confederal were cobbled together just to fill the vacuum left after Soli was banned. Even during the civil war, Catalunya performed this supplemental function.

After the traumatic dénouement of the 1909 revolt, publication did not resume in Barcelona until 12 February 1910. This second phase of publication opened under the sub-title 'Trade union publication.' Throughout this period, the paper moved from an address at Carrer Mercè, 19, principal (up until May 1911) to one in the Calle Ponent [these days the Calle Joaquim Costa], 24, 2º, very close to where it has its offices at present at No. 34. Andrés Cuadros was to be director of the publication and he was replaced by the socialist type-setter Joaquín Bueso who would hold that post up until October 1911.

Bueso is a good example of the ideological evolution triggered by the establishment of SO. Whilst Tomás Herreros moved from the anarchist camp across into the revolutionary syndicalist camp, Bueso turned his back on Lerrouxism (and on a friendship with Alejandro Lerroux) to

back the strictly syndicalist, albeit not apolitical option: “Within the PSOE, Bueso would carry on championing direct action, boycott and sabotage and a notion of the general strike identical to that which he backed at the 1910 congress [in which he was of course an active participant] etc.”⁷ It could be argued without exaggeration that Bueso died in 1920, embittered by the attacks directed at him by his radical neighbours following his political and personal U-turn via à vis Alejandro Lerroux.

Bueso’s issue with the attitude of another of the directors, Manuel Andreu, is well known (and has been reprinted by both Paco Madrid and by Susana Tavera): I am reprinting it here as well because it perfectly illustrates the origins and ideological evolution of the workers’ society and its mouthpiece. Bear in mind, however, that by around 1909, in order to maintain its ideological neutrality, the paper had turned down articles from Anselmo Lorenzo, Jerónimo Farré and José Prat. Be that as it may, this is what Bueso (hiding behind his pen name Orberosa) stated in 1915:

Quote:

Solidaridad Obrera was run by Tomás Herreros, anarchist, who was simultaneously also director of Tierra y Libertad, and Tomás Herreros did not turn Solidaridad Obrera into an anarchist bulletin board as is the case today. Solidaridad Obrera was [sic] later run by Andrés Cuadros, and that comrade too managed to avoid the anarchist flavour that is a feature of the paper today; later the direction of the aforementioned workers’ paper was taken up by the type-setter Joaquín Bueso, and, like the previous directors, he saw to it that the paper was non-sectarian; Cuadros returned as director and, even though, during this second term of his as director he was not as even-handed as he had been during the first, he did not allow Solidaridad Obrera to be a brazenly anarchist newspaper: but of late it has fallen into the hands of Manuel Andreu and since then has been in competition with Tierra y Libertad in terms of anarchist propaganda.⁸

Along comes the confederation

The organisation was soon grappling with the challenges of expansion and subsequent consolidation as it drew other agencies elsewhere around Spain into the fold. To this end, meticulous preparations were made for the 2nd congress of the regional Confederation which was to meet from 30 October and 1 November 1910, postponed because of the post-Tragic Week crackdown. It was held at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Barcelona. Contrary to what some historians and ill-informed dilettantes contend, this was to prove the foundation congress of a new organisational structure that was to burst forth upon the historical stage as the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour).⁹ In 1911, from 8 to 10 September, the first CNT congress would be held. Due, perhaps to the influence of Kropotkin’s communes, from which source it was to imbibe its libertarian municipalism, the CNT right from the outset was to stake all on Local Federations as the basis of its organizational structures.

⁷ Cuadrat, op.cit., p. 516

⁸ Cuadrat, op.cit., p. 589

⁹ Actually, during the first few months of its existence, the organisation was indiscriminately referred to as the Confederación Nacional or Confederación General del Trabajo, with the former eventually becoming standard.

Given the new circumstances, a fall-out with the socialists – who were unwilling to compete with the UGT, which was also organized across the state – became inevitable and they quit SO. In any event, the alliance between the republican parties and the socialist party was lending a belligerent edge to the Catalan union's apolitical outlook. Despite the parting of the ways, though, the CNT initially decided not to confront the UGT head-on, even though there had been voices around for the previous decade calling for it to face down the socialist union's compromising line.

As far as the evolution of Soli and its importance for the new organisation go, it is telling that even at the 1910 meeting reference was made to the need to turn the weekly publication into a daily, something that was only achieved almost half a decade later.

The history of the CNT as well as that of its mouthpiece would also be studded with closures and persecutions. In fact, as the first congress drew to an end, a secret meeting of delegates¹⁰ took place at which a general strike (a state-wide one, according to X. Cuadrat) was decided in solidarity with the Vizcaya miners and in protest at the war in Morocco. In retaliation, a government ban was slapped on the CNT and publication of Soli was suspended.

Not until 1 May 1913 was another edition of Solidaridad Obrera to see the light of day. At which point, phase three of its existence began. The Catalanian Regional Confederation of Labour (CRT) rather than the CNT tried to revert to normal activity but by August that year the manufacturing sector went on strike and the regional confederation was suspended: the same fate befell Soli for two weeks. During 1914, the CRT took on the hard slog of reorganizing the still disbanded CNT in which it would not succeed until the following year, at considerable effort.

In 1915 Andreu Cuadros was replaced as head of publication by the electrician Manuel Andreu¹¹, a director with scarcely any editorial assistance and he in turn was to give the job up the following year in what was another recurrent feature of the paper; the directors' mandate tended to be brief, indeed, ephemeral. In fact, external pressures and internal squabbling, exacerbated by endemic shortage of funds, made it impossible throughout the next 20 years to get any continuity in those elected to run the paper or in the many editorial teams or particular editors who were forever coming and going in the pages of Soli.

During 1915, the editorial staff ended up sharing premises with the Electricians' Union, an apartment in the Calle Paloma. In one of life's quirks, it later moved to a house at Calle Mercaders, 25, which, once the Via Laietana opened up, would be replaced by the Fomento building and the Casa Cambó which were both collectivised in 1936 to accommodate the Casa CNT-FAI and the Catalan regional committee.

¹⁰ Cuadrat queries the secret nature of that session, given the mass attendance at it. Susana Tavera, in line with Manuel Buenacasa and other sources, raises no such query.

¹¹ Prior to 1930, most of the directors of Solidaridad Obrera were manual workers and self-educated. Several of them were printing workers or engaged in other print-related trades. Remember that printing workers played a very prominent part in the spread of anarchism and had from the outset, given their peculiarity as literate workers at a time when hardly any working man could read and write. It is worth noting that, following their terms as director of the newspaper, a fair number of Soli directors stuck with their recently acquired journalistic trade. Over the years, they were joined in the pages of the anarchist press by more or less professional journalists. As Susana Tavera points out, a collective was thereby taking shape, a team of CNT reporters, who often performed like an affinity group. And whilst their editorial meetings had the air of a friendly get-together (*tertulia*) about them, drawing in the culturally most inquisitive militants (the *tertulia* being a model of conviviality and grounding since the 19th century), it should not be forgotten that on many occasions these editorial meetings were nurseries for a number of libertarian plots and internal intrigues.

In time of war

The years of the First World War coincided with a resurgence of class warfare on the streets of Barcelona. Spain's neutrality in the conflict laid the groundwork for an economic boom that was absolutely not reflected in any betterment in the workers' socio-economic conditions. The trade union response to this provoked retaliation in the shape of government repression and of hired guns in the pay of the employers' federation.

As might be supposed, all of this had an impact on the life of the paper. However, during those turbulent years which would also witness the emergence of mass journalism, the *Solidaridad Obrera* project was consolidated in terms both of journalistic model and of periodicity, when it finally became a daily.¹²

Thus, during 1916 and 1917 "the characteristic profile that was to mark this labour newspaper for ever more, with a lot of circumstantial tinkering, came into being: lots of trade union news (in sections named 'Trade Union Action', 'National Agitation' and 'Trade Union Guide'), the political news mentioned earlier [Tavera refers to "Spanish and international current political events"] and a sort of miscellany (the whole gamut of entertainment and cultural news). Not forgetting the space devoted to all manner of theoretical and doctrinal contributions, often signed by writers of renown in anarchist quarters within and outside of Spain, and a range of pamphleteering (in those days these tended to relate to the tactics of labour struggles rather than literary creation). *Solidaridad Obrera* paid especial attention to letters and articles from unsolicited contributors, as these poured into the editors by the dozen, creating an ongoing headache for those who, before they could be published, had to correct them until they more or less conformed to journalistic practice."¹³ The model was therefore more or less the same as the mass newspapers, but there was no loss of character in terms of its serving as a tool for cohesion, organisation and partnership, which the ordinary press did not.

In May 1916, Manuel Andreu handed over the top job to José Borobio, an enigmatic individual of whom it was said that, among other things, he had worked as a nightclub hypnotist. Borobio in turn was to hand over to José Negre (an activist since SO days) at the beginning of November that year and Negre held office only until mid-1917.

Together with Seguí, Negre favoured the trade union line, a view that he often transplanted on to pages of *Soli* over the years, in which it was challenged by a variety of libertarian circles. So the tensions that would erupt so virulently in 1932 when they would trigger a split, were still around inside the organization.

¹² Regarding the historical question of *Soli*'s being published as a daily, Susana Tavera, in *Solidaridad Obrera. El fer-se i desfer-se d'un diari anarcosindicalista (1915–1939)* [Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya i Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1992] offers the best summary of the sources. She states: "There is no consensus on the date on which *Soli* embarked upon life as a daily newspaper. In 1932 the official version was that it resurfaced on 1 May 1913, capitalizing upon a "barely perceptible let-up" and then did not become a daily newspaper until 5 January 1916. On the other hand, the anarchist Manuel Buenacasa insists that daily publication can be dated to May 1915. Ángel Pestaña remembers the date as early in 1916 and, finally, the historian Antonio Bar establishes the date as March 1916. The doubts remain, due to the incompleteness of the collections which have survived. Be that as it may, there is a chance that there was a half-way house, as mentioned by Buenacasa, in the shape of a daily supplement that the CNT decided to produce in 1915 as a briefing on the strikes by the metalworkers, bricklayers, bakers and seamen. Later, this supplement supposedly became a daily newspaper, albeit that after that Buenacasa's memory lets him down." (p. 22) Tavera estimates the number of copies of those supplements sold at 6,000–7,000.

¹³ Tavera, op.cit. p. 23

On 18 December 1916, the CNT and the UGT launched a joint, nationwide appeal for support for what was to become known as the General Subsistence Strike. Within days of the start of that strike, several prominent CNT members were under arrest, together with the entire editorial staff of the paper.

Those were times of straitened financial circumstances for the paper which found itself forced to make space in its pages for hitherto unimaginable advertisements, including some from cabarets and other unlikely insertions such as those advertising first communion outfits.¹⁴ And to make matters worse, the price of paper was soaring. Soli was to find itself reduced to a single, two-sided page and its print run fell to 3,000 copies. Impossible as this might seem, things got even worse in June 1917 when the Dato government banned press reporting of trade union news – Soli's very *raison d'être*.

Come August and with the prices of basic necessities soaring ever higher, a general strike was declared that in Barcelona acquired all the features of an insurrection. The army stepped in to snuff out the revolt and Soli was suspended up until the last fortnight in October.

In mid-1917, by which time Soli had reached its fourth phase of publication, José Borobio returned as director, only to figure, in November the same year, in the most sensational scandal in the paper's entire history, the "German Embassy Affair".

With the First World War at its height, Borobio abided by the majority sentiment within the CNT vis à vis the squabble between supporters of the Allies and supporters of the Germans: the proletariat should refrain from getting drawn into conflicts that were not class affairs (remember here that a minority within the CNT backed Kropotkin in his support for the Allies, which would bring him savage criticism from every libertarian quarter and to an extent he was ostracised up until his death in 1921). Borobio, a supporter of a general strike, if Spain were to plump for one side (the Allied side, if the left had its way) or the other. Things were not easy: any call for neutrality in the conflict was seized upon by republicans and socialists (especially the latter) as an excuse to hurl charges of pro-German sentiments. This was also the fate that befell Soli's director. Now, as will shortly be demonstrated, in this instance and to the Confederation's surprise, the charges were not without foundation. Under pressure from the lack of funding for the paper, José Borobio (and, if Pestaña is to be believed, its then administrator, whom we have not been able to identify) had accepted bribes from the German Embassy; in return, articles had been carried by the CNT's newspaper that were more or less subtly critical of certain stances by the allied nations, such as the treatment doled out to immigrant labour in France. At the same time, Borobio's own opposition to the allies was hardening. As one might imagine, this was a major scandal and it seriously affected the CNT's reputation among broad swathes of Spanish trade unionists and leftists.

After the scandal broke, the editorial team resigned and a commission took charge of the running of the paper until a new director was appointed in late November 1917. This was Ángel Pestaña who had to overhaul the line-up when it was found that he could expect no support from the outgoing team.

Historian Susanna Tavera has given us a detailed description of the complex task undertaken by Pestaña as the man in charge at Soli: he had to set the parameters for the CNT's daily publication, and liaise with the readers who were to be the essential (and of course, mass) social base when it came to establishing and consolidating the CNT in organisational terms.

¹⁴ Tavera, *op.cit.*, p. 26

As an opponent of armed struggle, the close-mouthed but highly intelligent Pestaña opted instead for other ways of bringing pressures to bear. Knowing the capacity of the new press to mobilise, he managed to demonstrate the efficacy of his option with the campaign waged against Bravo Portillo.

Comisario Manuel Bravo Portillo was notorious as one of the visible heads of the anti-labour repression during the years when the employers deployed their hired gunmen. With the Sants labour congress in the offing, Bravo Portillo had to be neutralised: otherwise he would assuredly do his damndest to prevent it from going ahead. On this occasion, the weapon chosen to eliminate Bravo Portillo was to be what we today would describe as “investigative journalism”.

Although the authenticity of the evidence adduced is not entirely clear, on 9 June 1918 Soli hit the streets with a spectacular lead story on Bravo Portillo’s contacts with German espionage. Apparently, the comisario was passing information to the Germans regarding shipping leaving from the port of Barcelona and some of that shipping was later torpedoed by German U-boats. Over the ensuing days, this report was built upon and Portillo eventually wound up in prison. However, Bravo was a free man again by the following year and back working for the employers’ hired guns at the direction of Catalonia’s Captain-General, Milans del Bosch. This time, though, Bravo was out of luck and the mercenary was gunned down in revenge for the murder of the CNT’s Pablo Sabater.

Thanks to the “Bravo Portillo Affair” Solidaridad Obrera not only managed to score a significant success as a newspaper, selling thousands of copies and raising its profile in society, but, given the nature of the episode, the CNT also recovered from the damaging fall-out from the “German Embassy Affair”.

With the road ahead now cleared, the Sants labour congress was able to proceed as planned. To be sure, Soli proved vital in the efforts leading up to the event and to newspaper coverage of it and returned to its 4-page format for the occasion. The congress was to prove enormously significant, in that it was to lay the groundwork for the trade union model that would carry the CNT into its heyday. This was the *sindicato único*, based on unionization on an industrial rather than a craft basis. In fact, the organisation swelled from a membership of 345,000 in 1918 to 715,000 in 1919: Barcelona accounted for some 250,000 of those members.¹⁵ The boom in membership also brought a spectacular upsurge in the print-run of Soli which swelled to 100,000 copies.

Apropos of the new confederal model and its implications for life in the city, historian Chris Ealham has pointed out that “The Confederation’s strategists, aware of the spatial impact of the swelling barrios as the basis of organised resistance to capitalism and the state, decided to establish district committees for the rank and file in the new trade union branches of the main working class districts. As one militant had it, these local committees were ‘the union’s eyes and ears in each barrio’, the intersection between the barrios and the Barcelona Local Federation [...] Besides, the Barcelona CNT’s newspaper Solidaridad Obrera played a crucial auxiliary role by announcing trade union meetings, talks and social activities mounted right across the city.”¹⁶

The busy newspaper would be much talked about at the Congress. On the basis of groundwork done by a commission of the regional committee, the conclusion was that, if the newspaper was to carry on publishing as a daily, its director, administrator and staffers should be exclusively

¹⁵ Chris Ealham, *La lucha por Barcelona. Clase, Cultura y conflicto 1898–1937* (Alianza Editorial, Madrid 2005) p. 85

¹⁶ Ealham, *op.cit.*, p. 86

committed to newspaper business and be paid an “agreed” wage, to borrow a contemporary phrase. At the same time, the Organisation laid down the mechanisms for ideological and political control over the paper. As for funding, it was determined that Soli would receive two céntimos a month per member, though this was no obstacle to its economic straits persisting into 1936.

Ángel Pestaña was re-elected as director. If the rumours reported by the official history of the CNT are accurate, the re-election of Pestaña was a slap in the face for Salvador Seguí who had his eye on the job. Those same rumours insist that there was a quiet competition between the two men. In any event, as far as Soli goes, Seguí’s aspirations (and cautionary words) were unrelated to his fear of a complete, irreversible Castilianisation of the paper, although this is a matter to which we shall return anon.

Agitation remained the keynote of Spanish political life. In response to a number of overtures, especially from Catalanist quarters, the Conde de Romanones suspended constitutional guarantees throughout the land. Lots of CNT personnel were arrested (Pestaña, although he managed to escape, was to be captured in the spring). For no particular reason, publication of Soli was suspended in January 1919. The beginning of the La Canadiense strike in February that year required publication of several clandestine issues. Under pressure from the need for propaganda at such a dramatic juncture, and with publication of the paper on any sort of a regular basis impossible, the Organisation decided to relocate publication to Valencia. The first edition of this Valencian run, which was also frequently harassed, appeared on 25 February 1919.¹⁷ It would appear daily until October 1922, at which point and for financial reasons it became bi-weekly. Even so, between 1919 and 1923 (in which year it resurfaced in Catalonia) some 335 issues would see publication.

We know that Salvador Quemades was Solidaridad Obrera’s director in November and December 1919, although it is unclear if this related to the fitfully published clandestine version or the Valencian edition. Susanna Tavera mentions Felipe Alaiz as director of the Valencian Soli, with Viadiu and Liberto Callejas as editors, but places its publication in 1922.

Given that the news needs of CNT life were not being met in Catalonia or elsewhere in Spain, the CNT was forced to come to a curious accommodation with the Madrid newspaper España Nueva, run by the republican Mariano García Cortés. To this day, this remains a controversial issue. Apparently, it was Adolfo Bueso – brother of ex-Soli director Joaquín – who started the following story: The CNT had ‘hired’ page 4 of España Nueva for its use¹⁸; as Paco Madrid tells us, that page was given over entirely to advertisements. According to Madrid, it was García Cortés who, in view of España Nueva’s financial straits, offered its columns to the CNT by way of a replacement for missing CNT mouthpieces, in the knowledge that the situation would bring about a boost in his sale figures, as indeed it did (the publication eventually came to publish three editions a day). The presence of anarcho-syndicalist bylines (belonging to Pestaña, Carbó, Alaiz, Buenacasa) and the coverage of CNT life – which had in fact started back in 1917 at the initiative of España Nueva – increased over 1919 as España Nueva became the semi-official mouthpiece of the CNT.

¹⁷ Paco Madrid ‘Solidaridad Obrera, símbolo y mito de un periódico legendario’ in 80 Aniversario: Solidaridad Obrera 1907–1987 (Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular and Centre de Documentació Històrico-Social, Barcelona 1987, p. 18)

¹⁸ Paco Madrid, quoting Adolfo Bueso (A. Bueso, Recuerdos de un cenetista, Barcelona 1976, Vol. 1, p. 117). “[...] around that point (early 1919) the Confederation had ‘bought’ a page of the daily España Nueva, a Madrid-published newspaper belonging to the republican Rodrigo Soriano, a man of very questionable morals. Page four of España Nueva was given over each day to the National Confederation of Labour [CNT] which paid good money for the access.”

In spite of all these problems, the Confederation soldiered on. In June 1922, a National Conference of Trade Unions held in Zaragoza decided to pull out of the Third International in order to participate in the efforts to refloat the IWA (AIT); the AIT initials were thereafter a standard feature of the anarcho-syndicalist title. Meanwhile, the employers use of hired guns was still on the increase and a particular target was the CNT sector described later as “syndicalist”. In 1922, Pestaña, who had survived one attempt on his life in Tarragona in 1920 was shot at in Manresa and left seriously wounded. On 10 March 1923, Salvador Seguí was gunned down by Sindicato Libre gunmen.

Tit for tat

On 6 March 1923, nearly four years after its last regular edition had appeared, *Solidaridad Obrera*’s haphazard publication resumed. And phase 5 of its publication history began. The editorial offices were at 58, Calle Conde del Asalto (today’s Calle Nou de la Rambla), sharing the premises with the Foodworkers’ Union. Those were definitely the offices visited by Albert Einstein¹⁹ on a visit to the city on 27 February 1923, after he had mentioned the possibility in a number of CNT locals. It was at around this point that Ramon Acin started working with *Soli*: his ‘Florelicas’ column which stretch from March to September that year, began with a piece devoted to the death of Salvador Seguí.²⁰

For a time, Pestaña returned as director. On account of his ideological evolution, an evolution that was to prompt him in 1932 to launch the Syndicalist Party, this native of León tried to ensure that *Solidaridad Obrera* became an openly syndicalist publication rather than exclusively anarcho-syndicalist. As might have been expected, the CNT was not disposed to see character of its most symbolic mouthpiece tampered with and Pestaña was replaced by Liberto Callejas.

To this day we do not know the real name of the man who hid behind the alias Liberto Callejas: Alexandre Callejas, say some sources, whereas others plump for Alejandro Perelló Sintés; the enigma has yet to be resolved. What we do know is that Callejas was a bit of a bohemian, something he had in common with other *Soli* directors, of course. In 1934 he was to be appointed director of CNT.

Primo de Rivera’s coup d’état on 13 September 1923 prevented the normalisation of the CNT’s existence. On 5 October, the [Barcelona] Local Federation wound itself up, though not without considerable internal frictions. On 13 October *Soli* was suspended, not reappearing until 24 November. By which point its print run had shrunk to some 6,000 copies.

In February 1924 Hermoso Plaja was appointed director, holding that post until May when the unions were shut down in retaliation for the attempt on the life of Barcelona’s hangman. The paper was suspended yet again and, except for the odd clandestine edition, would not reappear until 1930. From 18 October 1924 until May 1925, *Solidaridad Proletaria* (published, up until edition No. 3, in Mataró before relocating to Barcelona) was published. After that scarcely anything

¹⁹ Abel Rebollo in his article ‘M. Bakunin (1814–1876) y A. Einstein (1879–1955)’ y el Hotel Quatre Naciones’ in *La Barcelona rebelde. Guía de una ciudad silenciada* (Octaedro, Barcelona 2003, p. 214) offers us this description of the visit:

²⁰ Sonya Torres Planells, Ramón Acín. *Una estética anarquista y de vanguardia* (Virus, Barcelona 1998, p. 222). and ‘Las pajaritas de Ramón Acín (1886–1936)’ in *La Barcelona Rebelde, Guía de una ciudad silenciada* (Octaedro, Barcelona 2003, p. 130)

saw publication. Over six dark years, it would be the ateneos and workers' cooperatives that saw to it that the libertarian foothold in society was somehow sustained.

But seven years of dictatorship failed to put paid to the CNT. Ready to overhaul its structures yet again, the organisation held a National Plenum in 1930 with one clear cut aim: to relaunch the sindicatos únicos.

Pending the re-launch of Soli, the regional confederation was to publish a new weekly called Acción. But Solidaridad Obrera reappeared on 31 August whereupon phase 6 of its publication history began after an intense advertising campaign (some 50,000 leaflets announcing the imminent reappearance of the paper were printed). We reckon that the masthead design still in use today was created during this sixth phase; it is symbolic of the revolution in graphics at the time, and was for many years employed in the press and in advertising, but, be that as it may, we do not know who designed it. Soli's director by this time was Joan Peiró²¹ a man who had walked in the shadow of Salvador Seguí and one remembered still for his quintessential honesty; the editorial offices were at 3, Calle Nova de Sant Francesc up until they were relocated to the premises in the Calle Conde del Asalto. The resurrected Soli comprised of 4 pages, carried advertising and had a print run of rather less than 20,000 copies.

It was at this time that the anarcho-syndicalists saw off the Communists in the fight for control of the CNT. As ever, the newspaper would be one of the theatres of conflict. Soli started to carry articles by Ramón J. Sender²² who, between 1930 and 1932, wrote nearly two hundred pieces for the Catalan daily. His 'Political Postcards', given over to contemporary Spanish political developments, were very famous.

Soon the difficulties confronting the newspaper threatened its very existence. In an attempt to earn popularity and present a certain picture of openness, on 12 September 1930, the government did away with prior censorship in Spain, with two locations excepted – Barcelona and Bilbao. Needless to say Solidaridad Obrera was to be singled out for this special treatment by the government. After the rounding up of some of its editorial staff during the Construction Union disputes, the possibility of relocating to Madrid was looked at, although in the end it did not prove necessary.

In October, Peiró stepped down as director of the paper. Eusebio Carbó filled the gap. Although he had no clear cut profession, it is usually stated that Carbó was a journalist. Although he was not the first director of Soli with knowledge of the trade (Borobio and Quemades were not new to it either), Carbó's arrival as director of the paper signalled the start of a new phase of professionalisation leading up to Jacinto Toranzo who, as we shall see, would be one of the first 'qualified' Spanish journalists. (Prior to that, as a general rule, the directors of Soli had been men of working class backgrounds with a large degree of self-education: to cite but one example – Peiró, a glassworker and future government minister, was illiterate up to the age of 22).

²¹ Having matured in the shadow of Salvador Seguí, Joan Peiró Belis is remembered to this day for his impeccable honesty and utter commitment to the labour cause. He was sentenced to death by a council of war in Valencia on 21 July 1942; it is a known fact that the Francoists offered Peiró an amnesty if he would agree to become the figure-head of the new regime's vertical syndicates; such was his reputation. But Joan Peiró declined the offer to engage with a ploy that was simply designed to lend legitimacy to nationalist-catholic corporatism and despite numerous witnesses who spoke up on his behalf, he was eventually executed. As in the cases of Granados and Delgado, José Pellicer or Salvador Puig Antich, among others, a re-examination of the case against Peiró remains stymied: on 5 December 2006, the Military division of the Supreme Court rejected the Peiró family's appeal for a review of his death sentence.

²² For Sender's articles, see Jesús Ruiz Gallego-Largo, "R J Sender's articles in the newspaper Solidaridad Obrera" (in Spanish) available at: <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/CHMC/article/view/CHMC8585110281A/1183>

Before 1930 was out, a strike had begun that would be etched on the city's memory. The famous tenant's strike was remembered in Barcelona as a milestone in CNT history; it mobilised thousands and flagged up the CNT's deep foothold in society even outside the confines of work. In fact, way back in 1918 the CNT had set up a Tenants' Union that had promoted a variety of strikes throughout its history. The 1930 dispute was able to carry on, thanks once more to backing from the Confederation whose Construction Union this time set up an Economic Defence Commission. That commission, modelled on the Confederal Defence Committees, proved crucial to the strike, bringing organisation to a movement of rather scattered and by nature spontaneous origins. Solidaridad Obrera played a significant role during the dispute: its columns were habitually used for communicating watchwords and summoning open assemblies; as well as publishing the names and details of landlords who were harassing the strikers. But suspension orders continued to hamper the newspaper's life. The uprising by Fermín and Galán in December 1930 resulted in the imposition of army censorship. Soli, having but recently resurfaced after one close-down, was silenced yet again.

1931: Expectations

Its reappearance in January 1931 came amid all the political excitement over the imminence of the municipal elections that were to lead on to the proclamation of the Second Republic. Susanna Tavera says of this period: "The 15,700 copies printed on 13 March 1931 grew to 31,920 on 14 April. Over the days that followed, the print-runs just grew and grew. From May 1931 on, the monthly print run stabilised at around 40,000 copies."²³

The Republic arrived amid huge expectations and with a certain vote of confidence from the CNT. In Catalonia, Macià offered Pestaña the post of minister of Labour, which was declined.

Sebastià Clarà, director of Solidaridad Obrera over the past few months, stepped down in June 1931: Peiró took over again. Once again, Peiró's occupancy of the director's position was to be brief. On 30 August 1931 L'Opinió carried the celebrated 'Manifesto of the Thirty', so-called because of the number of signatories, whose numbers included Pestaña, Clarà, Peiró and a goodly number of Soli editorial staff. The Manifesto set the seal upon the 'syndicalist' approach as against the 'faïsta' insurrectionism within the CNT's ranks. On 22 September, at the height of the sniping between the 'syndicalists' and the 'faïstas' and following a fierce campaign waged by the latter against Peiró's stewardship, Peiró, fed up with the misrepresentation and harassment, resigned, as did a goodly number of his editorial staff. The CNT was on the verge of a serious split that had been simmering since 1907 and yet again its newspaper was one of the arenas where the two factions fought it out.

On 11 October 1931, Felipe Alaiz was appointed director. To give some idea of the turn taken by Soli, suffice to say that among the new editorial staff were Juan García Oliver [a member, with Durruti and Ascaso, of the legendary Solidarios (later Nosotros) group] and Federica Montseny. The latter, a future minister, had been a real thorn in the side of the syndicalists over the preceding years from the newspapers run by her father Juan Montseny (better known as Federico Urales). The remainder of the editorial team was made up of Liberto Callejas, Evelio Fontaura, Medina González, E. Labrador and José Alberola.

²³ Tavera, op.cit., p. 47

Felipe Alaiz, an individualist anarchist (and, ipso facto, ill disposed towards the purely syndicalist case) was another fellow of uncertain profession and another bohemian, although his contributions and instincts as a journalist cannot be denied. According to Tavera, Alaiz had been in charge of Soli once before, during its relocation to Valencia in 1922. He was a regular contributor to publications from the Urales family's stable, notably *La Revista Blanca*. In 1923, with Liberto Callejas, he took over *Crisol*, a free publication that might be looked upon as the mouthpiece of *Los Solidarios*. In 1933, his pamphlet *Cómo se hace un diario* (How To Run a Newspaper), a rarity in the journalism of the day and especially in libertarian circles, was published. In that essay, Alaiz lobbied for a mass journalism offering news, training and raised awareness, in short, a vehicle for social cohesion the modern expression of a clear cut class-based, popular voice.

The new team at Soli was soon grappling with their first suspension orders which came fast and thick throughout the years of the republic: one of the worst being on 2 November 1931 when, as a result of the intense street fighting, all anarcho-syndicalist publications were suspended for a month. Not until 4 December did the paper reappear.

In January 1932, *Solidaridad Obrera* sustained an ever graver blow when Alaiz was jailed until that November for some opinion pieces that were not even his.²⁴ José Robusté stepped in as acting director: Robusté was a *treintista* who would later defect to Pestaña's Syndicalist Party. The appointment of Robusté outraged Alaiz who went so far as to blame him for his arrest. In April 1932, Alaiz recovered his directorial position from prison only to resign once and for all that September in protest at Soli's publication of several articles by Peiró. Liberto Callejas was to be appointed as the paper's new director.

Even as Soli was experiencing this musical chairs game in terms of its directors, a split erupted within the CNT itself. Between April and September 1932, Communists and *treintistas* dropped out of the organisation, giving rise to the formation of the so-called Opposition Unions. The CNT experienced a real haemorrhaging of militants: whereas around August 1931 it had had some 400,000 members in Catalonia, this figure was to slip to 222,000 by April 1932 and to 186,152 by May 1936.²⁵ Soli's print run declined accordingly: from its peak in August 1931 of 46,855 copies to 24,812 by December the same year.²⁶

In the end the CNT fell under the sway of the *faístas* who thereafter dictated the course of the CNT's life. An era of naively thought out insurrections that served only to accelerate the decline in membership and, as a result, organisational ability, was ushered in. Bringing brutal repression down on the heads of the CNT's ranks. 'Expropriations' carried out against banks and companies soared during this time.

²⁴ Felipe Alaiz, like Jacinto Toroyho after him, was to prove a very dogged foe of one of the things that has thus far blighted the life of the CNT's newspaper: opinion articles. In Alaiz's day, as we have seen, certain comment could result in swingeing repression with no upside other than flattery of the author's ego; in their less dangerous forms, articles of this sort robbed the newspaper of whole periods of time. Tavera writes: "To some extent, the war and Toroyho managed to block the back page article which Toroyho described as a "collection of nonsense and claptrap" better suited to some 'terminal patient than to a modern newspaper." (Tavera, op.cit. p. 104)

²⁵ Ealham, op.cit., pp. 216 and 266.

²⁶ Tavera, op.cit., p. 57

Uprising!

The first big uprising came in the Upper Llobregat in January 1932. In retaliation, Soli was suspended from 21 January until 2 March. Throughout that year, the CNT newspaper was to suffer 32 suspension orders and confiscations, making the paper's finances critical again.

It was precisely during these years of internal fragmentation and persecution that the CNT was to mount a tremendous financial drive to keep the paper afloat. For the first time, Solidaridad Obrera was to have its own workshops: these would be at 241 Calle Consell de Cent, to where the editorial staff also relocated. Even before the ribbon was cut on these new premises in August 1932 the organisation had purchased presses for the paper.

Another move in the propaganda drive was the emergence in November 1932 of the daily CNT in Madrid. The life of that CNT mouthpiece, like that of its Catalan counterpart, was prey to repeated suspension orders. Elsewhere in Spain, the same routine persecution affected all anarcho-syndicalist platforms.

The cycle of insurrections struck elsewhere around Spain. April saw the Casas Viejas incidents, a qualitative leap in the escalating crackdown by the republic. Soli was to devote one of its special editions to these incidents. The success of the rightwing parties in the November 1933 elections helped radicalize the situation. The Bienio Negro (Two Black Years) were ushered in by the uprising that December and it too led to a further suspension of the paper.

As we have stated, under faïsta control, Soli was to become the mouthpiece for anarchist insurrectionism. Its columns announced that 1933 would be the "year of social insurrection".²⁷ In keeping with this editorial line, other struggles would be embraced as its own. This was the case with the struggle of the unemployed. It should be pointed out here that the Republic, from the moment it was proclaimed, adopted a two-pronged approach to matters economic: it sought to placate the capitalists by promising stability and order and it tackled the unemployment issue as a public order issue, rather than as one of social justice. For its part, the CNT covered up for certain unlawful practices such as street hawking or the unemployed campaigns referred to above. In 1933, articles about the latter, viewed through the prism of 'revolutionary gymnastics' grew more common, boosting the impression that Revolution was imminent. At the same time, Solidaridad Obrera set about exposing the prejudices of the penal system, pointing to republicans' failure to honour their promises about enforcing the law against every class in society.²⁸

The strategy of the CNT and FAI was also to be challenged by the bourgeois republican press. Symptomatic of this was a series of articles by Josep Maria Planes that appeared from April 1934 onwards in La Publicitat under the telling headline "The Gangsters of Barcelona". Actually, Planes would be at loggerheads with the anarchists on a number of occasions and featured prominently in an anecdote much aired in recent years: after Miguel Badia, former Generalitat police chief, and his brother Josep were executed on 28 April 1936, Planes rushed to denounce the CNT and FAI from the pages of La Publicitat as the guilty parties. The answer from Soli was: "We know who Jose Planes is. We recall how a series on reports about anarchists were carried by the same newspaper. The description offered of anarchist activities and anarchist centres were what might be expected of a crackpot." In July, Planes and the eccentric, Tisner, named names relative to the Badia deaths; the CNT mouthpiece accused them of lying and threatened to 'make them shut

²⁷ Ealham, op.cit., p. 216

²⁸ Ealham, op.cit., p. 251

up.²⁹ Josep Maria Planes's bullet-riddled corpse was discovered on the road from La Rabassada on 25 August 1936.

Harking back to 1934, the CNT started to feel the draining effects of several years of internal squabbles and open confrontation of the state.

When it proved impossible to keep publishing *Solidaridad Obrera* on a regular basis, the organisation decided that its place should be taken by another title, *Solidaridad*, in February 1934. The editorial staff and workshops of *Solidaridad* were the same as for *Solidaridad Obrera*. This situation was repeated the following year, with *La Voz Confederal* this time being the title chosen by the Barcelona Local Federation for the stand-in, of which nine issues were to see publication.

In April 1934 a refloating of the normal title became feasible again. Its director (appointed in December the year before) would be Manuel Villar and the editorial staff would be made up of Felipe Alaiz, Federica Montseny, Jacinto Toryho, José Bonet and Luis Semprún. The appointment of Villar in such circumstances was indicative of a change of strategy imminent in the CNT's history. Soli's new director was part of the Nervio affinity group around Sinesio Garcia Delgado aka Diego Abad de Santillán. From within the faïsta camp, Nervio would be one of the main driving forces behind the jettisoning of the insurrectionist policy in favour of a process of rebuilding the trade union structures organisationally. This process would be helped by the appointments of Villar at Soli and of Abad de Santillán (a lobbyist for tight control over the entire libertarian press) as director of *Tierra y Libertad* and as FAI general secretary in 1935.

The revolution of October 1934 in Asturias, which never got beyond a revolt elsewhere, interrupted the plans for reorientation within the libertarian camp.

As early as 6 October, the escamots, paramilitary youth gangs from the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia) under the control of Josep Dencàs, Interior minister with the Generalidad government, stormed the editorial offices and workshops of *Solidaridad Obrera* which was to be suspended out of hand. However, Soli abstained from involvement in the October events in Catalonia; unfortunately, its editors provoked a shut-down with a campaign opposing the death penalty. A further round of closures and suspensions followed up until April 1935, at which point the CNT itself decided to cease publication of its mouthpiece; the falling membership, prior censorship and the organisation's lousy image as a non-participant in the fighting the previous year lay behind this voluntary silence.

This time the paper would not be seen on the streets again until 1 August 1935, when a new, eight page edition of Soli, boasting the by-lines of leading libertarian figures such as Rudolf Rocker appeared. Serialisations also made a return to the pages (eg. Steinberg's *Life of Maria Spiridonova* and B. Traven's *The Death Ship*) and additional space was found for international politics. The series of articles *The Female Question in Our Ranks* by Lucía Sánchez Saornil [30], denouncing discrimination against women inside the libertarian ranks and urging the need for a targeted campaign in that area dates from this time. These articles from Sánchez Saornil drew a reply in the very pages of Soli from Mariano R. Vazquez aka Marianet, the then general secretary of the CNT: he blamed women themselves and their submissive attitudes for their marginalization. Lola Iturbe butted into the controversy with a piece in *Tierra y Libertad* (15 October 1935) entitled "An old subject: woman's social education." She wrote:

Quote:

²⁹ Jordi Finestres "Set trets al periodisme català" in *Sapiens*, No. 58

Luckily there is one truthful woman [meaning Lucia Sánchez Saornil] who does not plead but issues here ‘J’accuse’ against the male ethos that has rarely troubled itself about female emancipation in matters other than sexual (...) The male comrades so radical in the cafes, inside the unions and even inside their groups, are wont to cast off their raiment as lovers of female emancipation on reaching their front doors.”³⁰

For all that there was no shortage of instances where organized anarchism’s cold-shouldering of feminist arguments was made plain; take, say, when Soli itself “forgot” to publish advertisements for the Mujeres Libres review in April 1936 even though those advertisements had been bought and paid for.

Late 1935 and early 1936 were especially hectic with dramatic urgency: the February 1936 elections were approaching and ousting the pro-fascist right from power was of the essence. In keeping with the CNT’s policy, Soli involved itself after a fashion in the Popular Front campaign, merely by not encouraging abstention.

The Popular Front’s victory failed to calm the stormy waters of Spanish politics. There was a feeling in the air that a military coup was in the offing and the CNT made ready to stop the army in its tracks, in spite of the disparity in resources and in spite of the unspoken hostility shown by the incoming government which refused to hand out weapons. Soli was obliged to display large ominously white patches on its pages as reports about military intentions were systematically censored lest servicemen construe them as some sort of provocation sponsored by the authorities.

Knowing the gravity of the situation, both factions of the CNT reunited at the Zaragoza congress of May 1936. The Opposition Unions rejoined the fold at just the right moment: barely two months after the congress, the feared army coup attempt was mounted.

Sirens...

When the signal came, the ship and factory sirens of Barcelona wailed through the early morning hours of 19 July 1936. The rebel military mutinied in Barcelona and were routed off the city streets by the CNT.

On 20 July, an edition of Soli cobbled together by Jaime Balius (who would become famous during the May Events of 1937 at the head of the Friends of Durruti) and Alejandro G. Gilbert saw publication. Once things were more settled, a new director of Soli was appointed in the shape of Liberto Callejas; the new editorial team would be made up of Balius, Gilabert, Fernando Pintado and Ezequiel Endériz. Solidaridad Obrera was now sub-titled ‘Newspaper of the Revolution’ and published a 12 page edition. Right after 19 July its print run soared to 70,000, rising further to 150,000 by the following month. From premises in the Ronda de Sant Antoni, the editors moved to fresh premises in the Ronda de Sant Pere. Its workshops were set up in a confiscated building located at what is now No. 202, Calle del Consell de Cent, the same building that the Falangists were to commandeer in February 1939 for their newspaper, Solidaridad Nacional.

Susanna Tavera has this to say about the ‘Newspaper of the Revolution’:

Quote:

³⁰ Cited by Antonina Fontanillas and Sonya Torres in Lola Iturbe. *Vida y ideal de una luchadora anarquista* (Virus Editorial, Barcelona 2006) p. 48

During the summer of 1936, *Solidaridad Obrera* underwent a visible transformation. Alongside the usual Spanish, Catalan and world political news reports, the paper also featured equally run-of-the-mill notices of trade union gatherings and meetings. Alongside news of how the war was progressing on the front or, later, the intense diplomatic activity in which foreign powers were engaged vis à vis the Spanish war. As a regular feature and in screaming headlines, it launched a section of reportage – called ‘*Solidaridad Obrera Reports*’ – focusing on the institutional and political changes made in Catalan society and especially on the primacy achieved by the confederal labour organisation in the wake of the rebel uprising. Thus *Soli* highlighted the anarchists’ part in the Antifascist Militias Committee and, following its dissolution in November 1936, it highlighted the government responsibilities assumed by the Generalidad Council. At different times, these news contents of these reports concentrated on the most pressing social issues in the rearguard. Thus the issue of supplies, the lack of hygiene in working class areas, especially in the Barrio Chino, the defencelessness of the wounded and elderly and finally the internal organisation of the hospitals which were in the midst of an overhaul were monitored on a daily basis.³¹

Indeed, fresh features such as ‘The Revolution in the Countryside’ or ‘The Militian’s Post-Bag’ showed the paper adapting to the opportunities and requirements of the day. Cánovas Cervantes’s ‘Historical Notes on *Solidaridad Obrera*’ proved very popular and were published in book form shortly after serialisation ended; the same was true of Jacinto Toryho’s versatile columns. As one editorial from the time stated – not unreasonably – *Soli* had become Catalonia’s number one newspaper and its print run had soared to heights never before achieved by any Catalan newspaper.³²

But it was not long before the problems started to emerge. As expected, the CNT-FAI’s collaborationist policy, flying in the face of basic anarchist principles, provoked misgivings and criticism from the CNT ranks. Frictions between Liberto Callejas and the regional CNT committee were recurrent until he was replaced in November 1936 by León native Jacinto Toryho, a staunch defender of the new political line, a man ready to turn *Soli* into a platform for that, as events were to prove. In December 1936, a similar fate befell *Tierra y Libertad*, with Alaiz losing the directorship and J. Maguid being appointed in his place.

The lead editor of the Toryho line-up was Abelardo Iglesias and the rest of the line-up included Ezequiel Endériz, ‘Fontaura’, Fernando Pintado, Galipienzo, A. Fernández Escobés, Leandro Blanco, Lorenzo Otín and José Alabajes, with Fernando Ruiz Morales as illustrator. The writer Eduardo Zamacois would be *Soli*’s front-line correspondent.

Jacinto Toryho’s arrival as director of *Solidaridad Obrera* created high expectations. At a time when journalism was still an occupation without academic credentials, Toryho was a member of the first class to graduate from *El Debate*’s Journalism School in Madrid, a first for Spain. As a trained and experienced professional, Toryho, like Alaiz, was keen to turn *Solidaridad Obrera* into a modern newspaper, but one that would still remain a political instrument.

³¹ Tavera, *op.cit.*, p. 91

³² Ferrán Aisa, *La cultura anarquista a Catalunya* (Edicions de 1984, Barcelona 2006) p. 315.

In professional terms, Toryho did not disappoint the hopes placed in him; the memory he bequeathed as a man who was impossible is quite another matter. Intransigent and short-tempered, he clashed repeatedly with his editors, the staff on the shop floor, the regional committee and other unions. The CNT's general secretary, Mariano Rodríguez aka Marianet, certainly had his work cut out trying to prevent Toryho's dismissal.

A clash between Toryho as the strong man of the official propaganda line and those who espoused the 'go for broke' line (to borrow García Oliver's expression) was inevitable. Anti-collaborationist positions hardly got a look-in in the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera*; by contrast, other titles and indeed the CNT's own Journalists' Union embraced them, giving rise to a sort of a media war which at times was reminiscent of the journalistic sniping that had accompanied the split back in 1932. *Acracia* (in Lérida), under Alaiz, Peirats and Vicente Rodríguez, and *Ideas* (CNT-Bajo Llobregat) controlled by Balius, Peirats (again) and Liberto Callejas were but two of the publications which flew the revolutionary colours. In light of which, in March 1937, Toryho called for the imposition of war-time censorship. In his eagerness to homogenise the CNT's press and propaganda, *Solidaridad Obrera*'s director summoned the National Conference of Confederal and Anarchist Newspapers which met on 28 March 1937. Despite the characterisation 'national', virtually all of the papers attending the conference were from Catalonia, except for two from Madrid and one from Valencia. The matters in hand were 'Consistency in Doctrinal and Propaganda Policy' and news and propaganda requirements; the creation of a press service and a 'Wireless news Agency'. But the conference saw the official line routed as it failed to silence the dissenting voices. Not, of course, that the Toryho camp gave up. Even after the May Events and the ensuing tide of counter-revolution, it was to publish an 'Internal CNT Orientation Bulletin'. As might be expected, the guidance offered by the Bulletin was pretty much ignored.

...And siren songs...

The May Events of 1937 preasaged the loss of political office by the CNT. Amid the collapse of the handiwork of revolution, anarchist collaborationism proved pointless and it all began to fritter away.

Despite the turnaround in the situation, *Soli* was still publishing three editions a day. True, it was afflicted more than ever by problems such as paper shortage – a problem that did not seem to afflict counter-revolutionary organs – and machinery adequate to meeting the needs of the newspaper. The censorship for which Toryho had so lately been lobbying was starting to hit *Solidaridad Obrera* which was even suspended on two separate occasions.

In March 1938, with *Soli*'s print run down to just 100,000 copies, it was none other than Jacinto Toryho who threatened to throw in his lot with the anti-collaborationist camp, seemingly disenchanted with involvement in the institutions. However, after a few of his long-standing demands were met, he drifted back into the official camp, just when the CNT was flirting with the government again, a courtship initiated by Negrín (to be sure, the intervention of Germinal Esgleas, the then chief of Press and Propaganda for the recently established Spanish Libertarian Movement (MLE) must have had something to do with Toryho's change of mind. We know that Toryho as well as Juan Ferrer, the then director of Catalunya, abided strictly by the guidelines laid down by Esgleas from his post.)

Not that the new lilac times of the CNT-FAI (now MLE) with the government was any obstacle to the censor's cracking down on *Solidaridad Obrera*. Toryho spoke out to complain about how the CNT's national committee had, he claimed, left it defenceless. On 30 April 1938, in an effort at a dramatic move that might draw some response from the Organisation, Toryho sent the censored *Solidaridad Obrera* galley proofs directly to the unions. There was a reaction, but not the one that Toryho had been looking for; he was to be dismissed on 7 May along with his editor-in-chief, Iglesias. The editorial team resigned out of solidarity with the pair of them.

The last director of *Soli* prior to the defeat would be José Viadiu, a close friend of Salvador Seguí and a member of the team during the period of exile in Valencia in 1919–1923. The editor-in-chief at this point was Jacobo Prince and the editors Vidal Rueda, José Guirao, Enrique López Alarcón, Abelardo Cansinos, Emilio Vivas, Lorenzo Otín and Armando Vuelta (Liberto Callejas returned as editor of 'Trade Union Affairs').

Viadiu ran the paper right up until the Francoist army entered Barcelona: historians and the curious can at the *Ateneu Enciclopèdic* consult the edition published on 25 January 1939, very likely the final edition to appear before things fell apart.

Soli and Barcelona were overrun together. With ghastly, emergency and unsure times ahead, they both survived on the hard tack of watchwords and perseverance until tank-tracks crushed a world that may have been defeated, but which never surrendered.

"On 27 February 1927, [Einstein] paid a visit to the local of the *Sindicato único* as well as to the editorial offices of *Solidaridad Obrera* at 58, Calle Conde del Asalto, the Calle Nou de la Rambla today, and spoke with the then director Ángel Pestaña at some length. Einstein was interested in the workers' situation and problems, their struggles and demands. During the conversation, he declared: 'You are street revolutionaries and I am a science revolutionary.'"

As for more recent times and by way of an oddity, see the startling graphics that accompanied the article "A thwarted experience in confederal press: *Solidaridad Obrera* (1978–1979)" by Pedro Bergés and José García and carried in the supplement to the *Cuadernos de Ruedo Ibérico*: CNT: ser o no ser. La crisis de 1976–1979 (Editions Ruedo Ibérico, Paris 1979: Spanish edition by Ibérica de Ediciones y Publicaciones) p. 229–230; those graphics record the upsurge in opinion articles to the detriment of straight reportage after the Ramón Barnils editorial team was ousted.

{30} To this day, the figure of Lucía Sánchez Saornil remains mysterious and captivating. A founder of the *Mujeres Libres* in 1936 with Amparo Poch and Rosa Comaposada, she was a regular contributor to *Tierra y Libertad*, *La Revista Blanca*, CNT and *Soli*, as well as to the review *Mujeres Libres*. Sánchez Saornil was also a poet of merit, albeit one that had scarcely any recognition: in fact, she was the only woman in the ranks of the early ultraísta avant-garde, although the homoerotic character of some of her verse forced her to conceal her identity behind the pen name Luciano de San-Saor. Her poetry is available today in the anthology by Rosa María Martín, *Poesía conocida* (Pre-Textos, Valencia). When Sánchez Saornil first began to contribute to the columns of *Soli* we cannot say with precision. But what is beyond question is that hers was one of the few female by-lines in *Soli* along with that of Federica Montseny whose feminist sensibilities were never exactly outstanding (what is more, Montseny and other leading anarchists were critical – savagely critical – of Sánchez Saornil's stance on more than one occasion.)

Notice

Even though the reader may by now have realized this already, I would not want to conclude these notes without a word of caution. The essay above is not a work of discovery but rather of popularization. It must be obvious that the major source for it has been Susana Tavera's oeuvre, *Solidaridad Obrera* ... from which much of the data and analysis have been lifted. Secondly, let me mention Xavier Cuadrat's book, *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña. Los orígenes de la CNT*, from which I have quoted freely. Not forgetting Paco Madrid's article "Solidaridad Obrera, symbol and myth of a legendary newspaper" which opens up the pamphlet *80 Aniversario: Solidaridad Obrera 1907–1987*, published by the *Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular* and *Centre de Documentació Històrico-social* in 1987. It should be made clear that Paco Madrid is currently working on an expanded and updated version of this text. In addition to his article, I am indebted to Madrid also for his advice and the clarifications he offered me during the drafting of these notes which I hope may be of some use to those eager to get some grounding in the turbulent, intoxicating history of *Solidaridad Obrera*.

Catalunya, a Catalan-language “Soli”

Whether due to a degree of centralism typical of the left in Spain, or as a reaction to the socio-economic dynamics at work during the 19th and 20th centuries, the fact is that Solidaridad Obrera represents an emblematic instance of the absence of the Catalan tongue from anarcho-syndicalist circles (the absence being less pronounced among anarchists proper). Ferrán Aisa tells us here that “In his book *L’obrerisme català. Els precursors*, Joan Fronjosa tells an interesting anecdote about Soli.” [...] “In 1917 the directorship of Solidaridad Obrera was offered to Felipe Cortiella. Although in delicate health and unable to work, the offer represented just the opening he so needed. Cortiella made his acceptance conditional upon Solidaridad Obrera’s being drafted in Catalan. At a meeting of the regional and local committees Cortiella’s conditional acceptance came up for discussion. It caused great bewilderment. Pestaña just couldn’t fathom it. Miranda puffed and blowed and El Noi, [i.e. Seguí] seeing that the suggestion was not going down well, suggested that the paper should be bilingual. The latter proposal might well have proved acceptable had Felipe Cortiella not, quite rightly, stood his ground. Soli carried on being written in Spanish and Cortiella was sidelined.”¹

The deficiency was in part made up for with the appearance on 22 February 1937 of Catalunya, an evening daily written entirely in Catalan but, like Soli, the organ of the regional confederation. According to Toryho, the launch of the new title was a publicity stunt seeking ingratiation with the more Catalanist elements within the CNT and the rest of the political forces in Catalonia. The publication was short-lived: it would disappear in May 1938 after publishing something of the order of 300 editions. In Catalunya’s first few euphoric (and tentative) days of existence, 12,500 copies were printed: in March this fell to 3,000, dipping as low as 2,000, at which figure the average print run was set. Although sales stood at around 50%. In fact, Catalunya was always a loss-maker in financial terms: no matter how hard the Organisation strove to keep the title afloat, it never quite took off. In fact, during its short life, it changed director four times: the first was Ricard Mestres, a comrade of Toryho’s in the ‘A’ group; his place would be taken by Juan Peiró and Peiró in turned handed over to Juan Ferrer. Of the fourth director, we have only the family name, Vives. It was almost as hard to recruit readers for the new paper as it was to find journalists to write for it, for there was scarcely anybody in the anarcho-syndicalist ranks who could write in halfway decent Catalan. So inevitably they turned to the editorial staff of L’Instant, a group that accepted the challenge without enthusiasm, given its Catalanist sympathies and lukewarm feelings towards the revolution.

As for Catalunya’s dependency upon Soli, Susanna Tavera regards the former as merely an evening edition of the latter.² Be that as it may, Catalunya was used as a stand-in for Soli when the latter was suspended in August 1937 for publishing with great whited-out patches instead of censored articles, a protest gesture that was strictly forbidden.

¹ Ferrán Aisa, *La cultura anarquista a Catalunya* (Edicions de 1984, Barcelona 2006, p. 314)

² For further information about Catalunya, Tavera recommends Jordi Sabater’s *Anarquisme i catalanisme. La CNT i el fet nacional català durant la Guerra Civil* (Edicions 62, Barcelona 1986).

In 1978 the CNT would briefly resurrect the Catalunya title but only in a symbolic way when it appeared as a set page within Solidaridad Obrera. Carles Sanz tells us that from 1978 to 1980 that page was entrusted to Josep Serra Estruch, Gerard Jacas, Josep Alemany and Ferrán Aisa (currently a contributor to Soli). [See the web edition at www.soliobrera.org under the link 'Historia']

Since 1990 Catalunya has been the mouthpiece of the Catalan CGT. In its current form it has reached edition No. 90 and Jordi Martí tells us that it has a print run of some 10,000 copies.

Solidaridad Obrera, clandestinity and transition, 1939–1987

This short essay aims to do nothing more than record the historical continuity of the CNT newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* through the terrible times of exile and clandestinity as well as into lawful existence in the wake of its re-emergence in year one of the transition in Spanish politics.

Bear in mind that *Solidaridad Obrera*'s glory days were during the years leading up to the civil war and its influence among the populace during that war was truly significant. Later, with the CNT confronted by a new reality, *Soli* ceased as a daily newspaper, becoming instead an anarcho-syndicalist publication appearing at pretty regular intervals depending on the times and upon the finances of the Organisation.

The historical dates that crop up in this article have been tossed in only to help flag up the times and the circumstances in which the CNT found itself when it came to produce its publications, most especially *Solidaridad Obrera*.

To conclude this introduction, I ought to state that this essay was made possible only thanks to the documentary resources available at the Centre de Documentació Històrico-Social at the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular in Barcelona.

Exile

Following the military defeat of the republican forces and, more so, of the CNT, the position of Spain and of millions of people changed radically. The Francoist victory, abetted by international fascism, drove into exile the largest diaspora in the history of the Spanish people: between January and February 1939, upwards of half a million people crossed the border, fleeing from the Francoist victors. The folk crossing the Pyrenees, generally on foot, were escorted by French gendarmes and Senegalese troops to makeshift concentration camps along the coast; the Spanish refugees were crammed into these en masse. The more influential or more fortunate could reach Toulouse or Paris; others would emigrate onwards to the Americas.

Those not lucky enough to be near the border or who failed to flee in time were almost instantaneously stricken by the most ferocious repression the Spanish people ever experienced. Franco's new political regime not only wiped out all political freedoms, banning political, trade union and cultural organisations, but also had thousands upon thousands of people jailed by summary procedures, sentences against which there was no appeal and shootings were carried out on a daily basis. In short, the most elementary human rights were, for many years, ridden over roughshod and a state of siege turned Spain into an out-and-out graveyard.

Not that those who chose the road to exile found a bed of roses. The flight towards France began in mid-winter and they lacked proper clothing and suitable rations. The beaten Spaniards trudging across the borders looked like wraiths fleeing from Hell.

Having quit Barcelona on 26 January 1939, part of the governments of the Republic and Generalidad, military commanders and leaders of the political parties and trade union organisations settled in Figueras for a few days; from there, as best they could, they would orchestrate the human torrent flooding towards the border. The Cortes held a final session on Spanish soil in the castle in Figueras. Elsewhere, troops from the Popular Army – mainly from the 5th Regiment on one side and from the 26th (former Durruti Column) Division on the other covered the withdrawal.

Solidaridad Obrera, the CNT newspaper enjoying the greatest influence and prestige among the populace had appeared in Barcelona for one last time on the very day that Franco's troops entered the city. Even though its headlines cried out for resistance, the people's minds were focused elsewhere and the revolutionary spirit of 19 July 1936 was but a distant memory. After its editors set up in Figueras, they managed to bring out three further editions designed to brief the fugitives, after which it would not be seen again, in exile or within Spain, for some years to come.

On 10 February 1939 the last few batches of Spaniards crossed into France; on the same day, Francoist troops reached the border but the war was not over just yet. The struggle would persist in the Centre-South Zone of Spain; the Republic clung on for another month and a half before it finally went under. The defeat of the Republic triggered further exoduses and waves of imprisonment, but some CNT militants as well as counterparts from other political factions managed to get out to North Africa by sea; others fled for the Americas, but the vast majority were trapped in the port of Alicante, in Madrid or elsewhere in the republican zone: they were taken prisoner and deported to prisons and concentration camps such as the camp at Albatera, 28 kilometres from Alicante. The war had ended in Francoist victory and the victors were about to impose their will and bring the Spanish people to its knees. The Francoist victory hoisted the Inquisition into power: the machinery of police repression was set in motion and no city or village in Spain, however small, would be spared. Every single Spaniard was examined under the Francoist microscope. Another of Francoism's aims was to annihilate the identities of peoples like the Catalans or Basques. The freedom that these had previously enjoyed was to cost them dear.

In February 1939 the CNT national committee, FAI peninsular committee and peninsular committee of the FIJL met in Paris. After analysing the position, they resolved to launch a General Council of the Spanish Libertarian Movement (MLE) made up of twelve members: Mariano R. Vázquez, Germinal de Sousa, Germinal Esgleas, Francisco Iglesias, J. García Oliver, Roberto Alfonso, Pedro Herrera, Horacio M. Prieto, Valerio Mas, Lorenzo Iñigo and Serafín Aliaga. Mariano R. Vázquez was appointed general secretary to the General Council. The first statement from this libertarian body was dated 25 February. One of its first decisions was to appoint Juan Manuel Molina (aka Juanel) delegate for the concentration camps and liaison with the organisation within Spain.

The first stirrings of CNT reorganisation in the Spanish interior came in 1939. CNT militants organised themselves into camp committees or prison committees so as to assist one another and stay in touch with the outside world through relatives and friends. But it was in April 1939, with the war but recently concluded, that a first meeting of libertarian militants who had escaped the police dragnet was held in a fruit-shop in Valencia. The underground CNT began to function and a national committee was elected, with Esteban Pallarols its very first general secretary: he was later arrested by the police and shot. Between 1939 and 1951, no less than fourteen CNT national committees were rounded up by the police; but for every committee that fell, there

were militants standing by to fill the breach and take charge of the Confederation. 1942 saw the very first clandestine version of *Soli* (according to Fontaura), printed on a 'cyclostyle' machine in Barcelona, although the CNT's mouthpiece would not appear on any regular basis until 1945, but more of that anon.

In exile, there had been efforts made to reorganise in those locations where CNT militants had settled – Algiers, Mexico, France, Venezuela, Argentina, etc. One of the pressing tasks facing the CNT in exile was helping refugees who, as if they did not have enough problems in places like France, faced worse prospects with the German army's occupation of French soil. Lots of exiles went home to face persecution: if captured in France, they would be dispatched to Nazi concentration camps where the greatest danger was falling into Gestapo hands and being handed over to the Franco government, as befell Lluís Companys and Juan Peiró, Julián Zugazagoitia and so many other republican militants of every hue.

The first nucleus of CNT exiles to produce *Solidaridad Obrera* was the group in Mexico. Issue No. 1 appeared in 1942 and it was to appear on a regular basis up until 1963, 197 issues in all. Initially it was offered as 'Mouthpiece of the CNT membership in exile' but later would see publication with the subtitles 'Organ of the CNT of Spain in Mexico' and 'Organ of the CNT in Spain on the American Continent'. One after another, the direction of the paper fell to the following militants – Progreso Alfarache, José Viadiu, Hermoso Plaja, J.B. Magriñá, Adolfo Hernández, Octavio Alberola and B. Cano Ruiz. The pages of the paper, a monthly publication, contained organisational communiqués from the CNT, news from Spain, reports from exile, ideological pointers and free contributions by the militants scattered across the Americas along with those from the CNT and republican colony in Mexico proper; there was also widespread contribution by CNT members living in Europe. Among the more regular contributors we might cite Manuel Buenacasa, Ángel Samblancat, Fidel Miró, José Alberola, Liberto Callejas, Albano Rosell, Severino Campos, Carlos M. Rama, Floreal Ocaña, Eusebio C. Carbó, León Felipe, Ramón J. Sender, T. Cano Ruiz, Mariano Viñuales, Manuel Pérez, Juan López, Proudhon Carbó, Fabián Moro, C. Subirats, Acrata Pons, Jaime Rosma, J. García Durán and Juan Papiol.

In 1944 *Solidaridad Obrera* would appear in Algiers, to begin with, and later in France. CNT militants who had organised themselves in North Africa decided to adopt *Soli* as the title of the CNT mouthpiece as it addressed itself to the substantial Spanish presence in places like Algiers, Tunis or Morocco. Some 53 issues appeared in Algiers between 1944 and 1947 and there, as in Mexico, publication was monthly. Throughout its brief existence, its subtitle was 'Organ of the Spanish Libertarian Movement in North Africa'. It carried contributions from various militants from the Confederation in exile alongside articles by anarchist authors of acknowledged international reputation. There were also lots of organisational announcements and news about the repression in Spain. The most regular contributors were: Dionysios, Puyol, Isabel del Castillo, J. Muñoz Congost, Pedro Herrera, Rudolf Rocker, Gaston Leval, Belis, Augustin Souchy, Pedro L. de Gálvez, John Andersson, Fosco Falaschi, etc. Most of the members of this particular segment of the Spanish exile community gradually left North Africa as the situation returned to normal in Europe after the end of the Second World War and most of them opted to settle in France.

France was the country that harboured the largest number of CNT members. Reorganisation in France was soon a *fait accompli* and the CNT had a foothold in every French department, the two main concentrations of CNT exiles being in Toulouse and Paris. The national committee set up shop in Toulouse, its general secretaryship falling upon Germinal Esgleas. Toulouse was to

publish the newspaper CNT, of which Federica Montseny was the director. But the honour of reissuing the legendary CNT newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, fell to the Paris group.

At the Libertarian Movement's Region 11 regional plenum, held in Paris in January 1945, one of the items on the agenda referred to Soli's policy line and the motion passed stated:

Quote:

Soli should abide by the line taken to date, to wit, defending and spreading anarcho-syndicalist principles and the tactics of direct, anti-political, anti-state action, as ratified by the Madrid and Zaragoza congresses.

Solidaridad Obrera in France was published from Paris from 1944 up until 1961 when – following protests from the Franco government – the French government imposed a ban, forcing a change of the paper's name to *Solidaridad* and – later – to *Le Combat Syndicaliste* when Spanish exiles took over the organ of the French CNT. Publication of CNT was also banned; it changed its name to *Espoir*. Both publications were kept afloat by the nuclei of Spanish exiles in France until well into the 1980s. Now amalgamated, both these CNT organs continue to publish on a weekly basis from Paris under the title *Cenit*.

Some 867 issues were published on a weekly basis under the designation *Solidaridad Obrera*. Phase one was under the direction of A. Casanovas; he was followed by F. Gómez Pelaez, with the editorial panel made up of José García Pradas, Felipe Alaiz and José Peirats. From 1954 until 1961, the director was Igualada-born CNT militant Juan Ferrer. Later, after the publication's name was changed, Ferrer remained at the helm of *Le Combat Syndicaliste* for a long time. During the civil war, Juan Ferrer had served as an editor on *Soli* and as director of Catalunya.

In Paris *Solidaridad Obrera* would publish using the subtitle 'Mouthpiece of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) of Spain in Exile'. From the outset it surrounded itself with the best libertarian-minded writers which afforded it a certain access to the Spanish emigré community. In the 1940s, in the wake of the Second World War, its print-runs soared to something of the order of 30,000 copies monthly; under Ferrer's direction, *Soli* was publishing 6,000 copies a week. *Solidaridad Obrera* attracted lots of contributors in France, the long list of whom includes Federica Montseny, Fernando Pintado, Fontaura, Amador Franco, Raúl Carballeira, Juan Puig Elías, Félix Martí Ibáñez, Albert Camus, Ángel Samblancat, Eusebio C. Carbó, J. Borrás, J. Domènech, Ramón Álvarez, Germinal Esgleas, Alberto Carsi, Vega Álvarez, García Birlán (aka Dionysios) and Gaston Leval.

Beginning with issue no. 459 (1 January 1954) *Soli* was to print the *Solidaridad Obrera* literary supplement containing works of literature, art, science and culture in general. That supplement was a monthly feature and it carried on up until 1961 when a general ban on Spanish republican publication in exile in France saw it turn into *Umbral*. Some 96 issues of the 'Solidaridad Obrera literary supplement' saw publication. Its interesting contents included a number of monographic studies of Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, Ferrer y Guardia, León Felipe, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, García Lorca, Valle Inclán, Pere Bosch i Gimpera, Fernando Valera, Víctor García, Lluís Montaña, Octavio Paz, Lluís Capdevila, Albert Camus, Jean Cassou, Agustí Pi i Sunyer, Jean Rostand, Marcos Ana, Félix Martí Ibáñez, Carlos M. Rama and Felipe Alaiz.

Mention must also be made of the publishing efforts of Spanish exiles – especially CNT members – who launched lots of book and pamphlet collections directed at the emigré community

and publicising libertarian thinking, personal testimonies or literary creations of their own. In 1950 Solidaridad Obrera issued its first catalogue listing a large number of published books and pamphlets. Solidaridad Obrera publications also appeared in Buenos Aires under the direction of Diego Abad de Santillán.

Without question, of all the groups and organisations forced into exile after the end of the civil war, it was the anarchists that published and released the biggest amount of propaganda, whether in the form of newspapers, books or pamphlets. An Inter-Continental Plenum of Nuclei held in Bordeaux in August 1969 declared:

Quote:

This motion holds that it is vitally necessary that we sustain the existence of our publications, the most consistent and widely distributed in the whole of the Spanish exile community.

And at a plenum held clandestinely in 1946, there was talk of “boosting the newspaper CNT to the maximum and publishing Soli as often as practicable.”

In 1945 a congress of the CNT-in-exile was held in Paris. The CNT membership was nurturing a lot of high hopes: at the end of the Second World War, with the Allies triumphant, there was a belief that Francoist Spain’s days were to be numbered in weeks or months, but the reality was different. Yet again, differences over the tactics to be espoused by anarcho-syndicalists in the fight against Francoism produced a split within the libertarian movement’s ranks in late 1945. The main issue to be thrashed out and which triggered the CNT split was the matter of collaborationism, “collaboration, yes or no?” vis à vis the republican government-in-exile headed by José Giral in Mexico. That was a real dilemma for the CNT. Although the majority of exiles plumped for principles, tactics and objectives approved at the Zaragoza congress in 1936, part of the Organisation-in-exile chose to collaborate and appointed José Expósito Leiva and Horacio Martínez Prieto to take up portfolios in the republican government-in-exile. Other militants also took up places within Josep Terradellas’s Generalitat of Catalonia government-in-exile.

The split within the CNT was a fact over many years up until a fresh congress in France in 1961 brought about a reunification.

Further exile

In early 1944, the regional committee of the CNT of Catalonia decided to issue a newspaper, Solidaridad Obrera, clandestinely, in Barcelona. Publication of the first few editions of the paper was entrusted to Pedro Mas Valois, a journalist and photographer, who, after contacting the artist Helios Gómez, managed to locate a CNT old-timer by the name of Soto who had access to a printing press. The first 8 editions of the clandestine Soli were run off on those presses between March and June 1944. Later, publication had to be suspended for security reasons as the police had suspicions about the presses and although a house search produced no results, the organisation chose to wait for new presses to be found.

1945 was a year of great activity for the CNT. There was a widespread belief that the Franco regime’s days were numbered. Even though committees were being arrested, other militants took

up the coordination effort and the CNT remained in place as one of the leading forces in opposition to Francoism. With other elements, the CNT was also involved in a joint platform known as the Alianza Nacional de Fuerzas Democráticas – National Alliance of Democratic Forces – ANFD). For the first time since 1939, the end of the regime looked imminent. To get some understanding of the times, remember that between late 1945 and summer 1946, the CNT had issued some 60,000 membership cards in Catalonia, 21,000 of those belonging to the Barcelona Local Federation. At the time, Soli was putting out 30,000 copies per issue for distribution in the factories, workshops, offices and firms. The newspaper was really tiny, just 16 x 21 cms in size and four well presented printed pages. It came in other sizes too, but as a general rule, the smaller version was preferred as it facilitated distribution in times of strict clandestinity. The contents were mainly notices from the Organisation, announcements and declarations. In one editorial, the one for November 1945, (Issue No. 14), the front page headline read: “Going Down”, the general idea being that in the wake of the Allied victory over fascism, the Franco regime’s days were numbered.

Soli carried on appearing over the years that followed and was printed on premises in the Calle Estruch and then in the Calle Dos de Mayo. With the rounding up of the various national and regional committees, as well as the capture of the presses on which propaganda, bulletins and CNT newspapers were being printed, the incoming committees had to search for new places to meet and to publish its propaganda. When straits were at their direst, the propaganda was printed up in France and smuggled back into Spain over the mountains. According to (then CNT general secretary) Cipriano Damiano: “The organisation was to reach its high point in 1946 and 1947”, and, as for Soli, he opined “Solidaridad Obrera will not budge from periodical publication and will be devoured by the working class, keen to learn of the views and attitudes of its organisation.” During this period, not only was Soli appearing, but the CNT was at its height in virtually every region of Spain. In Galicia the regional CNT confederation also published a Solidaridad Obrera as a fortnightly. From the Centre region came Castilla Libre; from Valencia, Fragua Social; from Andalusia, Solidaridad Obrera; from Extremadura, Extremadura Libre. In addition, Ruta, Juventud Libre, Tierra y Libertad, CNT and such were also being produced. In his book, Juan Manuel Molina states:

Quote:

The organisation was gaining in strength with every passing day, despite upsets. It was publishing Solidaridad Obrera, bulletins, circulars, manifestos. Reaching beyond Barcelona to the rest of the country. Provincial and comarcal committees were being formed and there were even local federations.

After these days of splendour in clandestine operation, with Soli publishing huge print runs, it settled down to an average of 6,000 copies an issue; in all 42 issues were produced in a variety of formats between 1944 and 1957, although most of these appeared between 1944 and 1947. In the years thereafter there were changes in terms of periodicity, coinciding from 1948 on with the police crackdowns in the wake of the previous year’s strikes. Soli’s publication became more irregular and this became more pronounced after the Barcelona tram strike in 1951 as the harshest repression in the Francoist era fell upon CNT personnel and Communists, with arrests, prison sentences and death sentences. Besides, we should remember that in the 1939–1951 period alone

the members of no less than 14 CNT national committees were rounded up, as were several regional committees around Spain, plus rank-and-file CNT members galore. In 1957, repression zeroed in on the CNT organisation once more. *Solidaridad Obrera* was to disappear until it burst into a new era of activity in 1963–1966: and over those three years only five issues appeared, published in France and smuggled back into Spain, although earlier, in October 1958, there had been a *Solidaridad Obrera* ‘extra’ produced marking the 48th anniversary of the establishment of the CNT. Two languages (Castilian and Catalan) were widely used in many of the clandestine editions of *Solidaridad Obrera* and it carried the subtitle ‘Organ of the National Confederation of Labour and Mouthpiece of the Regional Confederation of Labour in Catalonia’. And below the masthead were emblazoned the initials AIT (=IWA). Articles in the paper were either unsigned or signed with noms de plume.

At the same time, even as some militants were busy organising (that is, publishing newspapers, bulletins, circulars, manifestos, etc., or getting together to deal with the trade union or political business of opposing the Franco regime in terms of agitation or propaganda targeting workers of anarcho-syndicalist leanings), other libertarian militants embarked upon armed struggle against the regime, initially in guerrilla campaigns in all parts of Spain and involving personnel from almost every republican faction, and later, in the late 1940s, in urban guerrilla activity wherein men such as Quico Sabaté, José Lluís Facerías, Marcelino Massana, Ramón Vila Capdevila and many another were to keep the Spanish police at full stretch right up until the early 1960s.

The weakening of CNT strength, what with their whole-hearted engagement with the fight against Franco in the years of the harshest repression, ensured that the CNT was all but marginalised in Francoism’s later years, especially after 1968, when trade unionism started to take off and the labour movement acquired fresh clout thanks to a new organisation spawned in Asturias in 1962 and known as the Workers’ Commissions. Initially this organisation purported to be an umbrella organisation, but later it was exposed as the trade union front of the Communist Party.

In spite of everything, *Solidaridad Obrera* resurfaced in 1973 and 1974, with a different numbering and dating system in each year, due to the fact that it had been produced by different committees, although back in 1972 the Rojo y Negro Group of Grenoble had produced an edition of *Solidaridad Obrera*. In this new phase, *Soli* was printed on a cyclostyle machine by young Barcelona students who had refloated the CNT, but the arrest of committee members and want of funds brought publication of that *Soli* to a halt. It would be two more years before it resurfaced when, in the wake of Franco’s death, the CNT was rebuilt.

Reconstruction

In late 1975, after the death of Franco, initial contacts were established between a number of nuclei and groups with an eye to rebuilding the CNT within Spain. The CNT had been missing from anti-Francoist opposition platforms since the late 1960s: in spite of which, it was during those dying days of Francoism that – especially in Catalonia – groups of anarchist persuasions, such as the First of May Group, the MIL and the GARI were active, but as an organisation the CNT was on the fringes of the big opposition political and trade union campaigns – the Junta Democrática and the Asamblea de Catalunya. CNT reorganisation took off after the Asamblea de Sants, held in the Sant Medir parish church on 29 February 1976. In the wake of that Assembly,

in which militants and groups from right across the libertarian spectrum, from syndicalists to councilists, including anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, libertarian marxists and Trotskyists, took part, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) bounced back on to the scene: with it came the committees, local federations, comarcal federations, unions and confederal organs.

On May Day 1976 *Solidaridad Obrera* resurfaced as the Organ of the Catalonia Regional Committee and mouthpiece of the CNT. Its first 15 editions appeared on a monthly basis in folio format; responsibility for the paper lay with the regional committee's press and propaganda secretariat and its administrator was Matías, from the Badalona Local Federation. The editorial offices used by those initial issues were located in the Calle Méndez Núñez. After that, a team of militants from the printing trades union would take charge of *Soli*. In this second phase there was a change in format and although it was still being produced as a monthly, the print run was increased and *Soli* began to be sold through a number of kiosk outlets: the administrator of *Soli* during this period would be Cipriano Damiano.

Over those years, there was an expansion in CNT membership, the unions were publishing bulletins of their own and gradually *Soli* started to seep through into the workplace. In May 1977, whilst the regional plenum for Catalonia was under way, a sizeable gang of CNT personnel invaded the premises of the Falangist newspapers *Prensa* and *Solidaridad Nacional*, overrunning the premises and chanting "Let's take back *Soli*". The occupation was the CNT's way of claiming back the presses seized from it by the Francoists at the end of the civil war; the CNT was claiming back its historical patrimony, of which *Solidaridad Obrera* was a part. That June, the CNT was granted lawful status. General elections were held and there was a sort of a libertarian spring-time, with mass rallies like the one in Montjuich and the International Libertarian Showcase (the *Jornadas Libertarias*). At the time, the CNT took part in assembly-based strikes like the Roca dispute, as well as ones involving the printing trades, construction workers and filling stations across Barcelona province. CNT recruitment had taken off by this point, but then came the murky 'Scala' nightclub fire which plunged the CNT into one its first crises. Despite this, *Solidaridad Obrera* was revamped and switched from monthly to fortnightly publishing from 1978 on. Ramón Barnils was chosen to direct it and Toni Batalla would look after the administration side of things.

Under Barnils, *Soli* got a second wind with print runs of 15,000 copies a fortnight, with regular features, correspondents, paid editors (editorial staff earned 10,000 and 5,000 pesetas a month). It was printed on the presses of *El Noticiero Universal* and was distributed through kiosks. During this stage of *Soli*'s existence the editorial offices were located at 56, Calle Princesa. But Barnils's term as director became a matter of controversy as far as one segment of the organisation was concerned. One year later, at a regional plenum held in April 1979, Barnils and his team were driven out of *Soli* and the directorship of the paper passed to Severino Campos. During this time *Soli* would remain a 16-page newspaper and its regular features were retained, as was its fortnightly schedule.

That same year the CNT held its Fifth Congress in Madrid. Having relocated to Madrid, the *Soli* editorial team produced a 4-page special given over to the congress. After that congress, the CNT was in tatters. A split that had been months in the making became a reality and even though the tendency favouring the historic line approved at the 1936 Zaragoza congress emerged triumphant, a real crisis erupted to tear the organisation apart. The main pretext for this fresh split in the CNT would be the issue of whether or not to participate in the trade union elections.

In the summer of 1980 *Soli* would be taken over by Ramón Liarte, with Lucas Moreno as administrator; the editorial offices were set up in an apartment in the Calle Reina Cristina and

Solidaridad Obrera stopped the printing arrangement with El Noticiero Universal. A press in Hospitalet was to cover the next phase when Soli switched from fortnightly back to monthly publication; at the same time the number of pages per issue was cut and the print run was severely reduced. In December 1980, during an exercise known as 'The Scala Case', Soli would appear daily in cyclostyle format, with a print run of 5,000 copies of four pages each.

Over the years that followed Carmen Diaz Mayo, Francisco Posa, Luis Andrés Edo and Josep Alemany all served as directors.

Over the 11 years when Solidaridad Obrera was being published without interruption, the most regular staffers or contributors to write for it were: Gerard Jacas, Ferrán Aisa, Esteban Alonso, Eugenio Recuero, Mario Vila, Juanjo Fernández, Miquel Correas, Josep Mateu, Miquel Didad Piñero, Abel Paz, Lluís Correal, Ramón Sentís, Francisco Piqueras, Francisco García Cano, Rafael Henares, Carles J. Sanz, Pep Castells, Federica Montseny, Bernart Gisbert, etc.

We should also mention the inclusion within Solidaridad Obrera from mid-1978 to 1980 of a page in Catalan (with its own numbering/dating system) entitled Catalunya and sub-titled (in Catalan) 'Mouthpiece of the Regional Confederation of Labour of Catalonia'. A CNT paper of that name was published as an evening daily during the civil war and was published on the presses of Soli, entirely in Catalan. During the period when Barnils was at the helm, this insert was under the care of Josep Serra Estruch and later the Catalunya page would be handled by Gerard Jacas, Josep Alemany and Ferrán Aisa. From time to time it has reappeared in Soli but only as just another page of the contents, without any separate dating or numbering. Although Catalunya did resurface as a (theoretically monthly but actually irregularly published) review published by the breakaway CNT and under the direction of Josep Serra Estruch. The breakaways were also to publish Solidaridad Obrera as the 'Organ of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT)', dispensing with the AIT initials, initially publishing out of Valencia and later from Madrid. That version of Soli, published by the CNT that emerged from the Valencia congress, was rather irregular in terms of periodicity and its contents ranged from trade union business to current affairs. No director's name was given and responsibility for the paper lay with the Press and Propaganda secretariat of the CNT's confederal committee; it had correspondents in each of the 'autonomous communities' and, as for contributors, we should mention the names of Enric Marcos and Josep Costa Font.

To conclude this brief study of Solidaridad Obrera, I should state that in July 1986, on the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution, Soli released a very high-quality printed review containing interesting articles and photographs from those historic events back in 1936 and entitled Sin Fronteras; it bore the subtitle 'Solidaridad Obrera Supplement'.

At present, Solidaridad Obrera continues to publish regularly, although neither its print run nor the number of its pages nor its regular features are the same as in the years when the CNT was in the ascendant. 185 issues, plus several 'specials' were published between 1976 and October 1987.

Solidaridad Obrera 1976–2006: A look back at the history of CNT journalism over the last 30 years

The reconstruction of the CNT in Catalonia following the death of the dictator Franco began on 29 February 1976 in the parish church of Sant Medir in the Sants barrio of Barcelona. That gathering attracted groups of every persuasion: anarcho-syndicalists, anarchists, syndicalists, councilists, libertarian marxists, Trotskyists, etc., and in the long run it showed, as tensions and strife erupted between them, which had a powerful impact on the prospects of the CNT and of the CNT's newspaper to boot. The first CNT regional committee, among other things, decided to refloat, albeit clandestinely, the legendary and historic *Solidaridad Obrera*. Since then, that newspaper has unrelentingly kept workers informed in spite of the difficulties placed in its path. A hundred years of labour journalism has now passed since *Solidaridad Obrera's* launch back in 1907 and the paper has been composed wholly and exclusively by workers, which of itself is reason enough for it to claim to be the doyen of Barcelona journalism, a title that officialdom has denied it in spite of the facts. Allow me now to analyse its course over the past thirty years.

Different phases

Soli, as it is colloquially referred to, resurfaced on 1 May 1976 as a broadsheet and, for the first 15 issues (up until July 1977 to be precise), as a monthly. Initially, publication was irregular, but from No. 19 (May 1978) on, it embarked upon a phase of more rigorous news reportage and regularity; by No. 4 the print run already stood at 10,000 copies. During the two earlier phases in 1976 and 1977, we have no knowledge of who was the director and the Press and Propaganda secretariat of the Regional Committee claimed responsibility, followed by a collective of militants from the Barcelona Printing Trades union. The first administrator was Matías from Badalona and Cipriano Damiano, and the editorial offices were located in Barcelona's Calle Méndez Núñez.

Phase three was the first properly significant phase and the director was Ramón Barnils (May 1978-May 1979) who faced internal criticism for trying to turn *Soli* into a bourgeois newspaper, this triggering his dismissal. Barnils had surrounded himself with a team made up of, among others, Juanjo Fernández, Santi Soler (an ex-member of the MIL) and J. L. Marugan-Coca; these too were criticised for writings that strayed from anarcho-syndicalist orthodoxy. The fact is that *Soli's* sales were never higher, *Soli* was well put together and was being distributed in kiosks throughout the city. Throughout this period the administrator was Toni Batalla. And during the same period *Soli* switched from monthly to fortnightly publication and attained a print run of 15,000 copies. Its offices were at 56 Calle Princesa, Barcelona.

During phase 4, when it was a fortnightly, *Soli's* director was Severino Campos (May 1979-December 1980) and the editorial team included Gerard Jacas, Ferrán Aisa and Josep Alemany.

Those were tough times, with the Fifth Congress (and the split in the CNT) in the offing, although the issue was not reflected in the columns of the paper. To its credit, it should be pointed out that a daily edition Soli appeared throughout the six days of the 'Scala Case' trial.

Phase 5 was when Ramón Liarte took over the direction (February 1981-February 1982), with Lucas Moreno as administrator. For the first time (No. 79) there was a full editorial line-up: F. Aisa and G. Jacas were still there, joined now by E. Alonso, J. March, C. Díaz Mayo, E. Recuero, J. Carrasco and L. Correal. Later some of these dropped away and in came Sentis Biarnau and J. Mateu. Publishing standards fell and some issues were lacking in substance, another spin-off from the split within the CNT which was preoccupied with internal business and what news there was on the work front was neglected. The fact is that Liarte surrounded himself with people from the exile community (Sentis, Muñoz Congost, Tomás Andrés, Antonio Costa, José España, P. Flores, Cosme Paules, Vicente Soler and Villar Sánchez) who brought nothing new except for a reaffirmation of anarchist thinking and morality, but the current affairs coverage that readers were looking for at the time were all but ignored.

Phase 6 saw Carmen Díaz as director (May 1982-July 1984), with Pere Farriol joining a few months later as administrator. Although the exiles group still contributed, it was gradually being edged out as the paper returned to coverage of the labour affairs that had all but faded away and there was a breath of fresh air added in the form of interviews with personalities from outside the libertarian fold. The editorial staff was joined first by Severino Campos and later by Rafael Henares and Carles Sanz, as well as by the 'Tinta Negra' (Black Ink) collective which handled all of the photography.

Francisco Posa was director during phase 7 (September 1984-July 1985) and administration was handled by José Hernández Muntaner. The editorial staff included Carmen Díaz, Josep Alemany, Esteban Alonso, Lluís Correal, Correas, B. Gisbert, Adrián, R. Henares, J. Mateu, Carles Sanz and Ramón Sentís, a wide-ranging team but one that failed to live up to its promise. Once again there was a decline in coverage of the work scene and a rise in coverage of cultural matters, with special supplements being produced, among them a joint Solidaridad Obrera-CNT edition marking the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the CNT.

Lluís Andrés Edo served as director during phase 8 (September 1985-February 1987), with José Hernández staying on as administrator. During this phase the exile team left the scene completely and this phase of publication was marked by more specific coverage of international affairs, police repression and the situation in the prisons, as well as a controversial, back page survey into the situation of the CNT, drawing contributions from, among others, Marcos Alcón, Pep Castells, J. Muñoz Congost, F. Álvarez Farreras, etc.

Phase 9 belongs to Josep Alemany (March 1987-May 1986) with Lluís Correal stepping in as administrator. The previous policy was upheld with columns opening up to contemporary issues.

Phase 10 saw the return of Carmen Díaz (June 1986-September 1990) as director, with Correal staying on as administrator and Carles Sanz on the editorial team. A feature of this phase of Soli's life was the emphasis on articles relating to labour news and with health and safety in the workplace. An innovation were the 'Soli Supplements' covering cultural topics. It was during this time that the paper switched premises to 6, Plaça Duc de Medinaceli in Barcelona.

In phase 11 (October 1990-December 1992) Adrià Sotés was appointed director, with Jordi Ballester as administrator. Under the name 'Team Soli', a number of comrades took charge of assembly, design and the photography of the paper. Supplements were also produced under the

designation 'Cultura libertaria' and during this time the editorial offices moved again to 13, Ronda de Sant Antoni, Barcelona.

Phase 12 was under the directorship of Albert Sabadell (January 1993-December 1994), the second professional journalist (after Barnils) to serve as director of the CNT's flagship. Once again, administration fell to Correal and Jordi Mascarell took charge of design and photography. As this phase was drawing to an end the CNT de Catalunya entered its current period of decline, with many of its unions de-federating. As a result of which two papers were issued, using the same title and with each of them retaining the same numbering system. On which basis I shall, from here on (Soli No. 250), deal with each of the factions separately.

The de-federated faction which at the time accounted for 80% of the unions, was known as 'CNT-Joaquim Costa'. Initially the regional committee took up the post of director and Guti would be the administrator. Publication resumed in September 1995, but only until December. Later, Salvador Gurucharri was appointed director (January 1996-January 1999) with Jordi Vélez covering the administration, only to be replaced later (June 1997) by Miguel Ángel López. Two changes of address took place during this stage, the first to 115, Calle Hospital in Barcelona. The editorial team was made up of Juan José Velilla, Jordi Vélez, Manuel Castro, Pako Millán, Salvador Gurucharri and Nono Kadáver; joined later by Manolito Rastamán and Mateo Rello. As for the photography, the 'Tinta Negra' collective returned to help out. At this point Soli got a second wind by turning to the illustration and comic strip tradition, with artists who designed striking covers. Here, Gurucharri was able to connect with and surround himself with collaborators and support from outside the CNT fold in the revamping of the paper's contents. In 1997 came the second and, so far, final removal of the editorial offices to the current Barcelona CNT headquarters at 34, Calle Joaquim Costa. After January 1999, for the first time (and even to this day) the CNT organ coped without a director, that task being covered by an 'Editorial assembly'. This initially featured M. Castro, P. Millán, M. Rello, Kristina, Chilango and Pierre (the last two as artists, although later they quit the editorial team whereas Rosendo joined it). As a result of de-federation, the coverage of labour disputes plummeted and there was a considerable rise in the space given over to cultural topics, with the publication of a number of cultural supplements, of which more anon. And a web-based Soli digital was launched.

The 'official' faction is referred to as CNT-Medinaceli or CNT-Badalona. The first edition of Soli it produced (March 1995) was produced by the regional committee of Catalunya and it was bereft of any news about the organisationally improper de-federation that had taken place. With No. 251 (April 1995) Nuria Galdón became director and there was a board of management made up of Antonio Blanco, Antonio Costa, Isabel Gracia, Rafael Henares, José Ros, Ramón Liarte and José Antonio Suárez. Later, J. S. Serrallonga joined as clerk, Caharo, Juanma and Pau as archivists and Carles and Nadia on 'retouching'. Some time later, Marta, Rubén, Rocío, David Jordi and Chuck joined as collaborators. Broadly, during this first phase, issues tended to be very lightweight in terms of contents. From No. 269 (February 1997) onwards, there was no named director and no named editors. However, in No. 271, the director was named as Josep-Suno Navarro and in No. 273, Xavi Muñoz joined as administrator. Illustrations were credited to Hugo de Lima and 'Team Soli' was named as the editors. From No. 296 on, the director was Martí Ferré Carreras with Muñoz staying on as administrator. The editorial offices switched to Villafranca del Penedès and during this phase there was improved coverage of international news and ecological issues. From No. 301 (February 2000) on, the director was David Becerra Rigart and the editorial offices moved to Olot. During this stage there was a re-design and quite a bit of labour news in the shape of

short notices. From No. 311 (November 2001) on, there was no named director or administrator and the address switched back to Badalona.

Content

Over the past thirty years, Solidaridad Obrera had offered a motley selection of themes and its variation has changed to reflect the internal and external developments through which the CNT has passed, as well as changes in society itself, especially with regard to the world of work and the trade unions. The paper has always enjoyed a great measure of freedom even though it is the organ of the CNT-Catalunya. Not that that freedom itself has not been at the source of the occasional additional clash. However, with the exception of the dismissal in 1978 of the journalist Barnils – as referred to above – the various editorial teams have always operated free of pressure or imposition from the committees of trade unions and only someone who has served on those teams knows how hard it can be to remain impartial and plough an independent furrow.

Our analysis of the contents of the paper is going to be in two parts. Part one covers the period up to 1995, so as to separate that period from the later one during which two rival papers using the same name were being produced.

Beginning with organisational matters proper, the first point to be stressed is that the paper has always refused to become an internal bulletin and so has set its sights on reaching out to a readership beyond the circles of the CNT. This being why there has been scarcely any coverage of accords passed by plenums or plenaries, although there has been coverage of the odd National Union Conference or indeed the controversy over the use of the initials (See Nos. 188 and 205).

Congresses are quite another matter; we find these being reported at length. Thus, several editions (Nos. 52, 55, 57 and 58) were given over to the controversial Fifth Congress in Madrid, but there was little or no coverage of what happened at it. There were a few ‘specials’ (Nos. 113, 123, 124, 125, 126 and 128, the latter being an ‘extra’) on the Sixth Congress in Barcelona. The same is true of the Extraordinary Single Issue Torrejón Congress (No. 131) and of subsequent splits (Nos. 145, 147, 148, 149 and 150). The paper dispatched a number of editors to the Seventh Congress in Bilbao, producing a 19-page extra filled with reportage and interviews.

One of the ‘star’ themes, year after year, was the turn-out every 1 May, an iconic date in the libertarian movement since 1890. During this period, Soli even devoted a number of ‘specials’ to this. By contrast, one topic that provoked no debate was nationalism, about which we have found (except for Nos. 2 and 100) scarcely any articles.

When it comes to trade union matters, we have to bear in mind that there were some significant debates, like the one about collective bargaining which tested some anarcho-syndicalist sectors and currents on their tactics: there was even an ‘extra’ produced on the subject (No. 131). Although the trade union elections were the main – but not the only – arena for clashes and subsequent splits, this debate was not triggered by Soli. However, we find articles there about the enterprise committees and boycotting the elections. On the other hand, there was always reference to direct action or self-management, not forgetting the trade union platforms. The anti-union laws and anti-worker laws are well represented, so we find lots about the Worker’s Statute, opposition to the Trade Union Law, the Strike Law or Social Action.

In the trade union-work context, company disputes, notably Roca, Telefónica, the filling stations, Macosa, the dockers, SEAT and Carrefour are well represented. We find detailed monitor-

ing of the strikes that erupted in these sectors as well as others such as metalworking, printing trades or health. Similarly, CNT personnel; have always been intrigued by work safety matters, in which we have been the pioneers, sometimes running ahead of the legislation. So there have been pieces on contaminants, the regulation or prevention of work risks and even, over a few issues, these took up the back page of the paper.

Recovery of historical assets has been a demand that has been reflected in the pages of *Soli*, beginning with the restoration of the newspaper assets (including an inventory of everything commandeered by the dictatorship in 1939), sit-ins in premises, lock-ins in Amsterdam or the take-over of the Columbus monument in Barcelona (No. 166), not forgetting evictions such as the Puertaferri eviction in Barcelona (No. 151). Similarly, the education issue has also been fundamental to the moulding of the society of the future and so, during this phase, there has been plenty about libertarian pedagogy along with texts about Ferrer y Guardia and the Modern School.

And there have been historical or cultural topics aplenty. There have been commemorations of the revolution of 19 July 1936, classics like Bakunin or Malatesta, or pieces by Peiró and Peirats. However, there were not usually any reprints of texts by historic anarchists or reprinted pieces from other publications.

As regards the political scene, if one had to follow developments in the country, reading *Soli* would certainly not afford any insights. However, on account of its anti-political line or rejection of it, there are exceptions. Among other things, there were articles referring to the Moncloa Pact. On the other hand, there was plenty of international news and new about the situation elsewhere. Other matter worth pointing to include texts about the *ateneos libertarios*, free radio, guerrillas such as Quico Sabaté or revolutionaries like Salvador Puig Antich.

Finally, the subject of repression and support for prisoners – standard in any newspaper styling itself anarchist or libertarian – was to the fore. This was given abundant coverage in *Soli*, especially reports from the Prisoners' Aid Committees (an essential part of the CNT), or reports on the COPEL, the murder of Agustín Rueda, those arrested in connection with the Scala Affair, the political amnesty, the abolition of prisons or opposition to the Anti-Terror Laws, to cite only the most important issues.

The 'Joaquín Costa Sector' from 1995 on put together a *Soli* quite well structured by sections – work-related, social affairs, international news, opinion and culture. Easy reading in terms of design and font. There was a reduced variety of opinion pieces, in contrast to what had been the tradition in previous years. However, there was a focus on cultural reporting in the form, say, of book reviews (history, philosophy, poetry, etc.). However, consistent with the changes under way in the world of work and within the CNT itself, there was a reduction in trade union news and reports on disputes at company level.

Topics tended to be a lot more current and closer to the alternative of anti-globalisation movements, although still tackled from a libertarian angle. International news was also dealt with well, as was the historical memory issue.

The cultural supplements deserve separate mention. The first such supplement was *El Solidarín*, of which three editions appeared. Filled with sketches and cartoons, it harked back to a century-long tradition in workers' publications of this sort. Its creators were the Barcelona Artists' Assembly and it carried the telling subtitle 'Harmful, malicious and above all, anti-monarchical supplement'.

Another focus of the current editorial team has been the monographs of Artarquía and the Cuadernos de Pensamiento. Ten issues of Artarquía have seen publication and these have focused on Antonio García Lamolla, Miguel García Vivancos, Andrés Carrnque de Ríos, ‘Three shadowy poets’, Remedios Varo, Margaret Michaelis, the ‘Asamblea de Quijotes Libertarios’, Ramón Acín, ‘Against Agustín García Calvo’ and texts from the ‘Madrid Surrealist Group’. As for the Cuadernos de Pensamiento, they have dealt with matters like the post-modern media, Situationism, the MIL revolutionary group, libertarian naturism or genetics.

As for the ‘Medinaceli Sector’, there has been a greater emphasis on CNT matters and international news, although it has also carried current affairs coverage. From the very start, no reference was made at any time to the question of the unions affiliated to the CNT de Catalunya. In more recent issues, we should highlight the drive to put out a publication for distribution absolutely free of charge to workers, the costs being borne – and this is a big difference with the ‘Joaquim Costa Sector’ paper – entirely by the organisation.

Other Solidaridad Obreras

Because of the fracturing and subsequent splitting of the CNT during the Fifth Congress in 1979, the breakaway faction – known these days as the CGT – published a Solidaridad Obrera of its own from 1980 to 1981. In all, 13 editions were put out from Valencia as the organ of the ‘Standing Secretariat of the CNT’s Confederal Committee’. Its very appearance came as the result of the determination by a regional plenum that Soli should be the CNT’s national organ. The very first issue carried a different masthead but subsequent editions aped the classical one. It also adopted the same format and masthead, as a result of which it can be hard to tell them apart. As for the contents, we should highlight the plentiful international coverage, internal reports on the breakways’ plenums and congresses, canvassing for the trade union elections and, towards the end, several articles about possible reunification when the CNT was holding its Sixth Congress in Barcelona.

In 1985–1986 there was a second attempt to refloat Soli as a national organ. Although no place of publication is given, it was most likely based in Madrid and it was published by the Press and Propaganda Secretariat of the then CNT-Unificada. Five issues were printed plus two ‘extras’. As to the contents, it is worth remarking on the great floods of trade union-work news it carried and especially the coverage of the trade union elections, the focus of two ‘extras’ complete with lists of CNT delegates returned in the larger firms. The masthead was the same as during the Valencian venture.

Finally, I should mention two new titles which appeared under the designation Solidaridad Obrera; one was published by the San Fernando (Cádiz) CNT in 1987 and we are aware of just one edition of this; the other was published by the Amalgamated Trades Union of Orense in 1993 and only issue No. 1 ever saw the light of day.

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Ferran Aisa, Mateo Rello and Carles Sanz
One Hundred Years of Workers' Solidarity
The History of "Solidaridad Obrera"
September 2013

Retrieved on 11th September 2020 from <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/h44jww>
"Solidaridad Obrera" (Workers' Solidarity), founded in Barcelona in 1907, is the voice of Spain's Anarcho-syndicalist Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT: National Confederation of Labour). The following essays were issued to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of "Soli" and together they illustrate the changing fortunes of the Anarcho-syndicalist movement, and its enduring attempt to communicate the anarchist idea. Translated by Paul Sharkey.

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