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# Living Utopia

English translation of screenplay

Juan Gamero, Francesc Rios, Mariona Roca

1998

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Vivir la Utopia: El anarquismo en España, English translation  
by Paul Sharkey

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**Miguel ALBA:** Anarchism is liberty, the door open to the infinite, to freedom and to the well-being of humanity.

**Federico ARCOS:** I woke up to the factory sirens. And it was as if the whole of Barcelona was pulsing to a single heart-beat, the sort of thing that only happens maybe once in a century...and, if I may say so, it has left its mark on my life and I can still feel that emotion.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** The revolution proper started on 19 July. And it was started, unprompted, by the people as they defended themselves against the army; and that was the first and only time that the people saw the army off and forced it to surrender. We saw off the army. That was García Oliver's breathtaking boast on 20 July. We had managed what no one before us had ever pulled off.

**Aurora MOLINA:** It was a very moving experience for me to think that the social revolution had been made, and not just in Spain. I thought that we had carried the day right around the world.

**Federico ARCOS:** It was spontaneous. We the people found ourselves masters of our fate and flexed our muscles and built

upon the hopes of which we had been dreaming for years and years... and it was a case of the 'opportunity's arising, its being grabbed, its being carried through and its finishing.

EL CABRERO

Freedom and the universe my deity;  
Freedom my motherland;  
Reason my flag;  
Truth my path;  
These are my thoughts...

*Year after year, the anarchists, protagonists of the revolution that Spain underwent during her civil war between 1936 and 1939, commemorate the summer that altered their lives for ever.*

**Marcelino BAILO:** Spain, '36, when we were all so much younger than now...

**Manuel SANZ:** When you think of it, a people with no history is not a people. It is nothing, and that really is a slap in the face...

**Federico ARCOS:** They did everything they could to bring the revolution into disrepute and to erase its memory. It is only in recent years that any books have appeared to tell the truth about the revolution.

**Miguel ALBA:** I'm a bricklayer by trade and when building a house I start with the foundations, and movies, like everything else in life, have a beginning and it is at the beginning, with the foundations that we have to begin. And so we need to understand why we were defending ourselves against fascism, how come we beat the fascists, what our beliefs were and how come the people could identify with them.

<em>The impoverished circumstances in which much of the Spanish population lived in 1930 had scarcely improved since the onset of the industrial revolution a century before. Illiteracy was still a problem, as were deep-seated social inequalities, for which the authorities, the Church and the bourgeoisie had failed to devise any cure.

No one who has not gone through the place would credit the awful conditions that we endured there... the cold, the maltreatment, the beatings they doled out to us. Only those of us who were there can know what it was like.

**Concha LIAÑO:** Sometimes I wonder if it was worth all the pain, all the sacrifices, all the suffering, but then I think, really, we taught the world a lesson. In so far as we were able, we set an example of the possibility of living without government, because there was no government, yet the collectives were working and everything was working. Everything was operating by mutual accord.

**Ximo QUEIROL:** The time that I spent with the collective were the happiest three months of my life because I hadn't a worry in the world: money was no good to me.

**Federico ARCOS:** Because those were the most intense years of my life. I experienced brotherhood, disinterestedness, a spirit of sacrifice and solidarity, that is, a feeling of brotherhood with those who were fighting alongside me, people who subscribed to the same ideas.

**Aurora MOLINA:** I reckon that it has no equal and is well worth struggling for, because, even though you may not get there, one needs a goal, a dream, a utopia, something akin to poetry...

EL CABRERO

Now I have sung you everything  
that has crossed my mind...  
I have sung you nearly everything.  
And now let me sing to you  
of what never was:  
the dove of peace.

**Federico ARCOS:** To the daring belongs the future... when we run out of dreams, we die... Emma Goldman said that. And it's the truth.

because machinery, tools and electrically operated kilns had been imported for making special alloys. When Franco's troops marched in, they were ordered to demolish this new plant and now nothing remains of it. It was destroyed because it was a credit to the Republican zone and to those who had managed and run the Can Girona plant.

**Concha LIANO:** We were only too well aware that the democracies were not keen for us to win... However, enthusiasm overrides everything else and we just said, right, we'll carry on as long as we can. And come the end that we knew had to come, we found it very hard to accept, very hard... it was heart-rending, for we had lost not just our homeland, but our very ideals and we knew that we had lost them for good.

**Aurora MOLINA:** The battle was going against us and then came the retreat. Until the retreat fell back to La Seu d'Urgell... and that was where we learned about the fall of Barcelona. Some of us comrades were there and my father made a phone call to Barcelona, to the Casa CNT-FAI and a voice answered 'Arriba Espana! Viva Franco!' That was the only time... no, not the only time... but I saw two tears fall from my father's eyes. It was a very emotional moment for those of us who were there.

**Miguel ALBA:** The wounded were loaded aboard splendid ambulances and the 'reds' were lovingly tending their brothers. They were unloaded at the top of the hill. Screams of pain! This wound will be the death of me! Another fellow, shivering from the cold, told his comrade: I'm dying, brother. This snow is very icy!

**Valero CHINF:** They told us that the war was over. Anyone who refused to accept this, who was not in agreement with Franco's rule, could leave the country because the ports of Valencia and Alicante would remain open as long as there was one single person wanting to leave. No one left the port of Alicante. Not one red from the Republican zone left. They rounded us all up and took us to Albaterra. Albaterra camp was ghastly.

Anarchism, which emerged as a utopian socialist device for combating social injustice, had been putting down roots among the least favoured strata of society over those 100 years. The ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin put down especially strong roots in Andalusia and in Catalonia.

1840 saw the emergence in Barcelona of the first workers' society and within thirty years the Spanish workers' organisation was an example to the rest of Europe.

Following the split in the First International, Bakunin's anti-authoritarian ideas triumphed in this country over the ideas advanced by Marx.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** Before anything can work, it has to be free. That was the great falling-out between Marx and Bakunin. Marx was an authoritarian and Bakunin was not.

*In southern Spain, Fermín Salvochea was one of the most influential figures in Andalusian anarchism. Down there, the people were pitted against a bourgeoisie that owned huge and unproductive landed estates.*

**José SAUCES:** Thanks to a handful of caciques who pulled the strings politically and who worked these huge tracts of land. The working man would have 2 or 3 months of active employment in the year. The rest of the year, there was nothing for him to do, or very little, and he scraped a very poor living.

In Jerez, 4000 peasants stormed the city to cries of 'Long live Anarchy!', looting businesses in search of food. To put paid to the anarchist groups increasingly active in Andalusia, the government concocted the so-called 'Mano Negra' (Black Hand) frame-up, executing and jailing persons suspected of membership of this alleged organisation which in fact did not exist. One of those put on trial was Sánchez Rosa, a writer on grammar and arithmetic and a working man's guide to the law, books that equipped the worker with the means whereby to defend himself in social struggles.

The confrontation between masters and men led to bloody outrages carried out by anarchists acting in an individual capacity.

Barcelona was known in Europe as the fiery rose, and the Montjuich fortress gained a reputation as the scene of firing squads and as a political prison. Many militants from the workers' associations were hauled before the courts.

**José URZAIZ:** The image has grown up of the anarchist always toting his gun; well, guns sometimes had to be used, but the chief activity of anarchism was raising people's consciousness through its cultural activities in order to conjure up what we want like a new world.

*For anarchists, it is the people's task to acquire a revolutionary consciousness by first getting to grips with reality in order to be able to change it.*

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** The explanation for self-education lies in this – – the thirst for knowledge, added to the lack of wherewithal. Which explains why the Spanish libertarian movement generated so many reviews and so many pamphlets. Every village produced its review or else a pamphlet or a bulletin. This was a miracle that scarcely anybody can explain away.

*Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Soledad Gustavo and Federico Urales were the founders, first, of Tierra y Libertad and of the Revista Blanca. The latter achieved a print-run of 12,000 copies.*

Proudhon's work, popularised by Pi y Margall, the president of the First Republic in Spain, introduced the notion of federalism into our country. That principle was thereafter to be taken to the bosom of the Spanish anarchist organisations.

In his book *El Proletariado Militante*, **Anselmo Lorenzo** put forward revolutionary ideas regarding the emancipation of the working class in a future society based on freedom, solidarity and the absence of any sort of authoritarianism.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** At first the collectives had to grapple with an anomalous wartime situation, with a wrecked economy, because everything was contingent upon Catalonia; if Catalonia felt so inclined, it provided the money. If not, not. Bad enough that having to go cap in hand was particularly irksome to an Aragonese. In short, there were all sorts of problems, even aside from Madrid's policy. There was never a single newspaper, other than a CNT newspaper, that was ever to have a good word to say about the Spanish revolution, the CNT revolution or the collectives. Not one word. As you know, anarchism has always had the worst of presses.

**Juan ROMERO:** 3 years is not time enough to do much, especially with a civil war raging, but you have to work with the materials at hand.

**Antonio ZAPATA:** Remember that we were short of everything, short of raw materials, faced with the insecurities of air raids and the people had a hard time just surviving.

**Juan ROMERO:** I am not one of those people who say that there were no squabbles or that there weren't things... but taking Libertarian Communism as a whole, the collective, the peace and justice in Membrilla, then, as I see it and as will be evident to anyone, it represents mankind's only hope of living right. Because there is nothing else on offer. Because it was demonstrated that there was no need for the Civil Guard, no need for the rich, no need for priests, in order to live right. That they merely hobble the progress of wealth, in that the only real wealth is labour.

**José SERRA ESTRUCH:** The worst thing is that, for all its shortcomings, and it did have shortcomings, it did not survive. In spite of which, once the factory owners returned, they found their establishments much improved upon what they had left behind, quite apart from production's having been doubled.

**Antonio TURON:** At the end of the war, Can Girona drew up a balance sheet and to the great surprise of its owners, capital investment had increased greatly upon the pre-war years,

Party mattered a damn to the communists, nor could they allow it to proceed.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** You will be aware already of what befell the collectives, of how Lister turned up with his whole army and finished them off, root and branch, at the point of a gun; and therein lies the great paradox; that the communists put paid to the most communistic of communisms.

**Antonio ZAPATA:** So along he came and he fitted the bill perfectly and he carried out the massacres we all know about.

**Miguel CELMA:** Lister did what he did because, just as in Russia, the Bolsheviks, dictators that they are, could not countenance the emergence of a libertarian experiment along the lines that were seen in Aragon. They had jailed the Council of Aragon in its entirety. And in the rearguard they were jailing the officers of the collectives in places like Calanda, etc.

*In spite of the government's and the communists' efforts to destroy the collectives, most of them were reorganised and carried on with their work. In Calanda, Miguel Celma, then aged 16, was put in charge of the collective.*

**Miguel CELMA:** There was no real formal change to our operations and aims, no change at all and this lasted until 15 March 1938.

**Helenio MOLINA:** Throughout the war, Catalonia's production capability never diminished, nor did its appetite for collectivisation. But there was no let-up in the pressures from certain conservative Generalidad elements. And the communists failed to do away with the CNT's economic autonomy in Catalonia.

*The war, shortages of raw materials, destruction of plant, a boycott by international capital and attacks from their own Republican government. The revolution that Spain experienced from 1936 through the implementation of anarchist ideas suffered all sorts of misadventures and yet production increased, working conditions improved, there was greater equality between citizens and the economy operated along more rational lines.*

**Liberto SARRAU:** Because anarchism is not just a theory, not just a philosophy, not merely a programme for life, but a whole way of life, a lifestyle.

<em>Through the workers' associations, the anarchists launched free schooling that made up for the lack of public education for all.

In 1902, Francisco Ferrer Guardia launched his Modern School, of which the inspiration was rationalism. His education was founded upon respect for the child, physically, intellectually and morally.</em>

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** Ferrer y Guardia was reacting against the obscurantism of the education offered by the priests and nuns. As a Cartesian and as a libertarian, he wanted to turn his school into a crucible of education primarily guided by logic and reason. Hence the assault upon capitalism, upon politics as a whole and upon power in its entirety.....

**Liberto SARRAU:** They did not rest until they they had killed Francisco Ferrer, framing him for deeds in which he had had no part. The crime of which he stood accused and for which they had him shot was the insurrection of 1909 in Barcelona by troops who refused to board ships taking them to Africa, where they were being killed, butchered on the whim of many officers, including the King, Ferrer never had any hand in this.

<em>In 1910, out of Solidaridad Obrera (Workers' Solidarity) the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) was born in Barcelona. Its aim was to unite the Spanish proletariat into a single anarcho-sindicalist organisation open to the whole of the working class.

Unlike the political parties, it used as its weapons in this struggle the strike, sabotage and the boycott..

Within two decades, the CNT was to grow into the country's biggest labour organisation and modern Europe's most active and most effective trade union movement.</em>

**José SERRA ESTRUCH:** The CNT is the workers' attempt at organising themselves in pursuit of the economic and social

construction of a better society, within which the short-term objective is self-management, that is, the capacity of workers to take over all of the functions currently performed by the State. Or, to put that another way, to supplant the State.

*The First World War brought the bourgeoisie in Spain rich pickings but this did not show itself as improvements for the working class. Tensions increased and, in the light of the Russian revolution, Spanish workers mounted countless strikes until they achieved the eight hour working day for the very first time.*

**Dolores PRAT:** There was one foundry that laid off 4 workers for pressing for the eight hour day. The employers, being unwilling to give in on this, were closing down their factories and shutting everything down. In Ripoll, kitchens had to be opened in the town square to feed the people, because this went on for 9 weeks.

<em>By 1919, the CNT had upwards of 700,000 members. The bitterness of the labour disputes provoked an extreme backlash from the young people and led to the emergence of action groups such as Los Solidarios.</em>

A colleague of Durruti and Ascaso, *cí*García Oliver, was to recall in 1937, by which point he was a minister of the Republic, the years of struggle when many anarchist militants such as ‘Sugar Baby’ Salvador Seguí perished.</em>

**Juan GARCÍA OLIVER:** (Archive footage) Our anarchist group was formed in 1923. The gangs of gunmen from the employer-sponsored *Sindicato Libre* were all but masters of the city and the police were conniving in the destruction of our organisations and our personnel. We came together and set up an anarchist group, an action group to take on the gunmen, the bosses and the government. And we achieved our aim. We beat them.

*In 1923, with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the CNT was outlawed and many an anarchist went into exile, as did Ascaso and Durruti, who carried on their revolutionary activity in the Americas.*

**Antonio ZAPATA:** And to end this, our comrades who held ministerial office, García Oliver and Federica Montseny, travelled up from Valencia to Barcelona to call for a cease-fire. Their advice was heeded and it stopped.

**Severino CAMPOS:** There was even a fraction of our columns that offered to come here and finish off the communists once and for all. But we told them no, that enough blood had been spilled already.

**Helenio MOLINA:** That was a mistake. The war was half lost in the events of May.

**Fidel MIRO:** Things had changed radically; Largo Caballero and the left-wing socialists had stepped down by then, and the CNT had been dropped from the government. And after the happenings in May there was a feeling in everyone’s mind that we had lost a lot of our strength and that the Communist Party was on the up and up and that all of the good weapons arriving from Russia were going to the troops that the communists commanded.

**Angel URZAIZ:** Surreptitiously they started to worm their way into the army, into the corps of commissars, into the military intelligence services which they captured completely.

**Ramon ALVAREZ:** And we were convinced that the idea was to carry out Stalin’s orders to wipe out the anarchists above all else, to capture the positions of command and wind up the war once Stalin might decide that the time was right. That this was what was afoot.

**Angel URZAIZ:** Ideologically speaking, it was not in their interests for revolutionary mechanisms to make any headway, so that if we were to win the war the country might be told ‘besides winning the war, this is what anarchism has achieved; this is what the CNT has achieved and it is starting point for the future.’

**Federico ARCOS:** Ours was the world’s first anarchist revolution and no revolution not controlled by the Communist

**Miguel CELMA:** In terms of efficiency I could see no difference; 100 men calling themselves a centuria were every bit as effective as 100 calling themselves a company.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** I believe that our mistake was to place ourselves in the enemy's shoes, turning ourselves into an army, instead of waging guerrilla warfare which, after all, historically, was a Spanish invention.

**José SAUCES:** And we came to the conclusion that this was not revolution any more but an extension of the war and then, in order to secure weapons and just to survive we had to agree to militarise.

*In Catalonia, the traditional parties gradually recovered the power they had lost on 19 July to the people and the revolutionary organisations. In May 1937, the (Catalan) nationalist parties and the recently-established PSUC (Communists) provoked incidents that were to trigger a civil war within the civil war. Lots of anarchists were liquidated, the POUM was outlawed and its general secretary, Andrés Nin, was murdered.*

**Antonio ZAPATA:** At the outset, the whole of Catalonia was living in a libertarian climate. It was only later, after setbacks and difficulties, that the backlash came from unsympathetic forces and then came the May events; Artemio Ayguader, the then Generalidad councillor, ordered the Generalidad police to seize the Telephone Exchange; the Exchange had been commandeered by the CNT and, naturally, there was resistance and it all spiralled from there. On the outlying districts we were the absolute masters, but in the city centre some streets belonged to this side or that. And so a number of people lost their lives.

**Concha LIAÑO:** The communists coolly determined to wipe out our leaders in order to leave us without leadership. And the ghastly thing was that they almost pulled it off.

**Helenio MOLINA:** They shot our comrades in the back. In San Andrés they murdered upwards of 50 comrades from the Libertarian Youth.

EL CABRERO

I started off racing  
down alleys and back streets  
where there was barely enough room for me to  
pass.  
And my neighbours said  
that I had gone astray  
gone off the rails.

*In 1927, on a beach in Valencia, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) was set up, its aim to keep anarchist ideas untainted within the CNT through the formation of small groups of like-minded folk subscribing to the same ideas.*

**Helenio MOLINA:** To be a member of the FAI and although this was not a written stipulation, one had not to have done one's military service nor had a church wedding and, if at all possible, to put one's children through paid rationalist schooling, to have no obvious vices. All of this was essential. .... There was a sort of natural selection process through moral pressures which made the organisation very strong but free of sectarianism.

**Aurora MOLINA:** My father was secretary of the FAI for a while and always held some sort of post. He was an activist and very radical. So was my mother. She too wielded a lot of influence. They were very humane and cultured, both of them. And they were always surrounded by people of pretty much the same calibre.

**Fidel MIRO:** And the man who was an anarchist sought to live a dignified life and set an example.

*During the Dictatorship, the anarchists carried on with their work surreptitiously. These were also the times of the great waves of emigration looking for better living conditions.*

**Juan GIMENEZ:** They were laying people off at the Peñarroya company, so one day my father decided to move to Barcelona, but we stayed behind until he would earn some

money and we might be in a position to buy the requisite tickets. It took him a year to gather the money together. As it turns out, he bumped into a compadre in Barcelona, who told him 'Here, come and work on the Metro.....place to stay and all: I have lodgings in the Calle Valencia, between Rocafort and Entenza.' Well, those lodgings housed the compadre's family of five plus us five as well. Ten people sharing just a few square metres. By then my father was already a CNT member; he was working on the Metro when they sent for him to tell him that he was being let go, because one worker had been doing shoddy work. The worker in question was a Murcian and so they sacked 80 Murcians. But the fact is that the sackings really had to do with CNT organising and nothing else, and that was why they let them go.

**Aurora MOLINA:** We knew that there was a world that did not belong to us, a world that detained our parents, and left us without jobs. Which is to say, the capitalist world, the bourgeoisie's world and we were its victims. But we were schooled in enthusiasm and we used to hope that this would come to an end and that society might become fairer and more egalitarian.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** I was an avid reader and later, when I was on my way home, especially in the winter-time, I used to pause under the gas-lamps for a little reading, a page, say, in front of the lighted shop windows and then I would be off, dashing away to read another page. I worked as a hatter up until the advent of the Republic. I waltzed through the streets of Barcelona calling out 'Long live the Republic! Long live the Republic!' That was all I did...

*On 14 April 1931 the Second Republic was democratically established in Spain and King Alfonso XIII left for exile.*

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** There were celebrations in Barcelona and I was swept up in them. Everybody was out and the streets were filled with people. How these phenomenal celebrations took place without anyone's making preparations for them defies imagining. Every street was filled with people

*Republican government fleeing to Valencia. At the time Durruti was the most charismatic figure in greatest demand.*

**José URZAIZ:** At the time, the figure of Durruti was the ultimate symbol of freedom. He represented an injection of optimism, of hope.

*In unfamiliar territory, the poorly-equipped Durruti Column sustained heavy losses. However, its presence proved crucial in the defence of Madrid.*

**Valero CHINÉ:** On 20 November, they pulled us back from the front lines and told us that Durruti was dead.

EL CABRERO

I was always the black sheep  
that managed to dodge the stones  
thrown at it.

And as the years went by  
I drifted further and further from the flock  
because I have lost my way...

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** Durruti's funeral in Barcelona has nothing in history to equal it. There was something like a million and a half people in attendance, some astronomical figure...

*The Republic made efforts to overhaul its army and imposed compulsory regularisation. The aim was to win the war and forget about the revolution. The anarchists, though, persisted with the notion of defeating fascism in order to create a new society.*

**Valero CHINÉ:** They said they were going to militarise the column which was not at that point regularised. We were militias. They said we had to regularise and we said no. We despised army discipline. We had gone to war to fight fascism, sure, but we had no intention of turning into soldiers.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** All of us of my generation who were waging the war were against war and opposed to militarism. Very much opposed. Thoroughgoing pacifists.



out of her servile circumstances, out of her submissiveness, in the workplace, inside the home. To get her to look upon herself as an adult.

**Suceso PORTALES:** And it was precisely on that that we placed the most emphasis. On that and on setting up schools where women might learn to read and write. I cannot tell you how many tens of thousands of women we taught to read and write. Thus, whenever we set up a local chapter, the first thing we did was launch a school. We offered women sex education classes. We had special classes taught by women and they even went into the hospitals for practical work. We issued a series of related pamphlets and pamphlets on relations between men and women, which we sent to the front lines. We issued thousands upon thousands of pamphlets, tiny little booklets.

*The anarchists promoted social changes that were unique in Europe. García Oliver, the Minister of Justice, was the first person in Spain to introduce legislation on equal rights for men and women. Federica Montseny, the Health Minister, promulgated an abortion law which won approval only in Catalonia.*

**Conxa PEREZ:** The abortion law was promulgated first in Catalonia. It was passed and then put into effect. Abortions were carried out at the Clinical Hospital.

**Concha LIAÑO:** Dispensing with unwanted pregnancy seemed splendid. It seemed reasonable enough to us but there was tremendous resistance on the part of the doctors.

**Suceso PORTALES:** Planned pregnancies can only be achieved through education. Since these women had never read a thing, you could scarcely expect them to plan their pregnancies. Nor could you expect it of their menfolk. Not even of the menfolk.

*German and Italian aid to the rebel camp and the Non-Intervention policy of the western democracies were paving the way for defeat of the Republican forces. The Francoist army stood at the very gates of Madrid and something was needed to raise morale among residents of Madrid who had witnessed the*

chanting, with no trace of hatred: ‘Long live the Republic, Long live Freedom, Long live the People...’...But this euphoria, this chapter of freedom that ushered in the Republic thrilled us to the marrow. There have never been young people as thirsty for knowledge as we who lived through the years between ’31 and ’36.

**Conxa PEREZ:** Our suppressed ambitions just overflowed. Then we were on the lookout for somewhere where we could go. We were told that an ateneo had been set up. It had its theatre stage, its Esperanto group, general cultural activities, excursions and every night we had a definite task to be getting on with. We hadn’t the time to fit it all in. That was where the Libertarian Youth and the FAI groups were formed.

**Concha LIAÑO:** When they took me along to the Ateneo Libertario in El Clot, it was a real eye-opener to me, because I was seeing people there of like mind to my own.....

**Miguel CELMA:** The whole union turned into an educational centre. The whole union was one big ateneo, making the revolution in Spain, on Earth, on the Moon.....

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** There was nowhere to play cards and nowhere to drink, only reading rooms, places to chat, to hold discussions, to write. Plays and poetry recitals – lots of recitals – were put on and these almost always touched upon social themes and upon denunciations.

**Helenio MOLINA:** All of Spain’s anarchist publications were a great success...

**Severino CAMPOS:** Within the anarchist area proper we had upwards of 70 publications.

**Fidel MIRO:** Damn it, whenever there were three anarchists together, out popped a newspaper. It might be *El Cantero* or *La Voz de la Tierra*...

**Helenio MOLINA:** Then came the parades down the Ramblas, something that had not been done before: they were a great success. There was great enthusiasm and we could not meet the demand for everything we were selling... Pamphlets

like *Lawful Abortion, Twelve Proofs of the Non-Existence of God, Cerebral Dynamite...* calling out the titles and people buying them up, because up to then we hadn't been allowed to do this. I must have been about 10 years old and the whole of Barcelona seemed to be hawking *Tierra y Libertad! Tierra y Libertad!* Organ of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI)!

**Aurora MOLINA:** Well, it was a formidable meeting place, where people especially set out their ideas in the press. It was a *Tierra y Libertad* clearing-house.

**Helenio MOLINA:** An extraordinary mental revolution was underway. *Tierra y Libertad's* print run soared from 4,000, when my father took it over, up to 20,000 by 1934–5.

*The Novela Ideal genre, devised by the Urales family, the parents of Federica Montseny, sought to spread anarchism's ethical ideas in readily accessible prose.*

**Maria BATET:** The *Novela Ideal* did sterling work among the young. There were very interesting themes, religious themes as well, in fact especially, because at the time religion in Spain held great sway and always has. They were always on the look-out for the other side of the coin, to combat religion.

Founded in Alcoy in 1923, *Generacion Consciente* initiated its readers into matters sexual and health-related. Years later, under the name *Estudios*, it was to achieve a print-run of 70,000 copies.

**Joséé ESPAÑA:** The magazine regularly had articles on such matters. I couldn't get enough of them.

EL CABRERO

When there is something that needs saying

One cannot keep silent

When there is something that needs saying

Because to keep silent is to die.

**Aurora MOLINA:** You even wrote and said that you wanted to know such and such and they would reply, saying that there

**Maria BATET:** She was against this and it went against the grain with her but I can assure you that she found it hard and whenever I saw the comrades criticising her I was driven to distraction.

**Federico ARCOS:** The Libertarian Youth were the first to bridle at the CNT's collaborationist line and later, something of a bureaucracy emerged, which was no good thing.

*With most of the men away at the front, it was the women who filled the vacancies. Now they had their chance to make their own revolution.*

**Concha LIAÑO:** When the menfolk went to the front and the women filled the positions in production left vacant by the men, perhaps this was an awakening for them and they felt greater freedom.

**Conxa PEREZ:** Of the female comrades with whom I was familiar, one was working in a sandal factory and she was carrying the place... another was working in a sugar refinery. These were jobs that had always been men's jobs before this.

**Fidel MIRO:** We had not given women their proper place previously. At CNT assemblies you'd have been lucky to see three women. The women were all at home.

**Suceso PORTALES:** The men thought that they had all the rights. We were keen to train women to avail of their rights with regard to their children, their homes, their husbands and their own lives.

*Mujeres Libres grew out of local chapters, turning into one of the most important feminist organisations of its time. Suceso Portales in Guadalajara and Concha Liaño in Barcelona were the two chief driving forces behind it.*

**Concha LIAÑO:** We were different from the bourgeois women's liberation movements because we realised that, on the basis of their education, they were fighting to compete equally with the men for the positions that the men held, whereas we focused our attention on the working class woman, the working woman, who was uneducated. To lift her

**Dolores PRAT:** You have to understand that you were working for yourself. *Once you have no boss to carry any more, you work with a greater gusto.*

*Elizalde, Ford, General Motors, Cros, Pirelli or Can Girona. In just seven weeks their work forces pulled off the startling feat of converting these civilian firms into arms plants. This turn-around was to make it possible for the Republican army to hold out.*

**Antonio TURON:** Each and every militant looked upon himself as the Don Quixote-like champion of this utopia, this *modus vivendi*, this way of behaving decently in society, without any need for a beat policeman.

**José SERRA ESTRUCH:** Which is to say that self-management is even now the unfinished business, because it was demonstrated back then, sometimes in the most enlightened way and sometimes with less enlightenment. Some people were ignorant and some were know-it-alls, but every one of them, every single human being has something, some contribution to offer.

**Dolores PRAT:** Virtually everyone says that this is utopian. But it is the only hope for the world, anarchy, the most beautiful thing imaginable. Everyone working, no masters and no bosses, everyone acting on his ideas because every one of us has something inside our heads.

*Gradually, the reality of war forced the anarchists to collaborate with the business of government.*

**Antonio TURON:** When the Antifascist Militias Committee was wound up after two months – the period of revolution in Catalonia lasted for two months, what? from July to September – there was a new cabinet to which councillors were appointed and the Generalidad took power once again with its councillors.

*Four anarchists also joined the Republic's government as ministers. They included Juan García Oliver and Federica Montseny who, much against her will, became the first female government minister in Europe.*

is this method or that one and the reply came in the magazine *Estudios*. Then later there was *La Pentalfa*, where the focus was more on nudism.

**Antonio TURON:** What happens inside the big steel plants I have no idea: people take drink... and sweat a lot and take more drink. On the other hand, there would be a few who did not smoke, took no drink, but read and talked and passed comment and I was drawn to them, for they were anarchists and naturists, nudists, etc., and great ones for learning.

**Concha LIAÑO:** To us, free love was simply a couple agreeing to live together, out of affection, without need for papers or contracts, and whenever there was dissension, they could by mutual agreement separate and remain friends with no bitterness or anything...

**Suceso PORTALES:** That strikes me as a revolutionary thing because a woman could have the companionship without going through the Church, without baptising the children, etc. In those days, women were very close-minded. Things improved a little afterwards.

*Anarchists want to change conventional society through intense cultural and ideological effort, and to that end they set up new organisations that try to spread their ideas among the young. And so were born the Libertarian Youth, which would later band together into an Iberian Federation of which Fidel Miró was to be general secretary.*

**FIDEL MIRO:** The watchword was culture and propaganda. Our task was to recruit members. We never asked anyone about his past or his beliefs. It was a case of 'Want to join the Libertarian Youth? Then join, and you can quit the day you have had enough.'

**Concha LIAÑO:** When the lads recruited me into the Libertarian Youth I joined the Sol y Vida, an excursion group. We spent the whole week eagerly looking forward to Saturday. We had such a burning desire to learn because we were all working class and we would pause and someone would read a passage

from a book and we would comment on it, take our ease and then carry on with the hike.

**José URZAIZ:** It may well defy understanding now, but the fact is that there was no end to this work, but it was thanks to that that younger generations of us entering the world of work gained some cultural background and a lively feeling of what it means to be alive.

*Meetings, direct action and propaganda helped the CNT to expand its influence. In cities like Barcelona, one in every two workers was even then enrolled in the anarcho-syndicalist confederation.*

**Ximo QUEIROL:** I put in a lot of hours. In a given day I might do 10, 15 even 20 hours, whatever the boss ordered me to do. One day I introduced myself to the CNT's secretary and, naive as I was, I asked him: Can I be a member of the CNT? To which he replied that of course you could, being a worker; and one of the things that has always stuck in my mind is that he told me that I was an honest sort and conscientious in my work and that I was within my rights to work only 8 hours.

**José SAUCES:** I was secretary of the Local and the Comarcal Federation and the fearless ones flocked to our organisation. They felt a measure of confidence in us, because we were open and above board. The thorniest problems of the peasants and villagers were resolved by the anarchist groups that had a foothold in every little village.

**José ESPAÑA:** And we put our hearts into things at home, in the factory, in the union, on the streets, in the public square... In Burriana there was a town meeting, with Montseny speaking, and I went along. I spoke prior to Montseny and when I finished, she said to me: You really have your finger on the pulse of the peasant... she said... and I still agree with her.

**Federico ARCOS:** The most striking thing was that even though the square was packed with people the speakers spoke and no one applauded. There was silence. No one applauded, but people mulled over what they had said. They listened and

**Antonio ZAPATA:** A commission was set up, called the Urban Holdings Administration and Control commission, comprising three persons from the Generalidad, three from the CNT and three from the UGT; I was one of the three CNT spokesmen. Ownership of the holdings was not abolished – rather, they were impounded. The owners had no right to run them, but were entitled to a place on the commission administration.

**Liberto SARRAU:** Anarchists could have made themselves masters of Barcelona and Catalonia, but they refused to do so. Instead there was collaboration between us all and as we held the upper hand in matters of education, one of our people, the teacher Puig Elias, was approached. With help from others acting under his direction, he set about drafting the charter of the CENU.

*The CENU (New Unified School Council) came into existence for the purpose of promoting standardised, free, secular schooling in the Catalan tongue. The revolution also set up hitherto non-existent welfare and security services which offered free health care, unemployment benefit, invalidity benefits and pension rights. Unemployment was combated through increasing the number of posts or by hiring new workers, even where none were needed, in order to share the work around them all. Small firms and workshops were amalgamated and the power companies were united. The network was a complicated business but it took in everybody.*

**José SERRA ESTRUCH:** We felt a sense of involvement, and later, of course, we were afforded an input and a responsibility that we readily accepted. At assemblies we did not debate what you were to be and what would become of me, but rather ways of improving output, of organising the work better, ways of streamlining processes, because a factory is a complicated business of course.

and even though ignorance is deaf  
it can speak out  
louder than the howls  
of pampered hounds  
and than the shepherd's voice.

*The revolution that Spain was experiencing did not go unnoticed by visitors. **George Orwell**, who arrived to fight as a volunteer in a column raised by the POUM, a dissident Marxist party allied to the anarchists, describes his impressions upon reaching Barcelona:*

This was the first time that I found myself in a city where the working class was in control... The anarchists were virtually in control of Catalonia and the revolution was striding ahead... Activities of a servile nature had disappeared. No one said 'Senor' or 'Don', nor even 'usted'. Everybody was called 'comrade' and 'tu'; and said 'Salud!' instead of 'buenos dias'.

*Barcelona was the nerve centre of the revolution in urban Spain. With the CNT and the FAI at the head of the antifascist militias committee, Catalonia underwent one of the most radical transformations in its history, affecting every aspect of its political, social and economic life. 80% of firms had been collectivised and all services were being run by the workers themselves. These changes were to be legalised by the Generalidad in October 1936.*

**José SERRA ESTRUCH:** There was no difficulty as to who was going to lead and who was to be led, because we had received our trade union training in the CNT and there were certain recognised values, and people who had demonstrated their responsibility and competence.

**Miguel ALBA:** I was one of those selected by the Metro collective. There was a general meeting of the Transport sector and they made me secretary: I was a bricklayer and knew little about transport services but we soon brought ourselves up to speed on that. Circumstances demanded that we did so.

only from time to time was there an audible cry of 'Long live the CNT!' followed by a resounding echo of 'long live Libertarian Communism!', and that lighted the fires and ensured that one was swamped all the more intensely by emotions. And there was none of the applause, none of the Communist rhetoric of clenched fists. There was more levelheadedness, more thoughtfulness...

**José FORTEA:** There was a trade union agreement that once a worker was dismissed no one was to take his place... if the boss sacked someone on the basis of his opinion that he was a revolutionary or because he bore him some grudge, and went on to dismiss him, no worker was to take his place.

**José ESPAÑA:** Which means that everyone is bound by a spirit of solidarity, which is the most important factor in our organisation.

**Federico ARCOS:** Neighbours made up one big family. In those days there was no unemployment benefit, no sickness benefit or anything like that. Whenever someone was taken sick, the first thing a neighbour with a little spare cash did was to leave it on the table... There were no papers to be signed, no shaking of hands. Let me have it back once you're back at work and it was repaid, peseta by peseta when he was working again; It was a matter of principle, a moral obligation.

**Helenio MOLINA:** Which means that effectively there was a universal family because, truth to tell, in Casas Baratas we were one family, and there was a rota system whereby those who were working would take in the children of those who were not.

EL CABRERO  
As I child I had no liking  
For books or soutanes  
Nor for processions  
I was as disobedient  
As the west wind,

Rebellious and playful.

*To combat illiteracy and Catholic schooling, anarchists, through their Ateneos and trade unions, launched schools modelled on Ferrer Guardia's Modern School and employing the methods of educationalists like Decroly or Pestalozzi.*

**Liberto SARRAU:** At the 'Natural' school in El Clot as much science as possible – every sort of science – was taught; the fact is that there was an emphasis throughout that was superior to the usual schooling; the point was to get the child to put his knowledge to use, not just become a fund of knowledge, but to equip him to utilise his knowledge. They ensured that the child could always be himself, that there would be differentiation between each and every child. This was done with great care, for it is the principal element in anarchism, as well as of anarchism's teaching methods.

**Aurora MOLINA:** At our school, at Puig Elias's school, at the Natura school, I never read Bakunin or Kropotkin. We read only the humanists, Tolstoy, poets, Blasco Ibáñez... rather moderate, liberal people. Ours was not a revolutionary education. It was pacifist and anti-militarist... humane and cultured... but that was all.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** The Escuela Nueva started from the precepts of modern pedagogy, where there is no place for either indoctrination or ideology. The notion of freedom takes priority over everything else and is the basis of everything else.

**Liberto SARRAU:** The emancipation of the workers has to be the workers' own doing. Otherwise no such emancipation will take place. Which means that there was self-sufficiency in a number of ways. Neither the Natura school nor the Textile Union ever sought subsidy from the state nor from the Council.

*But the hopes vested in the Republic by the least favoured classes in the country were sorely disappointed. The government*

**Juan ROMERO:** Just over there in the union local there was a huge blackboard. Any peasant with a complaint to air had only to write it on the blackboard and it was discussed by the assembly.

**Ximo QUEIROL:** Spelling out one's case was a way of coming to accommodation with the rest, provided they agreed to the proposition. They might agree or disagree, but the decision was always made at the level of the rank and file. We did not operate in accordance with some order handed down by the Regional Committee because, of course, every village has its own culture and, having a culture of its own, it has customs of its own. Our customs in these parts are not the same as the ones in Valencia or among the Andalusians. They're all different.

With the land seizures and with work being shared out on a more rational basis, production increased. Collective management of profits paved the way to construction of hospitals, schools, irrigation schemes, dairy installations and experimental farm centres.

**Miguel CELMA:** There was also the Francisco Ferrer group of schools with 18 teachers; and the friars; gardens, the monastery gardens were turned into an agricultural experimental centre.

**Ximo QUEIROL:** Vines were planted, and olive groves. Olive trees that were old and unproductive were used for firewood. In short, there was a transformation and the collective was thriving splendidly.

**Miguel CELMA:** The decision to made to get hold of 2 tractors and in Calanda 2 tractors would speed up the work considerably... not only could they replace the 350 men away serving on the front but, and this is a fact, they ensured that any land previously ploughed would not be left fallow. Every field was ploughed.

El CABRERO

Even as the silent mouth gives its consent

**Ximo QUEIROL:** Every village appointed a representative delegation and a Federation of Collectives was set up in Benicarlo.

In Levante, the CNT and the UGT worked hand in glove after the land and the factories had been spontaneously confiscated.

<em>Under the auspices of the anarcho-syndicalist labour confederation, Alcoy became a model of workers' control, as every one of its industries was collectivised.</em>

A Unified Agricultural Produce Export Agency of Levante (the CLUEA) was launched; its task was to orchestrate the collectives' foreign sales directly. This body, thrown up by the revolution, was very soon to run up against the misgivings of the central government, which began to throw its weight behind the communist co-operatives.</em>

**José ESPANA:** And abroad, we had outlets in Paris, in Brussels and in Holland. Everything was running like clockwork and things were getting better all the time.

*In Asturias, the CNT and the FAI belonged to the Council of Asturias and Leon, on which Ramon Alvarez was the councillor with responsibility for fishing.*

**Ramon ALVAREZ:** It was the workers who were running their industries. We carried on organising collectives without making a song and dance about it. We did it unobtrusively.

*Caspe was the seat of the Council of Aragon, the Spanish Revolution's first anarchist governing body. Eight councillors orchestrated the work of the collectives in the region.*

**José FORTEA:** This region was the one where collectives were preminent. They had their council in Caspe. There were collectives in Levante and Andalusia and in Castile too. There were collectives everywhere, but nowhere on the same scale as in Aragon.

*The social revolution experienced by rural Spain won the support of most peasants. Around three million Spaniards lived according to the principles of Libertarian Communism.*

*had to contend with a number of uprisings in Catalonia, Levante and Andalusia.*

**José ESPAÑA:** The peasants in Andalusia were suffering from hunger... and the feudalists down there insisted on holding on to their land and pastures and thousands upon thousands of hectares lay fallow while people had no work. That was where Casas Viejas came in...

**José SAUCES:** The Casas Viejas revolt was the work of anarchists, an anarchist revolt. We wanted to proclaim Libertarian Communism. In Casas Viejas there was a whole family butchered and its home put to the torch. This was in a peasant village in provincial Cádiz.

**Ramón ALVAREZ:** The CNT unleashed a revolutionary uprising with which not all of its regional confederations were in agreement. We in Asturias especially were opposed to it...

**Fidel MIRÓ:** There was a gulf between two outlooks; one favouring permanent revolution within a set time-frame and another, more moderate school of thought which argued that what was needed was an education drive to prepare the people and to wait for a suitable time when revolution might be attempted with some likelihood of success.

A year and a half into the Republic, the friction between Right and Left had triggered 30 general strikes, cost 400 lives and led to 9,000 arrests. 157 left-wing papers had had publication suspended, as had 4 right-wing ones, and the brakes had been applied to agrarian reform and the school building programme. Following the occasional attempted military revolt, the Right won in the elections.

**José ESPAÑA:** Gil Robles secured his election victory because there was 90% abstention, in that we wanted to chastise the Republic for being on their side rather than on ours... on the side of those transferring their capital out of the country, refusing to give work and shutting down their factories...

**Antonio ZAPATA:** The union premises were forever being shut down and the jails were filled with workers held in pre-

ventive detention... men who had not done anything but who had a trade union background... I spent six months in custody myself and there were plenty who served longer than I did.

*In Asturias the CNT workers and those from the UGT took the mines and factories into collective ownership. Ramón Alvarez was on the revolutionary committee in the region.*

**Ramón ALVAREZ:** There was a generally agreed intention to halt the onward march of fascism in Europe... and later we reached agreement on one basic point – that our purpose in October '34 was to introduce a federalist socialist society.

<em>But the Asturias revolution was not backed by leftist forces elsewhere in Spain. The Asturian workers held out for 2 weeks against the troops dispatched by the government and led by a General Franco. The uprising was crushed in an operation that offered a foretaste of the approaching civil war.

In February 1936, the Left defeated the right-wing National Front in the elections. The CNT vote had proved decisive.</em>

**José ESPAÑA:** We made up our minds to cast our votes in February. Many did decide to vote. I did not, but many did, because we had something like 15,000 prisoners in the jails around Spain.

*There was a flurry of strikes, land seizures and confrontations between the Civil Guard and workers and peasants. Even as the Right plotted its coup d'état, the most radical organisations were calling for revolution.*

**José SAUCES:** For me, Libertarian Communism is my ultimate aspiration. It was the reason why we held our Congress in Saragossa in 1936. After a lot of discussion, for we were great ones for talking, we arrived at a hard and fast resolution that the CNT was calling for Libertarian Communism.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** A communism that works from the bottom up and not from the top down, one that is regulated by general assemblies, with every officer subject to immediate recall should the majority so determine. The fact

**Ximo QUEIROL:** The vast majority of the village took kindly to the launching of the collective, even though they were not all trade unionists or anarchists.

**Miguel CELMA:** Anyone who wanted to strike out on his own carried on doing so, but there were very few like that. My own parents were among them, working only 30 metres from where I stand. They were 'individualists', and in order to qualify for a ration card they had to offer some of their produce, not having any money. That year my parents reared 4 pigs for slaughter; then along came one of the comrades. To be sure my mother was quite annoyed by what he did. Along came this comrade... I had known all along that they would be coming. He decided that 1 pig was plenty for our family and he requisitioned the other 3. In return, they covered all our requirements for the year.

**Antonio LAHUERTA:** We worked with a will and another thing is that outgoings were less for collectivists than for 'individualists', because, well, let's say you have a hundred individuals working as a collective and a hundred operating as individuals, the latter need 100 tractors whereas the former can get by with just 10.

*With the former local authorities dismissed from office, it was now the workers, organised in the CNT or, to a lesser extent, in the UGT, who controlled the administration, gradually running the whole of public life.*

**José SAUCES:** The Revolutionary Committee assigned me the post of delegate in charge of supplies. I think you will understand what that means. We took charge of all the goods we had. Our village grew no wheat, so we came down to Levante and bartered some sugar for some. And brought back chocolate and other goods that we had traded for.

**José FORTEA:** Coal was exchanged against goods, footwear and clothing for the village. All brought in from outside.



consist of? Money was abolished. All the landlords, leftist or rightist, were to be expropriated. All machinery would be at the people's disposal. All buildings would be available for housing of the townspeople, regardless of who owned them. Work would be collectivised and shared around the workers, split up into teams.

**Juan ROMERO:** There was no shortage of wise old heads to organise all this. It was done by the workers. Naturally the union committee (the most important committee) was set up, as was a defence committee, an agricultural committee, a foodstuffs committee, a barbers' committee, with the workers themselves choosing whoever they felt were the delegates best equipped to perform the task of overseeing the allocation of work and the distribution of everything.

*The anarchists' traditional contempt for money inspired a radical change in economic relations. Local currencies and vouchers were introduced, and in many places money was done away with altogether.*

**Juan ROMERO:** Money was done away with there and piled up in a stack that they named after Kropotkin. Food could be obtained with vouchers and through use of the ration cards that were issued.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** In cases where it was a matter of dipping into stocks, of course, one has to have the self-control and wit to ask why you should be helping yourself to 2 kilos of meat when 1 would do. After all, you can come back tomorrow for another, fresh kilo, or to pick up a suit or a pair of shoes.

**Juan ROMERO:** Lighting, water, schooling and all that were free of charge, with nothing to be paid.

**Ximo QUEIROL:** And there was no selfishness such as would later emerge. It just did not exist. Where there is no money there cannot be any selfishness.

**Juan ROMERO:** You can say that today and people just do not take it in, but it worked well.

that sovereignty resides with the grassroots does away with politicking manoeuvres. The whole thing belongs to everybody: there has to be equitable distribution. So, if everything belongs to everybody, everyone has a chance to train, in that there is time enough to train.

**José Antonio PRIMO de RIVERA:** (Archive footage) Spain has been brought to her knees by a triple division – by the fragmentation engendered by local separatisms, by the divisions created by parties and by the splits created by class struggle.

**Angel URZAIZ:** By that time the Falangists had begun to be quite strong... our comrades were coming under intense attacks... And this led us, for our part, to start to contemplate a more direct struggle. We even went around armed.

**Fidel MIRO:** Villages split right down the middle. In my village – with its population of 1,500 – the right-wingers would not even exchange the time of day with the leftists.

**Angel URZAIZ:** Generally speaking the workers were very clear-minded and knew who the enemy was: the Church, behind which lurked capitalism. The same old enemies as ever.

**José ESPAÑA:** Even the Church. Cardinal Segura had been continually at loggerheads with the Republic... and how! It was inevitable. They were already abroad, undergoing training and had their arrangements all made with Mussolini and Hitler.

**Liberto SARRAU:** It was an open secret and everybody was making preparations and the parties and the government knew this, but there were some ministers who were sleeping in their beds when the attack came.

**Fidel MIRO:** Casares Quiroga's central government denied that there had been any uprising and issued (fatal!) orders to all its governors that on no account were weapons to be issued to the people. It was more afraid of revolution than of the military.

**Federico ARCOS:** Because it has to be remembered that that right at the start of July, Companys ordered his public order chief to disarm the CNT, disarm the anarchists.

**Antonio ZAPATA** All of us militants and other leftists in Barcelona were on stand-by, and we remained vigilant throughout the night for 4 days on the trot.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** And, the day before the revolution erupted, they came along and the word went out – I had been sleeping on the rooftop – ‘Right, this is the moment of truth. Anyone who does not want in on this can go home. Because if the shit hits the fan today...’

**Concha LIAÑO:** We were in the Plaza de la Generalidad. It was crammed with men asking for weapons and then out came Companys to say that we would have to wait and see.

EL CABRERO

Throw my life away.

Whatever the reason why I came into this world

It wasn't to throw my life away.

And being no deaf mute

Why should I stay silent

In the face of force majeure?

*19 July 1936. The workers of Barcelona alert the city to the military uprising.*

**Aurora MOLINA:** When the sirens started up, there was a crowd in Horta of I could not say how many thousands, people coming down the Avenida from Santa Eulalia and making for the San Andrés barracks. Diaz Sandino flew low and dropped a couple of bombs. The gates opened and the whole crowd rushed inside in search of arms.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** Daylight was breaking as we went down and as we reached the Sants crossroads we could see a car daubed with the initials CNT-FAI and we stopped it to ask what was going on? And the reply was: it's all happening in the Plaza de Catalunya. And as we came around the back of the bull-ring along came a company of soldiers with their rifles in the firing position and with their officers brandishing their pistols.

**Severino CAMPOS:** The Los Aguiluchos column was mooted as a column whose members would be drawn exclusively from the libertarian movement.

**Ximo QUEIROL:** The Iron Column was organised on the basis of groups, groups of 10 and ten such groups made up one centuria. The group leader was appointed by you so he was your group leader. And then a centuria delegate was appointed by the 10 groups that made up your centuria.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** On the basis of friendship, trust, or the comrade's personality, he was entrusted with the responsibility of command. There was always someone in command, but their authority was conditional... orders were given and carried out.

**Maravilla RODRIGUEZ:** I set out from Alcolea, and from there we moved on to Madrid. There we were taken to a barracks, men and women alike, and the Ascaso Battalion was organised, which I joined.

**Juan GIMENEZ:** Let me say that while serving with the Durruti Column, we also lent a hand to the peasants and all the people in turning society over to self-management, in a host of activities and collectives, which had been our lifelong ambition. It wasn't just a matter of shooting bullets. As we advanced, we bought them a breathing space in which to try their hand at shaping and creating the ethos of what was to be our society, our society of the future.

*Changes occurred at a dizzying rate in areas of Castile, Extremadura, Andalucia, Asturias and – above all – in Levante, Catalonia and Aragón.*

**Miguel CELMA:** I was a real nosey parker and whenever I spotted anything going on I used to stick my nose in. And I turned up in the Plaza de la Constitución, which was crammed with the citizens of Calanda. The whole of Calanda was there. And the Revolutionary Committee announced from the balcony: 'From this moment forth Libertarian Communism is proclaimed here' and there was massive applause for the announcement... and what did this Libertarian Communism

**Antonio TURON:** The Generalidad councillors quit their respective offices. The Generalidad was left with just Companys's man as chief of police; and the streets belonged to us...

**Severino CAMPOS:** Companys asked the CNT to send him a panel of people with whom to talk.

**Liberto SARRAU:** He told them: we are indebted to you for everything. You are the ones who defeated this rising. We misjudged you...

**Severino CAMPOS:** From this day forth I am redundant, I am not the president... but if I can be of any service, I am at your disposal. Those were Companys's own words.

**Fidel MIRO:** García Oliver moved that we go for broke, but the only votes for that were his and Xena's and the people from l'Hospitalet. Santillan and Federica Montseny voted against. Federica Montseny stated: going for broke amounts to establishing our own dictatorship and that is a negation of anarchism; and Santillán said, if we go for broke and establish anarchism, we will isolate ourselves within Spain and from the rest of the world. No one is going to give us aid, arms or anything.

**Antonio TURON:** Which is why the CNT did not go for broke and declined the power offered it by Companys. Power was not in his gift. We had it already and we worked in concert with the other sectors on a body known as the Antifascist Militias Committee, whereupon the Generalidad was all washed up as such and all power passed to that committee.

**Severino CAMPOS:** We set about organising our columns. You have the photograph of one setting off, arriving at the Estacion de Francia... And they marched directly to the front to the sector they asked for, and most of them clamoured to join Durruti! Durruti! Durruti!

*Given the menacing advances by the rebels and the disintegration of the army, the parties and trade unions raised militias of worker and peasant volunteers to defend the country.*

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** And then we stepped out from the street corners to fire at them and that pretty much unnerved the soldiers.

**Aurora MOLINA:** The strangeness of it all moved me. The sight of the people armed... the cars pounding out CNT-FAI on their horns... the cars with flags fluttering, the sight of all this activity with a stomach for the fight and there was one thing that made a big impact on me: the sight of soldiers and Assault Guards on our side...

**Antonio TURON:** It was cast up to us that we had seized 40,000 rifles and I don't know how many cannons and horses. Well, we were there and others were not, because even the Assault Guards photographed taking cover behind a horse were there with us and not as part of their unit.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** In short there were so many people that it was hard to take it in as they emerged from their homes in their thousands upon thousands. It was quite a shock. The military were taken aback and surrendered.

**Federico ARCOS:** What I mean is that, much against the wishes of the government and all, the people of Barcelona, under the leadership of the CNT, defeated the army. Barcelona made the difference and it was Barcelona that inspired Madrid to capture the Montaña barracks.

**Angel URZAIZ:** There was a public demonstration by all of the people of Madrid in an attempt to ward off what was being foisted upon them.

*Spain was left divided into two. A civil had begun, a class war that was to endure for three years. Wherever they advanced the rebels murdered Republican and leftist militants and their sympathisers. In that part of Spain loyal to the Republic, it was not long before reprisals were mounted against those suspected of supporting the rebels.*

**Liberto SARRAU:** There were snipers in the bell-towers of certain monasteries; the clergy mingled with the military and they started to shoot, not just at opponents bearing arms, but

at anyone who was on the street. Hence the popular backlash and the burning of the buildings from which they had come under fire.

**Severino CAMPOS:** We lost a lot of personnel in the fighting, courageous personnel...

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** Francisco Ascaso lost his life in the storming of the Atarazanas barracks when he showed himself to a sniper posted at a window.

**Helenio MOLINA:** This was very frequently the case among us: especially as these were men who, while they were writers, like my father, were also the first to man the barricades.

*The Republican government's abject failure to take pre-emptive action against the military coup and the disintegration of the machinery of state ensured that in many places it was the civilians themselves who improvised a new society.*

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** All at once they all came pouring out of the Modelo Prison in Barcelona. This was the glorious first act of the revolution – to free all of the prisoners, male and female alike, of course...

**José ESPAÑA:** The whole state set-up was thrown out. As far as we were concerned the government was now useless and served no purpose. Now it was all up to the union. We would no longer take orders, nor accept comment nor advice from anyone, except from the union.

**Francisco CARRASQUER:** We then set up a committee, first to recruit people to go to Aragón or wherever and later also to pre-empt any instances of personal revenge.

**Antonio ZAPATA:** 19 July brought an automatic change to society. The bulk of the capitalists had clear off. Others scarpereed and fled and the workers had to take over the running of the workplaces.

**Dolores PRAT:** Then, overnight, an assembly was held at the instigation of the CNT-UGT in the Casa del Pueblo (which had been a rich man's club, but, since these had made them-

selves scarce...). Anyway there was a meeting at which factory committees, enterprise councils were appointed for every site so that work might continue... and we decided that we would find work for all of the unemployed, by each factory taking a few of them on. And we did just that, with the result that there was no one without a job...

**Juan ROMERO:** The rich used to say that there were 500 too many hands and the workers used to say that there were 5 too many: and once those 5 went there would be work enough for everybody. The harvest had yet to be brought in and the harvesting and the threshing and all that were pressing and we set to it. One particular day, the village of Membrilla went to bed poor and woke up rich. It woke up rich because it could eat all the bread it wanted, whereas previously it had had to go hungry.

*Unprompted, the people implemented the libertarian ideas they had cherished for a century past and they exceeded the expectations of their organisations. Barcelona became the pace-maker of the revolution.*

**Concha LIAÑO:** Right from the outset we made contact with the transport union and started teaching the female comrades to drive trams and you could see these comrades driving trams.

**Juan JIMENEZ:** There were those comrades who wanted to go to the front: I devoted myself to rounding up books with a lorry. Some of us were keen to see a people's library in the barrio. We wanted to placard the doorway with posters reading 'People's Library. People, study and better yourselves. All welcome.'

*In Catalonia the anarchists were by then in the majority and any power that the Generalidad government had had was handed over to the Antifascist Militias' Committee, a new body thrown up by the revolution.*