Anarcho
The Spanish Revolution: 70 Years On
September 1, 2008

Retrieved on 28th January 2021 from
anarchism.pageabode.com
An overview of the Spanish Revolution and its lessons for anarchists and other radicals.

**theanarchistlibrary.org**

# The Spanish Revolution: 70 Years On

Anarcho

September 1, 2008

## Conclusion

It is clear that the defeat in Spain was due to a failure not of anarchist theory and tactics but a failure of anarchists to **apply** their theory and tactics. Instead of destroying the state, the C.N.T.-F.A.I. ignored it. For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organisations which can effectively replace the state and the market; that is, to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision-making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this route can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed. Thus the most important lesson gained from the Spanish Revolution is simply the correctness of anarchist theory on the need to organise the *"social power"* of the working class by a free federation of workers associations to destroy the state.

Beyond doubt, these months of economic liberty in Spain show not only that libertarian socialism **works** and that working class people can manage and run society ourselves but that it can improve the quality of life and increase freedom. Given the time and breathing space, the experiment would undoubtedly have ironed out its problems. Even in the very difficult environment of a civil war (and with resistance of almost all other parties and unions) the workers and peasants of Spain showed that a better society is possible. They gave a concrete example of what was previously just a vision, a world which was more humane, more free, more equitable and more civilised than that run by capitalists, managers, politicians and bureaucrats.

> *... it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the universality of the Revolution ... will emerge triumphant."*[27]

Indeed, such an organisation already existing in embryo in the CNT's **barrios** defence committees which had led and co-ordinated the struggle against the military coup throughout the city. In combination to a federation of occupied workplaces based on direct delegation irrespective of existing unions, these could have ensured the success of the revolution.

Ironically, the mistake made by the CNT, while understandable, cannot be justified given that their consequences had been predicted by numerous anarchists beforehand. For example, Kropotkin critique of the Paris Commune refutes the two assumptions of the CNT leadership — first, of placing the war before the revolution and, second, that the struggle could be better waged by means of the state.[28]

Moreover, it seems difficult to blame anarchist theory for the decisions of the CNT when that theory argues the opposite position. Particularly given that the Council of Aragon exposes as false the claim that anarchism failed in during the Spanish Civil War. In Aragon, the CNT **did** follow the ideas of anarchism, abolishing both the state and capitalism by means of a federation of communes. This principled stand for revolutionary social and economic change stands at odds with the claims that the Spanish Revolution shows the failure of anarchism. After all, in Aragon the CNT **did** act in accordance with anarchist theory as well as its own history and politics.

[27] **No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism**, volume 1, Guerin, Daniel (ed.), Edinburgh/San Francisco, 1998, pp. 155–6

[28] **Words of a Rebel**, pp. 97–8



# Contents

working class people expressed in their assemblies. The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored.

Collaboration with the state ensured that a federation of workers' associations could not be created to co-ordinate the struggle against fascism and the social revolution. As Stuart Christie argues, *"[b]y imposing their leadership from above, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres — the grass-roots factory and local revolutionary committees — and prevented them from proving themselves as an efficient and viable means of co-ordinating communications, defence and provisioning. They also prevented the Local Revolutionary committees from integrating with each other to form a regional, provincial and national federal network which would facilitate the revolutionary task of social and economic reconstruction."*[26] Without such a federation, it was only a matter of time before the C.N.T joined the bourgeois government.

Only a federation of delegates from the fields, factories and workplaces could have solved the problems facing the revolution, as argued by Bakunin:

> *"the Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council ... [made up of] delegates ... invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times ... all provinces, communes and associations ... [will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all ... invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... and to organise a revolutionary force with the capacity of defeating the reaction*

[26] **We, the Anarchists!**, pp. 99–100

Oliver describes as *"democracy."* Juan Gomaz Casas (an active F.A.I. member in 1936) makes clear:

> *"How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the unanimous masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as their political organisations in the district and communities."*[25]

As such, the dilemma of *"anarchist dictatorship"* or *"collaboration"* raised in 1937 was fundamentally wrong both logically and in terms of why the decision to collaborate was made.

That Marxists repeat Garcia's words shows how superficial their critique of anarchism and their knowledge of the Spanish revolution really are.

## Unity from below

As can be seen, the rationales later developed to justify the betrayal of anarchist ideas and the revolutionary workers of Spain were created to justify a non-anarchist approach to the struggle against fascism. Instead of a genuine confederal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighbourhood assemblies) the C.N.T. created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, ordinary

[25] **Anarchist Organisation: the History of the F.A.I.**, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1986, p. 188f



> *"The atmosphere then, the feelings were very special. It was beautiful. A feeling of — how shall I say it — of power, not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of things being under **our** control, of under anyone's. Of **possibility**. We **had** everything. We had Barcelona: It was ours. You'd walk out in the streets, and they were ours — here, CNT; there, **comite** this or that. It was totally different. Full of possibility. A feeling that we could, together, really **do** something. That we could make things different."*
> Anarchist militant Enriqueta Rovira[1]

The 19th of July, 2006, marked the 70th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Revolution. On this day in 1936, the people of Spain took to the streets to fight a fascist coup started by reactionary Generals two days previously. Across two-thirds of the country, they were successful. After defeating the coup, they took the next step and started the most profound and far reaching social revolutions the world had ever seen:

> *"In Spain, during almost three years, despite a civil war that took a million lives, despite the opposition of the political parties ... this idea of libertarian communism was put into effect. Very quickly more than 60% of the land was very quickly collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganised and*

[1] quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, "Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women", pp. 151–176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 164–5

*administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high-salaried managers, or the authority of the state.*

*"Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.' They co-ordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganisation of social life. They replaced the war between men, 'survival of the fittest,' by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity ...*

*"This experience, in which about eight million people directly or indirectly participated, opened a new way of life to those who sought an alternative to anti-social capitalism on the one hand, and totalitarian state bogus socialism on the other."*[2]

All across non-fascist Spain traditional social relationships between men and women, adults and children, individual and individual were transformed, revolutionised, in a libertarian way. C.N.T. militant Abel Paz gives a good indication of this:

*"Industry is in the hands of the workers and all the production centres conspicuously fly the red and*

[2] **The Anarchist Collectives: self-management in the Spanish revolution**, 1936–1939, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1974, pp. 6–7



fighting had just ended and the Plenum decided *"not to speak about Libertarian Communism as long as part of Spain was in the hands of the fascists."*[23] The revolution took place **from below** in the days following the decision, independently of the wishes of the Plenum. In the words of Abel Paz:

*"When the workers reached their workplaces ... they found them deserted ... The major centres of production had been abandoned by their owners ... The CNT and its leaders had certainly not foreseen this situation; if they had, they had, they would have given appropriate guidance to the workers when they called off the General Strike and ordered a return to work. What happened next was the result of the workers' spontaneous decision to take matters into their own hands.*

*"Finding the factories deserted, and no instructions from their unions, they resolved to operate the machines themselves ... the union leaders of the CNT committees were confronted with a revolution that they had not foreseen ... the workers and peasants had bypassed their leaders and taken collective action."*[24]

As the revolution had not yet begun and the CNT Plenum had decided **not** to call for its start, it is difficult to see how *"libertarian communism"* (i.e. the revolution) could *"lead to the strangulation of the revolution"* (i.e. libertarian communism). In other words, this particular rationale put forward by Garica Oliver could not reflect the real thoughts of those present at the CNT plenum and so, in fact, was a later justification for the CNT's actions. Similarly, Libertarian Communism is based on self-management, by its nature opposed to dictatorship and, by definition, it is far more *"democratic"* than the capitalist state

[23] Mariano R. Vesquez, quoted by Paz, Op. Cit., p.214

[24] **The Spanish Civil War**, Pocket Archives, Hazan, Paris, 1997, pp. 54–6

This is not, we stress, to justify the decision but rather to explain it and place it in context. Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the leaders of the libertarian movement for their mistakes. The biggest of which were forgetting basic anarchist ideas and rejecting an anarchist approach to the problems facing the Spanish people (unlike the rank-and-file of the CNT, who organised collectives, communes and militias in line with anarchist theory).

The fact is that the circumstances in which the decision to collaborate was made are rarely mentioned by Marxists, who prefer to quote CNT militant Garcia Oliver's comment from over a year later:

> *"The CNT and the FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship. We had to choose, between Libertarian Communism, which meant anarchist dictatorship, and democracy, which meant collaboration."*[21]

As Abel Paz notes, *"[i]t is clear that the explanations given ... were designed for their political effect, hiding the atmosphere in which these decisions were taken. These declarations were made a year later when the CNT were already far removed from their original positions It is also the period when they had become involved in the policy of collaboration which lead taking part in the Central Government. But in a certain way they shed light on the unknown factors which weighted so heavily on these who took part in the historic Plenum."*[22] Most obviously, when the decision was made, the revolution had not started yet. The street

[21] quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, 3rd Edition, Freedom Press, London, 1983, p. 34

[22] **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 215



> *black flags as well as inscriptions announcing that they have really become collectives. The revolution seems to be universal. Changes are also evident in social relations. The former barriers which used to separate men and woman arbitrarily have been destroyed. In the cafes and other public places there is a mingling of the sexes which would have been completely unimaginable before. The revolution has introduced a fraternal character to social relations which has deepened with practice and show clearly that the old world is dead."*[3]

The social transformation empowered individuals and these, in turn, transformed society.

## The Collectives

Across Spain, workers and peasants formed collectives and communes. Industrial collectives were organised, based on "*general assemblies of workers decided policy, while elected committees managed affairs on a day-to-day basis.*"[4] Augustin Souchy writes:

> *"The collectives organised during the Spanish Civil War were workers' economic associations without private property. The fact that collective plants were managed by those who worked in them did not mean that these establishments became their private property. The collective had no right to sell or rent all or any part of the collectivised factory or workshop, The*

[3] **Durruti: The People Armed**, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1976, p. 243

[4] Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain: anarchism and the struggle for the emancipation of women**, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991, p. 73

*rightful custodian was the C.N.T., the National Confederation of Workers Associations. But not even the C.N.T. had the right to do as it pleased. Everything had to be decided and ratified by the workers themselves through conferences and congresses."*[5]

Thus the individual collective was based on a mass assembly of those who worked there which nominated administrative staff who were mandated to implement the decisions of the assembly and who had to report back to, and were accountable to, that assembly.

A similar process occurred in agriculture. Jose Peirats describes collectivisation among the peasantry as follows:

*"The expropriated lands were turned over to the peasant syndicates, and it was these syndicates that organised the first collectives. Generally the holdings of small property owners were respected, always on the condition that only they or their families would work the land, without employing wage labour. In areas like Catalonia, where the tradition of petty peasant ownership prevailed, the land holdings were scattered. There were no great estates. Many of these peasants, together with the C.N.T., organised collectives, pooling their land, animals, tools, chickens, grain, fertiliser, and even their harvested crops.."*[6]

Peirats also notes that in conducting their internal affairs, all the collectives scrupulously and zealously observed democratic procedures. Gaston Leval summarises:

*"Regular general membership meetings were convoked weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly... and these*

[5] **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 67

[6] Op. Cit., p. 112



those facing the anarchists in Spain on the 20th of July, 1936. It seems hypocritical to point to the Russian Civil War as the explanation of all of Bolshevism's crimes against the working class (indeed, humanity) while remaining silent on the forces facing the C.N.T-F.A.I at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Stuart Christie indicates the dilemma facing the leadership of the CNT at the time:

*"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism (or of the people), they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become, part of the bourgeois state ... Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, the Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism, was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory into practice by organisational decree ... [the] spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direct of its own."*[20]

[20] **We, the Anarchists! A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927–1927**, The Meltzer Press and Jura Media, Hastings/Petersham, 2000, p. 99

fluenced the decisions they took, decisions which they later justified by **mis**-using anarchist theory.

What was the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th? According to the report made by the C.N.T to the **International Workers Association**:

> *"The CNT showed a conscientious scrupulousness in the face of a difficult alternative: to destroy completely the State in Catalonia, to declare war against the Rebels, the government, foreign capitalism, and this assuming complete control of Catalan society; or collaborating in the responsibilities of government with the other antifascist fractions."*[18]

Jose Peirats notes that:

> *"According to the report, the CNT was in absolute control of Catalonia in July 19, 1936, but its strength was less in Levante and still less in central Spain where the central government and the traditional parties were dominant. In the north of Spain the situation was confused. The CNT could have mounted an insurrection on its own 'with probable success' but such a takeover would have led to a struggle on three fronts: against the fascists, the government and foreign capitalism. In view of the difficulty of such an undertaking, collaboration with other antifascist groups was the only alternative."*[19]

While the supporters of Lenin and Trotsky will constantly point out the objective circumstances in which faced the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution, they rarely mention

[18] quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, Janus Publishing Company, London, 1999, p. 1156

[19] **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, Freedom Press, London, 1990, p. 179



> *meetings were completely free of the tensions and recriminations which inevitably emerge when the power of decisions is vested in a few individuals — even if democratically elected. The Assemblies were open for everyone to participate in the proceedings. Democracy embraced all social life. In most cases, even the 'individualists' who were not members of the collective could participate in the discussions, and they were listened to by the collectivists."*[7]

Regional federations of collectives were formed in many areas of Spain. The federations were created at congresses to which the collectives in an area sent delegates. These congresses agreed a series of general rules about how the federation would operate and what commitments the affiliated collectives would have to each other. The congress elected an administration council, which took responsibility for implementing agreed policy. Martha A. Ackelsberg sums up the experience well:

> *"The achievements of these collectives were extensive. In many areas they maintained, if not increased, agricultural production [not forgetting that many young men were at the front line], often introducing new patterns of cultivation and fertilisation… collectivists built chicken coups, barns, and other facilities for the care and feeding of the community's animals. Federations of collectives co-ordinated the construction of roads, schools, bridges, canals and dams. Some of these remain to this day as lasting contributions of the collectives to the infrastructure of rural Spain."*[8]

[7] Op. Cit., p 119f

[8] **The Free Women of Spain**, p. 79

She also points to inter-collective solidarity, noting that the *"collectivists also arranged for the transfer of surplus produce from wealthier collectives to those experiencing shortages."*

From a purely economic viewpoint, production increased but, more importantly, this improvement in the quality of life included an increase in freedom as well as in consumption. To quote the member of the Beceite collective in Aragon *"it was marvellous ... to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful."*[9]

## The revolution complete?

The collectivisations allowed the potential creative energy that existed among the workers and peasants to be unleashed, an energy that had been wasted under private property. The popular assemblies allowed social problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. Self-management in collectives combined with co-operation in federations allowed an improvement in quality of rural life.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists are very proud of these achievements. However, the formation of these worker-managed enterprises has sometimes led people to misconceptions about anarchism. According to one group of libertarian Marxists *"a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these 'collectives' should be linked with each other on a 'federal' basis ... This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years"* and

[9] Quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain: the experience of civil war, 1936–1939**, Allen Lane, London, 1979, p. 288



This process went on in many different unions and collectives and, unsurprisingly, the forms of co-ordination agreed to lead to different forms of organisation in different areas and industries, as would be expected in a free society.

## A failure of Anarchism or Anarchists?

As is well known, the C.N.T. co-operated with the other anti-fascist parties and trade unions on the Republican side (ultimately joining the government). This co-operation, more than anything, helped ensure the defeat of the revolution. How did this happen? The key decision was made on July the 21st to not speak of Libertarian Communism until after Franco had been defeated, to collaborate with other anti-fascist parties and unions in a common front against fascism. This, initially, involved the C.N.T agreeing to join a *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* proposed by the leader of the Catalan government, Louis Companys. From this it was only a matter of time until the C.N.T joined an official government as no other means of co-ordinating activities existed.

The question must arise, **why** did the C.N.T collaborate with the state, forsaking its principles and, in its own way, contribute to the counter-revolution and the loosing of the war? Does the failure of the C.N.T to implement anarchism after July 19th mean that anarchist politics are flawed? Or, rather, does the experience of the Spanish revolution indicate a failure of **anarchists** rather than of **anarchism,** a mistake made under difficult objective circumstances and one which anarchists have learnt from?

The latter answer is the correct one. Rather than being the fault of anarchist theory, its roots can be discovered in the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20th. The objective conditions facing the leading militants of the CNT and FAI in-

and took over all the facilities in their industries, eliminating competition between separate firms. This was considered to be a step in the direction of eventual socialisation.

The actual process in Spain towards socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved — as would be expected in a true social revolution. For example, the department stores were collectivised and an attempt to federate the stores failed to win support in the general assemblies of the collectives. Joan Ferrer, the secretary of the CNT commercial union, considered it natural as *"[o]nly a few months before, the traditional relationship between employer and worker had been overthrown. Now the workers were being asked to make a new leap — to the concept of collective ownership. It was asking a lot to expect the latter to happen overnight."*[16] Elsewhere, the debate went the other way. Gaston Leval gives the example of Hospitalet del Llobregat:

> *"Local industries went through stages almost universally adopted in that revolution ... [I]n the first instance,* ***comites*** *nominated by the workers employed in them [were organised]. Production and sales continued in each one. But very soon it was clear that this situation gave rise to competition between the factories... creating rivalries which were incompatible with the socialist and libertarian outlook. So the CNT launched the watchword: 'All industries must be ramified in the Syndicates, completely socialised, and the regime of solidarity which we have always advocated be established once and for all.*
>
> *"The idea won support immediately"*[17]

[16] quoted by Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 220

[17] Op. Cit., pp. 291–2



in 1936 people *"seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality."*[10] Some even dismiss the whole experience as little more than *"self-managed capitalism."*

The truth of the matter is somewhat different as CNT policy and social anarchist theory was **not** in favour of workers owning their individual workplaces. Instead both argued for **socialisation** of the means of life by a system of federations of workplaces. The idea of converting the worker-managed workplaces into co-operatives, operating in a market economy, had never been advocated by the Spanish anarchists before the Civil War, but was now seen by some as a temporary stop-gap that would solve the immediate question of what to do with the workplaces that had been seized by the workers. As one CNT militant recalled:

> *"Up to that moment, I had never heard of collectivisation as a solution for industry — the department stores were being run by the union. What the new system meant was that each collectivised firm would retain its individual character, but with the ultimate objective of federating all enterprises within the same industry."*[11]

The idea of collectives had not been advocated by most anarchists. Rather, self-managed workplaces were seen as one step in a process of socialisation, the basic building block of a federal structure of workers' councils. They were **not** seen as an end in themselves no matter how important they were as the base of a socialised economy.

The collectives, then, were a product of the objective circumstances the CNT found itself in rather than anarchist theory. This was recognised by anarchists before the Civil War. D. A. de Santillan, for example, had argued for *"free experimentation,*

[10] "Anarchism and the Spanish 'Revolution'", **Subversion** no. 18

[11] quoted by Ronald Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 212

*free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation,"* recognising that *"[i]n each locality the degree of [libertarian] communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy."*[12] In this he echoed Kropotkin and Bakunin. For the former, it was "*a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation."*[13] For the latter, the divergence of an actual revolution from the precise theory of anarchism expresses the nature of a social revolution:

> *"I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this ... organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda ... , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State ... will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times ... The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation ..."*[14]

In other words, the anarchists recognised that its end goal libertarian communism would not be created overnight and

[12] **After the Revolution: Economic Reconstruction in Spain Today**, Greenberg, New York, 1937 (facsimile edition by Jura Media, Petersham, 1996)., p. 97

[13] **Words of a Rebel**, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1992, p. 72

[14] **Bakunin on Anarchism**, 2nd Edition, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1980, p. 207



different areas will develop at different speeds and in different directions depending on the material circumstances they faced and what their population desired. Social revolution is a dynamic process and things rarely develop exactly as predicted or hoped in pre-revolutionary times. The "collectives" in Spain are an example of this. To denounce such developments in favour of ideal solutions means to misunderstand the dynamic of a revolutionary situation.

## From Collectivisation to Socialisation

Initially, there were very few attempts to co-ordinate economic activities beyond the workplace. This is hardly surprising, given that the overwhelming need was to restart production, convert a civilian economy to a wartime one and to ensure that the civilian population and militias were supplied with necessary goods.

Many anarchists were aware of the short-comings of what Gaston Leval, in his justly famous study of the collectives, later described it as *"not ... true socialisation, but ... a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates."*[15] Leval in fact terms it *"a form of workers neo-capitalism"* but such a description is inaccurate (and unfortunate) simply because wage labour had been abolished and so it was not a form of capitalism — rather it was a form of mutualism (i.e. while wage labour, capitalism, was abolished the wages system — payment for work done — remained).

This dilemma of self-managed individual workplaces and lack of federations to co-ordinate them was debated within the CNT and a number of unions went beyond "collectivisation"

[15] **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, Freedom Press, London, 1975, p. 227–8