

# **Review: The Spanish CNT and the struggle in Puerto Real**

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England.)

Conor McLoughlin

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FOR ABOUT TWO years from July 1936 huge parts of republican Spain were anarchist dominated. Millions were involved in collectives in cities like Madrid and Barcelona, on the land and in anarchist militias fighting Franco at the front. Factories, bus companies, hospitals, gas works and much more were taken over and run by the workers. In 1939 the republic fell and the movement was smashed. Anarchism, though a nice idea now remains little more than a historical curiosity- right??? Wrong!!!

## **Puerto Real**

In Spain there are two large syndicalist unions in operation today, the CNT and the CGT. Between them they organise tens of thousands of workers. Both unions have organised highly successful strikes and demonstrations. This pamphlet is based on a talk by Pepe Gomez of the CNT's Puerto Real/Cadiz section given in London in October 1993. It is based on the long running battle between the CNT and the shipyard bosses. This struggle has continued since 1978.

Gomez places great emphasis on the way the struggle has been broadened beyond just the shipyard workers. Activities have been directed throughout by village assemblies. These involved shipyard workers and workers from a wide range of other industries, in fact most of the local community; employed and unemployed, men, women and children.

This meant that the fight went beyond the shipyard gates. Other issues around education, health services, the campaign against a new golf course, against privatisation of a local cemetery and local taxes. The emphasis was on direct democracy and direct action. The basic tenets of anarchism were used and to good effect.

## **Juan Carlos not welcome here**

In 1987 a visit by the Spanish monarch became a major focus for action. This involved occupations, sealing off parts of the shipyards and barricading roads. The state responded by drafting in police reinforcements. The union and the community organised their own defence with slings, stones and any handy missiles. Other sections of this pamphlet deal with women's organisation during the strike and relations with other unions, whose members consistently supported the CNT in the assemblies.

## **Anarchism delivers**

This pamphlet is only a few pages long but a great read. It provides proof positive that anarchism can still be a powerful force and presents strategies that can deliver the goods. For example, after the 1987 flare-up the workers gained major concessions. Eight new ships were brought in to be refitted, and an early retirement scheme with a pension linked to salary increases was conceded by the shipyard bosses.

The other major point is to show the importance of linking limited disputes with wider issues and involving the whole community.

## **The Spanish anarchist unions**

After Franco died in 1975 the National Confederation of Workers (CNT) began to blossom once more. Within a matter of months its membership had increased from a few hundred activists to 150,000. Unfortunately the union split when a dispute arose over whether to sit on the state regulated workplace committees which negotiate with the bosses.

Those who stood for election to the committees formed the General Confederation of Workers (CGT). The CNT refused to participate and remained affiliated to the International Workers' Association (the anarcho-syndicalist international).

There are also unions which do not declare themselves anarchist but whose policies and structures show a major libertarian socialist influence. These include the unions of the dockers (Coordinadora) and the rural workers (SOC).

It is important to note that in Spain many workers are not union members. However almost all workers vote to elect representatives onto workplace committees. Anarchists form a majority on the committees in some major workplaces, and a sizable minority in many more.

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