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The Spanish Civil War

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FSORE: Federación de Sociedades de Resistencia de la Región España (Federation of Societies of Resistance of the Spanish Region) Successor to the FRE and FTRE. 1900–1907. Peak membership c.70,000.

FTRE: Federación de Trabajadores de la Región España (Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region) Anarcho-collectivist labour federation. 1880–1888. Peak membership c.50,000.

JJLL: Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youth) Catalan anarchist youth organisation.

MMLL: Mujeres Libres (Free Women) Anarcho-feminist group. Founded May 1936. Membership c.20,000.

PCE: Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain) National Communist Party. Dramatically grew in support and influence during the Civil War.

POUM: Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Party of Marxist Unification) Coalition of Trotskyist and other dissident communist groups, primarily active in Catalonia. Founded 1935.

PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) Parliamentary party of the socialist movement.

PSUC: Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (Unified Socialist Party of Cataluña) Coalition of socialist and communist groups in Catalonia, federated with PCE. Founded July 1936.

UGT: Unión General de Trabajadores (General Workers' Union) National union of the socialist movement.

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context.¹¹⁷ Likewise, increasing attention to the functioning of the CNT at its committee and grassroots levels is revealing it to be a far broader, more plural, and complex organisation than has previously been acknowledged.¹¹⁸ The Spanish movement and its role in the Civil War thus rightly remains a focal point—or, to use the movement’s terms, ‘fertile terrain’—for studies into the history of anarchism and the experience of revolution and defeat.

Glossary of Political Groups

ADD: Amigos de Durruti (Friends of Durruti) Radical anarchist group, hostile to militarization and ‘encroachment’ on the revolution. Founded March 1937.

CCMA: Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas (Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militia) Anti-fascist co-ordinating body established in Catalonia during the early revolution.

CNT: Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour) Spanish anarcho-syndicalist organisation. Founded 1910–1911.

FAI: Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation) Purist anarchist organisation, aimed to direct the CNT. Founded 1927.

FIJL: Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth) National anarchist youth organisation.

FRE: Federación Regional de España (Regional Federation of Spain) Spanish section of the First International, dominated by Bakuninists. 1870–1874 Peak membership c.15,000.

¹¹⁷ See D. Evans and J. M. Yeoman, ‘New approaches to Spanish anarchism,’ *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29.3 (2016), 199–204 and the collection of works which follow in this issue.

¹¹⁸ See in particular A. Monjo, *Militants: Participació i democràcia a la CNT als anys trenta* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2003) and Guillamón, *Revolution*.

period in its history. Its organisations and cultural practices were banned, and thousands of its members were arrested, tortured, detained in prisons and concentration camps, and executed. While the CNT continued as a clandestine organisation, it was exhausted by the war and repression and fractured by internal schisms.¹¹³ Similar problems were experienced by the movement in exile, which remained split over the memory of the revolution and collaboration.¹¹⁴ Following Franco's death in 1975, the CNT's membership soared, and hundreds of thousands attended its rallies in Valencia and Barcelona, yet this apparent resurgence was not sustained, and by 1978 the movement had shed most of its members and was once again split, leaving it a marginal force in the transition to democracy which followed.¹¹⁵

Few anarchist movements have come close to the size and longevity of that which existed in Spain. The Republic's defeat in the Civil War marked the end of a period of seventy years where libertarian ideas were articulated in mass movements across Europe and the Americas, in which the years of 1936–1939 stand out as a moment of great hope for anarchists in Spain and around the world, as well as great regret at what could have been. Research into the contexts, decisions, and experiences of the Civil War and Revolution continues to ask new questions of these well-studied events.¹¹⁶ Particularly encouraging is the growing effort to reflect the international dimensions of the revolution and bring it into comparative history, helping to undermine the persistent notion that anarchism in Spain was an exceptional phenomenon, peculiar to its national

¹¹³ Á. Herrero López, *La CNT durante el franquismo: Clandestinidad y exilio (1939–1975)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2004), 14–36.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 406–422 and Ealham, *Living*, 37–169.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 197–221.

¹¹⁶ A comprehensive survey and bibliography of English-language works on Spanish anarchism can be found in Chris Ealham's introduction to Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 3, i–xiv.

Abstract

The Spanish Civil War is one of the most significant events in the history of anarchism. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 prompted a libertarian social revolution, which saw widespread collectivisation and worker self-management in Barcelona and urban Catalonia and the rural provinces of neighbouring Aragon. Empowered anarchist committees and groups also sought to overturn gender oppression, overhaul the education system, and enact radical public health programmes. This unprecedented revolution ended in May 1937, with the reassertion of Republican state control. After a week of violence in Barcelona, the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) was removed from its dominant position in the north-east of the country, and most revolutionary measures were halted or reversed. This chapter will begin by outlining the development of the anarchist movement in Spain. It will then focus on the Spanish Revolution, highlighting the key anarchist individuals, groups, and ideas of the early months of the Civil War, before moving on to a discussion of the events and historiography of the 'May Days'. Finally, the chapter will examine the decline of the movement in the remaining years of the Civil War, and the experience of defeat, repression, and exile during the Franco dictatorship.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 was one of the most significant moments in the history of anarchism. The outbreak of the conflict sparked a revolution, in which women and men inspired by anarchist ideas took control of the streets of Barcelona and the fields of Aragon. For perhaps the first, and last, time in history, libertarian communism appeared to be imminent, if not already in effect. In under a year, however,

the revolution was over, and the anarchist movement was fractured and in the process of being crushed in the wake of the Nationalist advance across the country. Franco's final victory and the decades of repression which followed marked the end of anarchism as a mass movement in Spain.

These events were only possible because of the depth and longevity of support for the Spanish movement. Anarchist principles of grassroots, revolutionary unionism underpinned the national branch of the First International (FRE, 1870–1874) and its successors the FTRE (1880–1888) and FSOE (1900–1907).¹ These organisations were prone to cycles of enthusiasm and action, followed by paralysis and collapse. Difficulties were particularly acute during periods of repression, such as that which followed the upsurge of anarchist terrorist attacks in the 1890s.² Yet the movement was broader than its organisations and was sustained at the turn of the century by its cultural foundations in working-class communities, above all in Barcelona and its surrounding towns.³ The movement was also strong in south-west Andalusia (particularly Seville and Cádiz provinces), western Aragon, and the Levante (Valencia and Murcia), along with pockets of support in the

¹ On the nineteenth-century movement, see J. Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en España: La Primera Internacional (1864–1881)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000); G. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989). The FRE claimed 15,000 affiliates at its height, the FTRE 70,000, and the FSOE 80,000.

² Á. Herrerin López, *Anarquía, dinamita y revolución social: Violencia y represión en la España de entre siglos (1868–1909)* (Madrid: Catarata, 2011), 129–234 and 'Anarchist sociability in Spain: In times of violence and clandestinity', *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, 38.1 (2013), 155–174.

³ On turn-of-the-century anarchist culture and ideology, see J. Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868–1910)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1991); L. Litvak, *Musa libertaria: Arte, literatura y vida cultural del anarquismo español (1880–1913)* (Madrid: Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, 2001).

general secretary and one of the leading instigators of collaboration, announced to the confederation's national plenum that the war was lost.¹⁰⁶ Although stalled by a Republican offensive along the Ebro River in the summer, the collapse continued. By the end of 1938, a huge movement of people was underway from Catalonia to France, broken by starvation, disease, and relentless bombing of urban areas.¹⁰⁷ Many of the 500,000 refugees who survived attacks by the Italian air force and the winter crossing of the Pyrenees found themselves interned in concentration camps once they crossed the French border.¹⁰⁸ This included some within the leadership of the CNT–FAI and thousands of its members, who fled Barcelona as Nationalist troops entered the city on 26 January 1939.¹⁰⁹

The last significant act of the anarchist movement during the Civil War took place in Madrid in the final month of the conflict, when the CNT assisted the military coup of Segismundo Casado against Negrín and the PCE.¹¹⁰ With the war all but over, the CNT supported the coup to aid the evacuation of its leadership from the capital, and gain revenge for the communists' role in the May Days and the movement's subsequent marginalisation.¹¹¹ The coup left around 230 dead and Casado clear to attempt, and fail, to negotiate a cease-fire. Nationalist forces marched into Madrid unopposed on 28 March, and on 1 April, Franco declared victory over all of Spain.¹¹²

Under Franco's dictatorship the movement faced a period of repression of greater intensity and duration than at any other

¹⁰⁶ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 372.

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 480–485; Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 3, 214–217.

¹⁰⁸ Ealham, *Living*, 122–127.

¹⁰⁹ García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, 506–512.

¹¹⁰ Á. Viñas, 'Playing with history and hiding treason: Colonel Casado's untrustworthy memoirs and the end of the Spanish Civil War', *Bulletin for Spanish Studies*, 91.1–2 (2014), 295–323.

¹¹¹ H. Graham, 'Casado's ghosts: Demythologizing the end of the Spanish Republic', *Bulletin for Spanish Studies*, 89.7–8 (2012), 260.

¹¹² H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Penguin, 2012), 861–890.

the remainder of the war.¹⁰¹ These figures had achieved little during months of collaboration, where they had been exposed as poor politicians with limited choices or power. They had more success in exerting greater control over the movement, which continued long after their departure from government. Hierarchy, centralisation, discipline, and the purging of dissenting voices intensified, now that the tragic—and in the leadership’s view, inevitable—defeat of the revolution had played out.¹⁰² Resistance to these processes also continued in clandestine papers and sections of the FAI, MMLL, and JJLL, who sought in vain to defend the remaining vestiges of the revolution, end collaboration, and maintain the CNT’s pre-war federal structure.¹⁰³

The CNT–FAI retained a considerable membership and continued to function until the end of the war, yet it was a demoralised and minority force during the continuing erosion of Republican Spain. Bilbao fell to the Nationalists a month after the May Days, followed by Santander on 26 August and Gijón on 19 October. With the north lost, government policy now rested on the slim prospect of lifting the arms embargo imposed by the Non-Intervention agreement, which was ignored by its signatories Germany and Italy but upheld by Britain and France, and the withdrawal of Axis troops. These hopes never came close to realisation.¹⁰⁴ In April 1938, eastern Aragon was invaded and Catalonia was severed from the rest of Republican territory, prompting a split between the CNT and FAI over the policy of resistance.¹⁰⁵ A month earlier, Horacio Prieto, the former CNT

¹⁰¹ Segundo Blanco of the Asturian CNT joined Negrín’s new government in March 1938. See Casanova, *Anarchism*, 155–156.

¹⁰² Guillamón, *Revolution*, 183–186; Evans, ‘Anarchist’, 208–213.

¹⁰³ On the post-May 1937 oppositional press see F. Godicheau, ‘Periódicos clandestinos anarquistas en 1937–1938: ¿Las voces de la base militante?’, *Ayer*, 55.3 (2004), 175–206.

¹⁰⁴ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 316–323.

¹⁰⁵ J. Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham, vol. 3 (Hastings: Christie Books, 2006), 68–81.

north-eastern ports (La Coruña, Vigo, and Gijón), the Basque regions, and Madrid.⁴

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the movement aligned itself with syndicalist ideas, leading to the creation of the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) in 1910–1911.⁵ The CNT grew dramatically during the First World War, in which neutral Spain experienced an economic boom and then crash, and was a major force in general strikes which erupted towards the end of the conflict. Almost 850,000 affiliates were represented at the CNT’s 1919 Congress, which also affirmed the movement’s ultimate goal to be a libertarian communist society, to be secured through direct action, without political or economic mediation.⁶ This high-point was not maintained for long, as the entanglement of CNT activists in bloody street battles with employers and police in Barcelona prompted the military coup of General Primo de Rivera in September 1923 and the repression of the movement.⁷ Within this period of illegality a new anarchist organisation was formed: the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (FAI), which sought to maintain the CNT’s revolutionary direction against syndicalist ‘adaptation’.⁸

⁴ Some of the better English-language regional studies include T. Kaplan, *The Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868–1903* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); P. Radcliff, *From Mobilization to Civil War: The Politics of Polarization in the Spanish City of Gijón, 1900–1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); R. Purkiss, *Democracy, Trade Unions and Political Violence in Spain: The Valencian Anarchist Movement, 1918–1936* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2014).

⁵ See X. Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña (1899–1911): Los orígenes de la CNT* (Madrid: Revista de Trabajo, 1976).

⁶ A. Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos: Del sindicalismo revolucionario al anarcosindicalismo (1910–1926)* (Madrid: Akal, 1981), 479–555.

⁷ A. Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898–1923* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 290–360.

⁸ J. Garner, *Goals and Means: Anarchism, Syndicalism and the Origins of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016), 219–254.

The declaration of the Spanish Second Republic in 1931 brought to power a Republican–Socialist alliance, which promised agrarian and industrial reform, greater civil liberties, secularisation, and an expanded education system. This programme was welcomed by ‘gradualists’ in the CNT’s leadership, who regarded legality and building organisational strength as vital to the revolution. Within months, however, frustrations at the extent and speed of reforms sparked a wave of strikes and protests, which were violently repressed by the Republican state and its supporters in the socialist *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and its national union, the *Unión General de Trabajo* (UGT). With legalism having seemingly failed, gradualists were replaced by ‘purist’ figures from within the FAI through 1931–1933, prompting a large sector of the CNT’s membership to leave the organisation.⁹

During this schism, a series of insurrections took place across Spain, most infamously on 11 January 1933, when revolution was declared in the small town of Casas Viejas (Cádiz). Upon their arrival, Republican security forces massacred the villagers, killing nineteen men, two women, and a child.¹⁰ A further uprising took place the following December in Aragon, La Rioja, and Barcelona, in response to the victory of the right in the November general election.¹¹ Once again the uprising was a disaster, which prompted regional federations of the CNT to begin looking for alternative models of collective action. Anarchist participation in the Asturian uprising of October 1934 was thus the product of local alliances with socialist and communist groups, against the wishes of the CNT’s national leadership and the powerful Catalan regional

⁹ J. Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain: 1931–1939* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17–63.

¹⁰ See J.R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹¹ D. Evans, “‘Ultra-Left’ anarchists and anti-fascism in the Second Republic”, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29.3 (2016), 241–256.

extinction’.⁹⁸ A different reading accepts the limitations of the movement and the revolution, yet questions the inevitability of their eventual failure. This view would suggest an alternative to both collaboration and an ‘anarchist dictatorship’, namely, the creation of revolutionary institutions backed by a workers’ alliance of the CNT, UGT, and POUM, which would consolidate the revolution, rather than allowing it to peter out as spectacle.⁹⁹ Elements of this position can be found in the radical critique of collaboration and denial of the ‘fatalism’ which enveloped the movement’s leaders from the autumn of 1936. Radical calls for an end of collaboration, resistance to militarisation, full socialisation of the economy, the creation of a revolutionary army, and the maintenance of anarchist dominance in local committees also show how this position sought a solution which would bring victory in both the revolution and the war.¹⁰⁰ This was a minority position, highly unlikely to succeed, and never countenanced by the movement’s leaders, yet the existence of this radical alternative does mitigate the claim that the movement had no choice other than to assist in its own demise.

Defeat

The summer of 1937 saw the end of both the revolution and anarchist participation in government. Under increasing pressure after the May Days, Caballero resigned and was replaced by the PSOE’s Juan Negrín on 17 May, who removed the CNT–FAI from ministerial positions in the national government and Generalitat. Despite these expulsions, the movement’s leaders did not abandon the principle of collaboration and sought re-entry into the government through

⁹⁸ Castillo Cañiz, ‘Anarchism and the Countryside’, 230.

⁹⁹ Ealham, ‘Revolution’, 227–228 and ‘Unidad’, 125.

¹⁰⁰ Evans, ‘Anarchist’, 56–111.

pressed in organisations such as MMLL, JJLL, and ADD, in the Barcelona defence committees, and in papers such as *Acra-cia* (Lleida), *Nosotros* (Valencia), and *Ideas* (Bajo Llobregat).⁹³ Thus, when the insurrection of May 1937 erupted, the movement's leadership and a substantial section of its membership found themselves separated by more than just barricades.⁹⁴ For the CNT-FAI ministers and higher committees, the May Days threatened the revolution which they had secured through participation in government. For those on the streets, defence of the arms and buildings won in July 1936 reflected a desire to maintain the revolution, which had been abandoned months earlier by their leaders.⁹⁵

In the aftermath of the war, many of the protagonists in state collaboration reflected on the agonising choices they faced in 1936. As committed anarchists and syndicalists, they knew that their actions were undermining their ideology and the revolution, yet they could not reconcile themselves to the prospect of aiding a Nationalist victory, which they saw as the consequence of 'going for everything' in July 1936 and May 1937.⁹⁶ Many historians would agree with this perspective, adding that the revolution was doomed to failure because of the naïve, antiquated, and incoherent nature of anarchist ideology and practice.⁹⁷ In this view, collaboration and the top-down renovation of the movement imposed by the CNT-FAI leadership was a necessary step in the modernisation of Spanish anarchism, which purposefully broke with its longstanding traditions and ultimately 'condemned [it] to

⁹³ C. Ealham, *Living Anarchism: José Peirats and the Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015), 91–102.

⁹⁴ F. Gallego, *La crisis del antifascismo: Barcelona, Mayo De 1937* (Barcelona: Random House, 2008), 406–414.

⁹⁵ Ealham, 'Unidad', 126.

⁹⁶ Casnova, *Anarchism*, 122.

⁹⁷ For example see H. Graham, "'Against the state': A genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)", *European History Quarterly*, 29.4 (1999), 531 and Casanova, *Anarchism*, 129–130.

federation, which refused its support.¹² The severe repression which followed all of these events paralysed the movement: CNT membership crashed, strikes virtually ceased, anarchist publications were banned, and hundreds of workers' centres were closed.¹³

The victory of the Popular Front in the February 1936 general election provided an opportunity for the movement to regroup. Eighty-five unions returned to the confederation at the CNT's Zaragoza Congress in May, boosting membership to around 550,000. This reconciliation was given impetus by the growing threat of a rightist military coup against the Republic. By the early summer, anarchist militants were set on a 'war footing' in preparation for the expected rising, which began in Spain's Moroccan colonies on 17 July and spread to garrisons on the mainland the following day.¹⁴

Civil War and Revolution

The coup of July 1936 shattered the Republican state. Military garrisons rose in every city in Spain, alongside 50 per cent of Civil Guards and 30 per cent of Assault Guards, who together attempted to seize the country for the right. While the central government prevaricated and collapsed, in most large populations the uprising was defeated by a combination of popular mobilisation and loyal security forces.¹⁵ In Barcelona, rebel

¹² Á. Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en Asturias (1890–1936)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1988), 389–415.

¹³ C. Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, (1898–1937)* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010), 130–148.

¹⁴ D. Evans, 'The conscience of the Spanish Revolution: Anarchist opposition to state collaboration in 1937', (PhD thesis, The University of Leeds, 2016), 30–33. Forthcoming as *Revolution and the State: Anarchism and the Spanish Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2018). My thanks to Dr Evans for providing the manuscript and his thoughts on this chapter.

¹⁵ H. Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79–84.

troops left their barracks on 19 July, but were overwhelmed by militants of the CNT and the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM: a small, dissident-communist organisation highly critical of the Soviet Union) and police units after hours of street fighting.¹⁶ The final rebel position—the Ataranzanas barracks—fell the following day after an assault by anarchist militias, which to one eyewitness ‘overshadowed the capture of the Bastille’.¹⁷ Leaders of the CNT–FAI met that afternoon with the head of the Catalan regional government (Generalitat), Luis Companys, who informed them that ‘today you are masters of the city and of Catalonia [...] you have conquered everything in your power’.¹⁸ In Madrid, popular resistance was led by the PSOE–UGT with support from the CNT, Communist Party (PCE), and Assault Guards, who together stormed the city’s Montaña barracks on 20 July.¹⁹ Similar combinations of forces overcame the rebellion in Málaga, San Sebastián, Jaén, and Badajoz, while in Valencia and Gijón, rebels were held in their barracks for a fortnight and a month, respectively, until overcome by militias.

A number of areas of anarchist strength fell to the military within days, including Seville, Cádiz, and Córdoba in the south-west, Zaragoza and western Aragon, and the Galician ports of Vigo and La Coruña.²⁰ These areas, added to northern Castile and Navarre (where the CNT had little presence), formed the initial territory of the Nationalist forces, where an-

¹⁶ A. Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defence Committees in Barcelona: 1934–1938*, trans. P. Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 45–70.

¹⁷ Génerao Tejedor, cited in J. Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham, vol. 1 (Hastings: The Meltzer Press, 2001), 119.

¹⁸ Ealham, *Anarchism*, 170–173.

¹⁹ E. de Guzmán, *Madrid rojo y negro* (Madrid: Oberon, 2004), 39–61.

²⁰ Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 120–130. On the coup in Zaragoza see G. Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State: The CNT in Zaragoza and Aragon, 1930–1937* (Amsterdam: IISH and Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 148–154.

announced this development as a ‘historical necessity’, borne of a war that had ‘transformed the nature of the government and the Spanish state’ which had ‘ceased to be an oppressive, anti-working-class force’.⁸⁷

For critics of the movement’s leadership, collaboration not only violated one of the core principles of anarchism, it was also a strategically poor decision which politically ‘disarmed’ the movement.⁸⁸ Official resistance to the counter-revolution would now take place within official bodies, where CNT–FAI figures were consistently outnumbered, outmanoeuvred, and constrained by ministerial responsibility. Criticism of collaboration was also directed from foreign revolutionaries, including Alexander Schapiro and Emma Goldman, who felt the CNT–FAI was ‘permitting itself to be treated like children’.⁸⁹ From the winter of 1936 onwards, the movement’s leadership sought to co-opt, silence, and expel these opponents, and enacted increasingly bureaucratic practices in meetings to stifle grassroots criticism.⁹⁰ The leadership justified these moves as a necessary step in securing anti-fascist unity and maintaining the war effort, a view which hardened after the disastrous loss of Málaga to the Nationalists on 7 February 1937.⁹¹

Although a minority, critical voices from the movement’s grassroots gained coherency and strength through early 1937, as state reconstruction accelerated and Barcelona was hit by an economic crisis.⁹² By spring, hostility towards the movement’s leadership and calls for a ‘Second July’ were being openly ex-

⁸⁷ Cited in Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 180–181.

⁸⁸ Ealham, ‘Unidad’, 122–127.

⁸⁹ E. Goldman, *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 106. See also criticism from Sebastian Faure, cited in Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 181–184.

⁹⁰ Ealham, ‘Unidad’, 133–135.

⁹¹ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 205–210.

⁹² Guillamón, *Revolution*, 155–175.

Catalan Nationalists, and socialists, as well as power-holders in the military and judiciary. Instead of searching for blame amongst these groups—which were always going to seek a return of state power, with violence if necessary—a more pertinent question is why the anarchist movement was unable, or unwilling, to prevent the counter-revolution, which began only days after the coup had been defeated.

In July 1936, senior figures in the CNT and FAI recall finding themselves facing a choice: either they could destroy the remaining state apparatus in Barcelona—characterised as the creation of an anarchist ‘dictatorship’—or work with other groups on the left in the spirit of anti-fascist unity. Figures favouring the latter prevailed at a series of meetings held from 21 to 26 July, which approved the creation of the *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas* (Central Antifascist Militia Committee, CCMA) under the authority of the Generalitat.⁸⁵ Formal collaboration soon followed. On 4 September, the veteran UGT leader Francisco Largo Caballero was made prime minister, and senior figures in the anarchist movement began negotiations to enter both regional and national governments.⁸⁶ At the end of the month, the CNT–FAI agreed to dissolve the CCMA and join the Generalitat, which within weeks approved the containment of collectivisation and reconstituted the region’s anarchist-dominated local committees to reflect a plurality of political positions. On 4 November Caballero appointed four members of the CNT–FAI to national ministerial positions: the aforementioned García Oliver (Justice), the syndicalists Joan Perió (Industry) and Joan López (Trade), and the FAI’s Federica Montseny (Health), whose appointment made her one of the first women in European history to hold a cabinet role. The CNT organ *Solidaridad Obrera*

⁸⁵ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 110–113 Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 130–134; Guillamón, *Revolution*, 78–82.

⁸⁶ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 116–119.

archists, alongside others of the left, soon felt the full impact of repression. As the Nationalist Army advanced towards Madrid from its positions in the north and cut through Andalusia and Extremadura from the south, it implemented a systematic plan of extermination designed to ‘purify’ Spanish society, assisted by paramilitaries of the ultra-reactionary Carlists and the fascist Falange. Rape, torture, imprisonment, enslavement, and summary execution were meted out on thousands of trade unionists, Republican politicians, non-church goers, and any who had resisted the rebellion.²¹

In the Republican zone, a wave of violence, iconoclasm, and church-burning erupted in the early months of the war. Landlords, military figures, right-wing activists, and—above all—thousands of members of the clergy were denounced, imprisoned, humiliated, and killed.²² Some anarchists who participated in this violence regarded it as necessary in securing their zones of control, enacting ‘proletarian justice’ and bringing forth the revolution.²³ While he lamented this violence, Joan Peiró, a moderate anarcho-syndicalist and former CNT General Secretary, also perceived its rationale: ‘revolution is revolution [...] logically, then, the blood of those who for many centuries maintained their power and privilege by means of organised violence, unnecessary pain

²¹ P. Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Collins, 2012), 131–218.

²² M. Vincent, ‘“The keys of the kingdom”: Religious violence in the Spanish Civil War’, in C. Ealham and M. Richards (Eds.), *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68–89 and ‘Made Flesh? Gender and doctrine in religious violence in twentieth-century Spain’, *Gender & History*, 25.3 (2013), 668–80.

²³ J. de la Cueva, ‘Religious persecution, anticlerical tradition and revolution: On atrocities against the clergy during the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33.3 (1998), 355–369. See also A. Guillamón, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937–1939*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), 15–21.

and unhappiness and death, will be spilt'.²⁴ Some operating in the name of the CNT–FAI also used the turmoil as a means to 'satisfy their selfish whims and vengeful instincts', engaging in looting and settling scores with former employers, policemen, and strike-breakers.²⁵

Republican violence was not, however, conducted solely by its most revolutionary sectors or 'uncontrollables'.²⁶ In the fragmented Republic, violence became a source of legitimacy and power for Republicans, socialists, communists, and anarchists alike, all of whom could find justifications for their actions in the ideology and history of their movements. What took place in the early months of the war thus included some sections of the anarchist movement and was broader than it: a reflection of the 'patterns of violence deeply embedded' in communities across Spain, driven by a range of ideologies, and catalysed by the outbreak of the Civil War, in which both state and union authorities had only limited control.²⁷

The dislocation of state power in July 1936 spurred a huge mobilisation and politicisation across Republican Spain, and a context in which this was channelled towards revolutionary change. The extent this revolution differed between areas, according to the pre-Civil War strength and outlook of local political groups, and the proximity of the front. In Madrid, the CNT had always been a minority to the PSOE–UGT, and had generally been open to inter-union alliances. The city's anarchist leadership was thus willing to participate in joint committees and complied with the return of state power, particularly as the Nationalists advanced towards the capital.²⁸ The

²⁴ Cited in Ealham, *Anarchism*, 177.

²⁵ Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 145.

²⁶ J.L. Ledesma, 'Qué violencia para qué retaguardia o la República en guerra de v1936,' *Ayer*, 76.4 (2009), 83–114.

²⁷ M. Vincent, *Spain 1833–2002: People and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 137–139.

²⁸ J. Vadillo Muñoz, 'El anarquismo en el Madrid de la Segunda República: Perfil social, estrategias y tácticas,' *Revista Historia Autónoma*, 10

oluntary order' in Republican Spain.⁷⁹ By the time the insurrection took place, most urban and rural collectives had been legalised and brought under state control, and the majority of militias had been militarised, including the Durruti and Iron Columns.⁸⁰ Even the streets of Barcelona had largely returned to their pre-war appearance. In early 1937, Borkenau remarked how completely the city had changed since the previous summer: 'no more barricades [...] no more cars covered with revolutionary initials and filled with men in red neckties rushing through the town [...] the red banners and inscriptions, so shining in August, had faded'.⁸¹

Many anarchist and *poumista* participants, along with sympathetic historians, have long identified the PCE–PSUC as the main counter-revolutionary force in Republican Spain.⁸² The presence of Soviet NKVD agents in the post-May Days repression—including their role in Nin's death and the assignment of Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri on 5 May—is often cited as proof of a 'foreign', Stalinist agenda in their actions.⁸³ Some of this position undoubtedly holds truth. Indeed, from July 1936, the PCE and PSUC had maintained that the war was a clash between democracy and fascism, and openly sought to limit the social revolution which they regarded as damaging to the Republic's stability and its credibility with Western democracies.⁸⁴ Yet while the communists were arguably the most dynamic of Republican parties during the war, they were only one part of a much broader and more complex process of state reconstruction, which also included Republicans,

⁷⁹ Godicheau, 'Mayo', 62–63.

⁸⁰ Casanova, *Anarchism; Paz, Iron*, 169–178.

⁸¹ Borkenau, *Spanish Cockpit*, 175.

⁸² C. Ealham, 'The Spanish Revolution: 60 years on', *Tesserae*, 2.2 (1996), 215–216.

⁸³ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 286–296; Godicheau, 'Mayo', 41–42. See also D. Kowalsky, 'Operation X: Soviet Russia and the Spanish Civil War,' *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 91.1–2 (2014), 159–178.

⁸⁴ Ealham, 'Revolution', 213–214 and 221–224.

spoke to his erstwhile comrades over the radio, infamously referring to both the police and anarchists as his 'brothers', which brought incredulity and derision from the barricades.⁷⁵

The deadlock was broken by the arrival of thousands of Assault Guards from Valencia on 6 May. Barricades were abandoned, anarchist cadres and patrols were disarmed, CNT premises were torched, and hundreds of revolutionaries were arrested, imprisoned, and shot.⁷⁶ Alongside revolutionary anarchists, the POUM was identified as the source of the insurrection and subject to a wave of slander and violence. The POUM's executive committee was arrested on 16 June, and its leader, Andreu Nin, was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered.⁷⁷ While the CNT-FAI could not be scapegoated and crushed as easily as the POUM (which received little support from the CNT), state forces took the opportunity provided by the May Days to end the urban revolution and quell the movement. With Barcelona subdued, the central government turned to Aragon, where it sent the Republican army to dismantle hundreds of collectives and dissolve the regional Council through the summer of 1937. Hundreds were arrested, including Joaquín Ascaso, and some killed as central state control was reasserted over the region.⁷⁸

The disarming of the rearguard in May 1937 was a crucial—also the final—act in the reassertion of 'social order' over 'rev-

⁷⁵ García Oliver provides a transcript of his message in *El eco de los pasos*, 425–427. Some on the barricades assumed that Oliver had been taken prisoner and made to speak these words, such was their disbelief, see Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 271–272.

⁷⁶ F. Godicheau, 'Los hechos de mayo de 1937 y los "presos antifascistas": Identificación de un fenómeno represivo', *Historia Social*, 44 (2002), 39–63.

⁷⁷ P. Pagès i Blanch, 'El asesinato de Andreu Nin, más datos para la polémica', *Ebre*, 58.4 (2010), 57–76.

⁷⁸ Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 173–180; J. Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham, vol. 2 (Hastings: Christie Books, 2005), 228–242.

CNT dominated Gijón following the defeat of the coup, yet revolutionary changes in the area were not sustained, in part due to the local movement's history of collaboration with its UGT counterpart and local Republican groups.²⁹ In Valencia region, the CNT was involved in collectivisations of industry in some mid-sized towns, yet the movement's gradualist leadership in Valencia city joined a mixed Popular Executive Committee at the start of the war, which permitted and facilitated the return of Republican state power.³⁰

Barcelona, in contrast, witnessed 'the greatest revolutionary festival in the history of contemporary Europe'.³¹ Rather than a 'spontaneous' reaction to the absence of state power, as is often depicted, the revolution in Barcelona was spearheaded by the CNT's local committees, in advance of—and at times in conflict with—the confederation's national and regional leadership.³² These groups mobilised the movement's grassroots, ensuring that working-class power was manifest in the streets: barricades and checkpoints criss-crossed the city; anarchist committees filled the void left by central and regional government; and surveillance groups and patrols took over from the police. The revolution was seen, heard, and felt: bourgeois clothes disappeared from public, replaced by workers' overalls; formal forms of address became redundant when all were comrades; streets were renamed after revolutionary heroes, such as Kropotkin and the Chicago martyrs; black and red

(2017), 123–143. On the internal struggles between the PCE and CNT within the Madrid defence council, see J. Aróstegui and J.A. Martínez, *La Junta De Defensa de Madrid: Noviembre 1836–Abril 1937* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1984), 136–140.

²⁹ P. Radcliff, 'The culture of empowerment in Gijón, 1936–1937,' in C. Ealham and M. Richards, *Splintering of Spain*, 113–155.

³⁰ A. Bosch Sánchez, *Ugetistas y libertarios: Guerra Civil y revolución en el País Valenciano, 1936–1939* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1983), 15–126.

³¹ Ealham, *Anarchism*, 173.

³² Guillamón, *Revolution*, 71–107.

CNT–FAI banners were everywhere.³³ International observers recall the tangible sense of revolution when they arrived in the city in the summer of 1936.³⁴ To Franz Borkenau, an Austrian academic and former member of the German Communist Party, ‘it was as if we had been landed on a continent different from anything I had seen before’.³⁵ Mary Low, a 24-year-old POUM volunteer, found it

extraordinarily exciting [...] a feeling of new strength and activity seemed to radiate from the crowds of people in the streets [...] Housefronts were alive with waving flags in a long avenue of dazzling red. Splashes of black and white cut through the colour from place to place. The air was filled with an intense din of loud-speakers [...] Between the pauses, snatches of the “Internationale” burst out over the crowd.³⁶

A similar impression was made on George Orwell—another British volunteer for the POUM—when he arrived some months later: ‘Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle’.³⁷

³³ Ealham, *Anarchism*, 173–180.

³⁴ Critical analysis of international accounts of the revolution is given in V. Cunningham, ‘Introduction’, in V. Cunningham (Ed.) *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ix–xxxiii and Gerd-Rainer Horn, ‘The language of symbols and the barriers of language: Foreigners’ perceptions of social revolution (Barcelona 1936–7)’, *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1990), 42–64.

³⁵ F. Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit: An Eye-Witness Account of the Political and Social Conflicts of the Spanish Civil War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 69.

³⁶ M. Low and J. Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook: The First Six Months of the Revolution and Civil War* (London: Martin Seckler and Warburg, 1937), 18–20.

³⁷ G. Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 2000), 2–3. For a recent critical appraisal of Orwell’s account see P. Preston, ‘Lights and

front as militarisation intensified in early 1937, returning to Barcelona and forming groups such as the *Amigos de Durruti* (ADD) which sought to maintain the revolution against compromise and Republican encroachment.⁷¹

Counter-Revolution

On 3 May 1937, Generalitat security forces attempted to seize the telephone exchange (*Telefónica*) in Barcelona’s Plaza de Catalunya, which the CNT had held since the start of the war. Anger at this assault on the symbolic centre of revolutionary power sparked the mobilisation of around 7000 anarchists across the city.⁷² By the following day, Barcelona was divided by barricades. Government forces were restricted to the central city, surrounded by working-class districts defended by armed workers and militants from the CNT, FAI, MMLL, JJLL, ADD, and POUM, with considerable support from foreign revolutionaries and civilian non-combatants. Street fighting across the ‘May Days’ which followed left scores of casualties on both sides, while the positions remained largely static. Like the July revolution, this was not a wholly ‘spontaneous’ mobilisation, rather it was coordinated by neighbourhood defence committees, acting in accordance with local-level decisions made in previous months.⁷³ It was not, however, sanctioned by the CNT–FAI leadership, many of whom spent the following days in the Generalitat attempting to calm the situation.⁷⁴ After being flown in from Valencia, Juan García Oliver

⁷¹ Guillamón, *Durruti*, 22–45.

⁷² M. Aguilera Povedano, ‘Los hechos de mayo de 1937: Efectivos y bajas de cada bando’, *Hispania*, 73:245 (2013), 789–816.

⁷³ Guillamón, *Revolution*, 177–183; Evans, ‘Anarchist’, 115–123.

⁷⁴ C. Ealham, ‘De la unidad antifascista a la desunión libertaria: Los comités superiores del movimiento libertario contra los quijotes anarquistas en el marco del Frente Popular (1936–1937)’, *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, 41.1 (2011), 136–137.

Republican forces and the XI International Brigade. In the following days of intense fighting, all sides suffered horrendous casualties—one report suggesting that three-quarters of the International Brigade and half the Durruti Column died—but, eventually, the Nationalist advance was halted.

On 19 November, Durruti was shot in the chest while reviewing the front and died the following morning. Speculation that he had been assassinated—by either a fascist, one of his own men angered by suspicions that he was joining the communists, or by the PCE and/or Soviet NKVD to silence a prominent critic—emerged almost immediately, which challenged official reports that the shot came from an accidental discharge of his weapon. Thousands came to watch and pay tribute to Durruti as his body was carried aloft through the streets of Barcelona at his funeral four days later.⁶⁷ One British attendee at this procession remarked that ‘it was like seeing a God or a statue killed [...] the Anarchists did everything they could to refuse [his] mortality’.⁶⁸

Durruti’s death had occurred amid pressure upon the anarchist militias to join the regular Republican army and accept military discipline, rank, and a tempering of the revolution. Both critics and supporters of militarisation within the movement looked to the words of the ‘heroic martyr’ Durruti to legitimise their position.⁶⁹ While he had appeared to become more favourable to some aspects of militarisation as the war progressed, Durruti had also shown unease at the compromises being made by the movement’s leadership, including its attitude to the militias.⁷⁰ Many members of his column left the

⁶⁷ Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. Chuck Morse (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 577–677.

⁶⁸ Low and Breá, *Red Spanish*, 215.

⁶⁹ Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 170–171. See also García Oliver’s invocation of Durruti during his May Days radio address in Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, 426–427.

⁷⁰ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 177–179.

A clear example of the new social relations brought about by the revolution was its unsettling of gender hierarchy. Uniquely amongst the Spanish left, the anarchist movement had incorporated gender liberation as a central element of its outlook and strategy since the late nineteenth century. The outbreak of the war gave anarchist women an opportunity to act on these principles. Many took up arms and joined popular militias during the defeat of the uprising. Images of these *milicianas* appeared regularly in the early revolution as a symbol of the liberation underway in anarchist-controlled zones.³⁸ A broader sense of female empowerment—a ‘feeling that together we could really do something’—was tangible in Barcelona.³⁹ Women became visible in a highly patriarchal public sphere, and gained decision-making positions on revolutionary committees. They also organised to maintain the possibilities opened up by the revolution, above all through the 20,000 strong anarcho-feminist group *Mujeres Libres* (MMLL), founded in May 1936 as a means to fight for equal pay and employment rights, advance gender liberation, and confront sexism within the movement.⁴⁰ MMLL also played a central role—alongside the anarchist youth organisation, FIJL (in Catalonia known as *Juventudes Libertarias*, JJLL)—in the dissemination of anarchist culture and propaganda. This was accompanied by a massive expansion of education provision in Catalonia which promoted literacy, technical training, and political instruction as the tools with which women, men, and children could empower themselves. Anarchist social centres also proliferated, providing night classes, public lectures, and

shadows in George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* (2017).

³⁸ M.A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), 93–97.

³⁹ Enriqueta Rovira cited in *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 115–197.

spaces of socialisation for workers.⁴¹ The revolution also provided a context in which the longstanding anarchist attention to public and sexual health could be enacted. A programme of 'eugenic reform' in Catalonia, led by the anarchist health minister Dr Martí Ibáñez, expanded maternity care and the prevention of venereal disease, and in December 1936 legalised abortion for the first time in the history of Spain.⁴²

The revolution was also manifest in economics and production. Around 3000 enterprises were collectivised in Barcelona in the first months of the war, as worker committees took control of the city's factories, communication, public services, and transport.⁴³ A number of sectors benefitted from consolidation into larger plants and new machinery, and maintained or exceeded the production levels of the poorly-organised pre-war system.⁴⁴ In many firms, salaries were levelled and workers' rights and conditions improved dramatically: 'it was amazing'—recalled one CNT textile worker—'everyone [...] felt themselves in charge now and with the right to speak for themselves'.⁴⁵ Despite these gains, collectivised industries faced a range of problems, including an acute lack of raw materials and difficulty accessing foreign markets. Many also operated with far less enthusiasm from their workforce than their committees envisaged. In Catalonia, membership of

⁴¹ On anarchist education during the Republic and Civil War, see A. Tiana Ferrer, *Educación libertaria y revolución social (España, 1936–1939)* (Madrid: UNED, 1987) and J. Navarro Navarro, *A la revolución por la cultura: Prácticas culturales y sociabilidad libertarias en el País Valenciano, 1931–1939* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2004).

⁴² R. Cleminson, *Anarchism, Sex and Science: Eugenics in Eastern Spain, 1900–1937* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 227–253.

⁴³ Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 136–142; F. Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management in Revolutionary Spain*, trans. P. Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2013), 63–77.

⁴⁴ See the example of Barcelona's bread industry in Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 140 and bus factory visited by Borkenau, in *Spanish Cockpit*, 89–91.

⁴⁵ Andreu Capdevilla cited in R. Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 214–215.

San Miguel de los Reyes prison, which besieged Teruel from the summer of 1936.⁶³ The majority of anarchist columns were formed in Barcelona and sent to the Aragon front as soon as the coup had been defeated. Many were headed by former members of the *Nosotros* group, which had been at the forefront of the insurrectionist section of the movement during the Second Republic. These included *Ortiz* (led by Antonio Ortiz), *Ascaso* (named after Francisco Ascaso, who had been killed during the assault on the Ataranzanas barracks and led by his brother Domingo), and *Los Aguiluchos* (initially headed by Juan García Oliver). Figures for these columns vary dramatically: contemporary anarchist sources claimed that up to 20–30,000 joined the militias, while more recent works estimate that most were around a tenth of that size.⁶⁴ Anarchist columns operated without martial discipline and military rank. Arms, ammunition, vehicles, and supplies were limited, and most volunteers had no training or experience in open battle. Nevertheless, they took almost a third of Aragon in the early weeks of the war, 'a greater achievement than any other [Republican] militia forces'.⁶⁵

The first, largest, and most famous of the columns to leave for the Aragon front was headed by Buenaventura Durruti, which raced through the region before being halted on the outskirts of Zaragoza.⁶⁶ Durruti was then called on to assist the defence of Madrid, where he arrived on 14 November, followed by 1400 of his column the following evening. They were immediately thrown into a counter-attack against Nationalist units which had broken the city's frontlines, alongside other

⁶³ de Guzmán, *Madrid*, 86–169; A. Paz, *The Story of the Iron Column: Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 31–45.

⁶⁴ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 109.

⁶⁵ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 132–136, 133.

⁶⁶ J. García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos* (Barcelona: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), 194–199.

Republican, socialist and communist representatives.⁵⁹ While it was hamstrung by internal disputes, the Council did manage to give a greater coherency to Aragon's collectives and made considerable efforts to increase production by providing credit and purchasing machinery.⁶⁰

As in urban areas, rural collectivisation faced strong criticism. Radicals within the anarchist movement saw it as a compromise and the Council of Aragon as a concession to the state.⁶¹ More damaging were attacks by protagonists of state reconstruction, who saw anarchist collectivisation as an impediment to a functioning war economy and centralised political control. The latter position was supported by small proprietors—particularly in Catalonia and Valencia (less so in the rural south and Aragon, where they were much fewer)—who found political expression in the communist PCE and its Catalan equivalent PSUC. Pressure from these groups ensured that in the majority of Republican territory, radical collectivisation was stalled and/or reversed from autumn 1936 onwards, even if collectivisation per se was allowed to continue on land expropriated from Nationalists.⁶²

War had provoked the revolution, and then shaped it as it developed, placing demands on collectivised industry and agriculture which orientated production towards the war effort. The revolution also shaped the war, most directly in the creation and contribution of anarchist militia columns, such as *Del Rosal*, *Águilas de Libertad*, and *España Libre* which were active in the defence of Toledo and Madrid, and the infamous *Columna de Hierro* (Iron Column) formed from 'extremist' elements of the Valencia CNT-FAI and prisoners released from

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 147–157.

⁶⁰ For a detailed analysis of the Council, see J. Casanova, *Anarquismo y revolución en la sociedad rural aragonesa, 1936–38* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 133–243.

⁶¹ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 391–392; Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 171–172.

⁶² Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 325–326.

CNT unions had soared in the early months of the war, up from a reported 150–175,000 prior to the revolution to around a million. As well as revolutionary enthusiasm, expediency was a significant factor in this surge, as union membership became a prerequisite for employment, accessing goods and services and ensuring personal safety. Throughout the war, CNT officials lamented the lack of engagement from newer members with the principles of the movement and the workings of its collectives, which hamstrung their operation and led to increasing coercive regulations, 'bourgeois' practices and disillusionment.⁴⁶

Urban collectivisation also faced hostility both from radical anarchists and from former owners and their political supporters. For the former, collectivisation had not gone far enough and needed to be accelerated into full socialisation, with complete bottom-up union control of the economy.⁴⁷ For critics outside the movement, collectivisation was an ill-disciplined, inadequate way to organise a war economy and needed to be reversed or displaced by top-down nationalisation. As state power began to return in Barcelona in the autumn of 1936, the initial wave of collectivisations was legalised, as the Generalitat—with support from the CNT leadership—sought to pull back control over the process and limit future worker-led initiatives.⁴⁸

Similar dynamics were at play in rural Republican Spain, where many communities took control of agricultural production following the outbreak of war. Rural collectivisation was not an exclusively anarchist project and varied dramatically

⁴⁶ See M. Seidman, 'The Unorwellian Barcelona', *European History Quarterly*, 20 (1990), 163–180.

⁴⁷ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 222 (see 210–236 for reflections on collectivisation from a range of participants and onlookers); Evans, 'Anarchist', 76–82.

⁴⁸ The legalisation decree of October 1936 is reproduced in Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 276–281.

across the country.⁴⁹ In what remained of the Republican south (Jaén, Almería, Murcia), and centre (areas of New Castile), collective practices had ‘deep roots’ which were older and broader than any specific ideological position.⁵⁰ Many of the collectives which formed in these areas thus did so in advance of union directives, which arrived later to give post-hoc justification to processes already in motion. A number of anarchist-led collectives were established in rural Valencia and Catalonia, and efforts made to orientate collectivised agriculture towards feeding the cities and re-establishing export markets. In both of these areas, however, collectivisation was less extensive than other agricultural regions—both in scale and in revolutionary character—and was met with greater and/or more organised resistance.⁵¹

The clearest expression of the anarchist revolution in rural Spain took place in eastern Aragon, where in some areas all land, tools, livestock, and produce was collectivised, alongside other sectors of the village economy, such as barbers, masons, and furniture-makers.⁵² Money was abolished, education provision was increased, vices—gambling, alcohol, and prostitution—were suppressed, and the freedoms of women were extended. Collectivisation was popular with poorer sections of the peasantry and rural proletariat, giving them

⁴⁹ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 130–131, cautiously cites official figures which suggest that 1469 rural collectives were formed across Republican Spain, run by the CNT (857), UGT (415), joint CNT-UGT (135), and other organisations (62).

⁵⁰ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 102–103.

⁵¹ See the attempt to coordinate the orange trade in Valencia in Mintz, *Anarchism*, 273–278. See also A. Bosch Sánchez, ‘The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: Rural conflict and collectivisation’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 75.5 ([1998], 117–132 and ‘Collectivisations: the Spanish Revolution revisited, 1936–9’, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 14.1 (2001), 4–16.

⁵² See A. Diez Torre, *Trabajan para la eternidad: Colectividades de trabajo y apoyo mutua durante la Guerra Civil en Aragón* (Madrid: La Malatesta and Zaragoza: Prensas Universidades de Zaragoza, 2009) for one of the most complete recent studies.

an unprecedented degree of ‘power and dignity’ and bringing substantial improvements in their material conditions. It also provoked resentment and violence, particularly in areas where the land was poor.⁵³ The origins of rural collectivisation in this region have long been the source of debate between those who regard it as a ‘foreign imposition’ of the Barcelona CNT, and those who see it as a grassroots initiative of the peasantry.⁵⁴ There is no simple answer to this question.⁵⁵ Many collectives were encouraged, directed, and defended by CNT–FAI militias and militants from Barcelona, which at times involved bloody repression against local opposition. In areas of CNT strength and high pre-war social conflict, however, collectivisation had been underway long before the militia arrived.⁵⁶ This debate also masks the dynamism of the rural sphere, in which the movement of ‘local’ activists between communities catalysed revolutionary changes and violence.⁵⁷

In October 1936, the CNT formed the Regional Defence Council of Aragon to coordinate the fragmented collectives and administer justice in the region. The Council was initially an entirely anarchist body, headed by Francisco Ascaso, a former member of the *Los Solidarios* action group and head of the Zaragoza CNT construction workers.⁵⁸ The movement’s influence in the Council was diluted prior to its legal ratification, as the central government and Generalitat brought in

⁵³ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 113–114.

⁵⁴ Compare the contemporary view of the PCE given in Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 347 and that of Casanova, *Anarchism*, 136–138, with those of Peirats, *CNT*, vol. 1, 231–239 and Mintz, *Anarchism*, 79–89.

⁵⁵ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 349.

⁵⁶ Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 157–166.

⁵⁷ A. Castillo Cañiz, ‘Anarchism and the countryside: Old and new stumbling blocks in the study of rural collectivization in the Spanish Civil War’, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29.3 (2016), 228.

⁵⁸ J. Ascaso, *Memorias (1936–1938): Hacia un nuevo Aragón* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2006), ix–xix.