

Six articles on the Spanish Revolution

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Pierre Besnard

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Preface by Frank Mintz

It is clear that the author never published this work, composed of the articles collected below, during his lifetime, but it is no less clear that he intended to do so. I do not know whether these texts were ever published in French.

My professed and obvious intention is to show, by way of Pierre Besnard, that the criticisms directed against government collaboration were just as or even more necessary during the era of civil war and the decisive years that followed, as they have been since the 1960s. Even more important is the description of a process of institutionalization of the CNT carried out by many militants who held responsible positions in the organization, a process that was contrary to the goals expressed by the CNT itself in its Congresses and put into practice by many syndicates during the civil war of 1936–1939.

Only the issues of the journal, *Universo* (*Universo: Sociología, Ciencia, Arte*. Toulouse, 1947–1948), referred to below, were consulted.

It is obvious that these texts were written with contemporary issues in mind, specifically the tactics of the CNT in the postwar world; this is also demonstrated by its *ad hominem* attacks, directed in particular against Diego Abad de Santillán and Horacio M. Prieto.

The subject of economics, addressed in the second article, gives way to a denunciation of the politicization of the CNT in the remaining five articles.

Nor do these articles comprise an academic study, although an interesting array of documents is quoted.

The theory of the perversion of the essential mechanism of the CNT by governmental collaboration is elaborated on the basis of contemporary texts. It will be noted that the critique is much more uncompromising than the one Vernon Richards was to publish five years later.

The style at times betrays certain Gallicisms and two or three of them have been modified (“to entertain relations”).

After searching Peirats’ *History of the CNT in the Spanish Revolution* for the documents quoted by Pierre Besnard, we discovered that Peirats’ book does not contain the quotations from the Plenary Session of the FAI of February 1936, the Plenary Session of July 21, 1936, or the Report of M. R. Vázquez. Nor did Peirats include any quotations from or references to Horacio M. Prieto’s January 1938 speech or Gilabert’s article published in November 1938. Nor is there even one single quotation from Azaretto’s book or Nettelau’s text that appeared in *La Soli* in May of 1936 or from *La Ruta*, or from the FAI article in *Tierra y Libertad* of December 1936, or Santillán’s article of June 1937.

On the other hand, Besnard quotes from the Plenary Session of the Catalan Regional Federation, but from a very distinct perspective. It will be noted that the Manifesto of February 14, 1936 issued by the National Committee of the CNT is reproduced, as in Peirats (without pointing out, in either case, that this Manifesto was written by Horacio M. Prieto). The article by Sebastián Faure also appears, which Peirats quotes in its entirety (in almost the same translation as Besnard’s quotations).

Frank Mintz
June 2001

The Political Economy of the CNT

Before plunging into an analysis of how the CNT reached the stage of governmental collaboration, we believe that it is necessary to discuss its performance in the domain of political economy, because there was no political-social event in the last twenty-five years that aroused so many expectations, or sowed the seeds of so many moral concerns, as the Revolution of July 19, 1936.

The actions of the Spanish anarchists and anarchosyndicalists have been the subjects of passionate debate. In many cases, the anarchists have been treated unjustly. Whether it is a question of if the Spanish experience can still serve to some extent as a model for any future plans of action; and mostly when an attempt is made today to extract lessons from the political experiences of the CNT and Spanish anarchism more generally: to the extreme of detecting voices in favor of revisionism, it would be advantageous to discover how those who—either dragged along by circumstances or else as a result of their lack of audacity and anarchist convictions—influenced the CNT to cross the Rubicon of governmental politics managed to do so.

We shall proceed, then, in the name of the minority opposed to governmental collaboration, to lift the veil that cloaks the confederal resolutions in that tragic period for the Spanish people, one that was so full of hopes for the international proletariat: The CNT, meeting in Barcelona, in a Plenary Session of the Local Federations and Regional Committees of Catalonia, while the machine guns were still rattling and the outcome of the struggle outside of Catalonia was still uncertain, the militants who took part in the debate on the analysis of the situation allowed themselves to be swayed by the arguments of a few comrades who advocated postponing the establishment of Libertarian Communism. In this debate we shall hear the words of Santillán, García Oliver, Vázquez, Juanel, Peiró, and many others. Those with the least charismatic personalities felt inhibited and, surrendering to these revolutionary harangues purged of Libertarian Communism, voted in favor of the following resolution, on July 21, 1936:

“The Plenary Session chooses not to proceed to carry out totalitarian measures due to the fact that it is confronted by the dilemma of imposing its dictatorship, violently destroying all those—soldiers, civil guards, and elements from other parties—who had fought alongside it and collaborated in bringing about the victory over the rebel forces, a dictatorship which would on the other hand be crushed by foreign intervention even if it is successful domestically. The Plenary Session declares for collaboration, and agrees, with the sole dissenting vote of the Regional Committee of Llobregat, to join the Committee of Antifascist Militias, together with all the other parties and organizations. The CNT and the FAI direct their representatives to abide by this resolution of the Plenary Session.” The fact that no debate was allowed, nor were any tactical revisions considered, is clearly stated in thousands of articles published in the CNT and FAI press: it would be more accurate to say, thousands of articles subject to the imposition of the views of their influential members; here is what A. Gilabert wrote on November 5, 1936 in Barcelona, published in *La Protesta* of Buenos Aires:

“Some enemies of anarchism, disguised as comrades, are now beginning to speak to us of principles, of tactics, and of ideas. They believe that anarchism has deviated from its normal trajectory, compromising with the bourgeoisie and violating its anti-state principles.”

“This criticism is by no means inspired by healthy motivations. They have a false bottom, which we must penetrate. So, then: anarchism in Spain has taken new road. It has rectified all its negative tendencies. When anarchism was a movement of permanent opposition, it advocated that everything that was established must be rejected. But in Spain we live in special circumstances. Here we have ceased to be an opposition in order to become a determining power. Anarchism, rather than rejecting, must create. Those who will create will be those who are victorious.”

“We cannot advocate a classical negative position characteristic of international anarchism for the Spanish people. The situation is too serious to spend our time looking on from the sidelines. Is there a positive example, an effective precedent from outside Spain that can help us find the way? International anarchism is too small to dictate terms to Spanish anarchism. We have to proudly show that Spain has to serve as an example to the anarchists of the whole world.”

“... We anarchists have the obligation and the duty to criticize and to lead the war against fascism and the revolution against capitalism, not only from below, from the rank and file, but also by assuming responsible positions in the institutions that rule the destiny of the country.”

“Those who criticize the position of the anarchists are concealed enemies, agents of the bourgeoisie, individuals who are not very pleased with the libertarian influence that has gravitated around the Spanish people.”

“This is the time of anarchism, and we must accept the struggle with all its consequences, assuming all responsibility for these decisive moments!”

This is how the young carpenter A. Gilabert, a municipal councilor for Barcelona, expressed his views, forgetting that he had written articles, as director of *Tierra y Libertad*, in opposition to the reformism of the so-called Treintistas and gallantly fought alongside the General Secretary of the Catalanian Regional Federation against the organization in Sabadell that refused to pay the confederal postage fees because it alleged that the CNT press was operated by the FAI. During the course of his involvement in this dispute Gilabert earned the sympathy of the whole Movement because of his character, his austere habits and his intransigence with regard to his convictions.

After July 19, however, he forfeited its sympathy due to his political collaboration alongside those who held influential posts in the specifically anarchist and confederal Movements. Later we saw him take on Torhyo, another revelation of the revolution, who did more damage than a hailstorm, from his position as editorial director of *Solidaridad Obrera*, to Movement and its ideas and whom we also find hiding out with J. J. Doménech, in the Culture Militias, posted in Port Brou, in order to be closer to the border to make a quick escape.

Another piece of evidence, among the thousands that we possess, which indicates that the minority was considered to be a threat, and the comrades of the minority just so many provocateurs, is the following passage from Puigcerdá's *El Sembrador*, from around December 1936:

“We anarchists are supporters of the serene, noble and documented critique, but we only grant this right to those who do everything they possibly can to defeat fascism. But we must be very careful with criticism. Now is the time for doing, for acting, rather than criticizing. As a general rule, it is a weapon that is easily wielded by

the saboteurs of the 'Fifth column', who must be silenced and eliminated." (*Crítica Constructiva*)

An insinuation that confounds the comrades of the opposition with fascist elements. Some friends lost their lives, because they had the courage to express their disagreements with the directives followed by the movement; directives that were issued by the Committees rather than the rank and file, as A. Gilabert unmistakably points out.

It is undeniable that a majority of the "leaders" ignored anarchist principles, tactics of direct action, and even the ideal postulates of anarchism, dragging the movement from a one retreat to another until it arrived at government collaboration, and from their position in the government directing the activities of the population for the purpose of "winning the war". There was a kind of lust for giving orders and commands. Today it seems to be indispensable for us to point out all these fluctuations.

Seven days after the Plenary Session of Barcelona, on July 28, 1936, the National Plenary Session of the Regional Committees was held in Madrid. There it was also agreed "not to speak of Libertarian Communism for the duration of the war, and to renounce any totalitarian intentions. We proclaim our desire to collaborate with the other Parties and organizations, especially with the UGT, and to participate in all the institutions that will be established in the various localities."

The Secretary of the National Committee of the CNT, M. R. Vázquez, interpreted this historical sentence in the following way:

"... Why did the CNT go to the Council of the *Generalitat*? Because this was decided by a Plenary Session of the Catalan Local and Regional Committees that was held during the month of August, which unanimously approved a directive elaborated by a subcommittee of the Plenary Session."

"It was thought that, in order to avoid the duplication of powers that was implied by the existence of the Committee of Antifascist Militias and the Government of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, the former must disappear and merge with the Council of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, carrying out more positive activities without the restrictions implied by the clash of jurisdictions and in order to put an end to the pretext of the democrats that they will not help us 'because the anarchists are in charge'." (page 96, report quoted above)

And with regard to the reasons that led to the incorporation of the CNT into the institutions of the national government, he said:

"On the fifteenth of September, 1936, a National Plenary Session of Regional Committees was held in Madrid. At this Session, the CNT defended the necessity of intervening in the military, economic and political leadership of the country, in order to assure that its forces fighting on the battlefronts are respected and to guarantee that the economy of the workers can be directed without having to face the obstacles and hindrances that were constantly being put in its way by the central Government. As you may see in the resolutions of the Plenary Session, the CNT also supported such intervention in the provincial and regional Local Councils." ("Report to the Extraordinary Congress of the IWA", December 1937, page 97).

We have seen how Horacio M. Prieto boasted of having dragged the CNT into the Government.

The fact that this syndicalist was more of a Marxist than an anarchist, with his attempt to constitute an Anarchist Party, is demonstrated by his speech at the conference he held in the meeting hall of the CNT-FAI center on January 9, 1938, portions of which we reproduce below:

“.... As for us, we cannot say that we are going to live in libertarian communism, because that is not possible in Spain. A strict regime of anarchist collectivism, of that autonomy characteristic of anarchist collectivism, is not possible, because it would signify the atomization of our confederal economy; we cannot live in other more advanced, more perfect systems, because that is just a dream. What we have to do is to live in coexistence with and offer to the other sectors the necessary confidence so that the war can be won. That is why our organization has said: we have to be discriminating regarding the possibilities of our economy. The nationalization of certain sectors of industry and commerce has been accepted, and so has the system of collectivization for the secondary industries of domestic consumption; we also accept, we recognize it as something inevitable, and irreplaceable, the existence of the petit bourgeoisie. But the existence of the petit bourgeoisie must be defended for the purposes of the development of our system, of our experiments, of our economic realities. Wherever they exist, the institutions of political administration must be defended, for they are the institutions that really give the orders. If the Bolsheviks were able to achieve—and do not be disturbed by such comparisons—if they were able to do what they did; to create a basic industrial economy, which has been the salvation of that kind of hybrid socialism that exists in Russia, this was because, above and beyond the economic difficulties, they had the political power that they had absolutely no intention of abdicating, and in the early days of the economic reconstruction of the USSR, the Executive Committee of the Soviets had to rely on foreign businesses in order to build the industrial foundation of the country’s economy. And naturally they entered into temporary economic agreements with those businesses; and the interference of foreign capitalism was incapable of disrupting the country’s political order because the latter is composed of the world’s most formal and serious economic organizations, because not even the economic organization of North America possesses the systematic perfection and the functional coordination that characterizes the Soviet economy....” (“Issues debated at the Economic Plenary Session of the CNT”, page 14).

Horacio M. Prieto, who would assume the post of Assistant Secretary of Health, despite his past as a miner, had no scruples about sitting at a desk in the office of the Subsecretariat, and made himself comfortable; he had before him the perspective of political command, of that command that obsessed him, which led him to sing the praises of the political and economic arrangements of communist Russia. Prieto was a member of the National Committee, its Assistant Secretary, he was one of those who fought hardest to divert the revolutionary achievements towards the channels of republican legality. Like Santillán, García Oliver, David Antona, M. R. Vázquez, Aurelio Fernández, etc., he was one of the leading advocates of the CNT policy shift. These elements will never be able to claim that they represented the general sentiment of the militants. We have seen that they imposed their views on the militants, and their confessions clear up many obscurities for us.

What cannot be too loudly proclaimed, because it is true, is that in opposition to this passion for antifascist command and collaboration at any price, there was a minority, that was able to express itself publicly, in complete independence, and was actually the majority prior to July 19, with the exception of those who found themselves promoted to managerial positions due to the demands of the offices they occupied and which the new recruits—who formed the new majority—considered indispensable. This phenomenon will always take place, whenever the foundations of the regime that is supposed to be slated for destruction are left standing.

We shall also point out that those converted to ministerialism delivered their oral and written propaganda in a tone of patriotic and authoritarian exaltation. We shall not waste time or space in reproducing the infinity of texts displaying the wide variety of arguments utilized to uphold and defend the trend to merge with the State and its mechanistic institutions or laws. We shall not do so because we cannot conceive of the possibility that the finely-wrought minds of the anarchists could change their views from night to day so suddenly, especially when we recognize that this represented an abandonment of the principles that they had upheld and defended and for which they had shed rivers of blood. We shall now attempt to decipher the impact of those days and their consequences, and see how the majority of those who so cheerfully assimilated to the antifascist bureaucracy, the easy chairs in the offices, and military command persisted in their disruption of the organic and spiritual unity of Spanish anarchism.

Some words of Max Nettlau's, written in *Solidaridad Obrera* of Barcelona, in May 1936, seem apposite in this connection and we shall present them for the purpose of refuting those who still have their followers, after having besmirched themselves and with worthy pretenses having proceeded to a revision of anarchist tactics and principles:

"Anarchism has been subject, for the last forty years, to infiltrations, which call themselves pure syndicalism, nationalism, dictatorship, the transitional period, platformism, etc., and in this category also belongs the fashion, which has arisen now and certainly not for the first time, of electoral collaborationism. The very distinction between 'questions of principle' and 'simple tactical questions', which implies that, for 'tactical' reasons, principles can be trampled on, has not the slightest kinship with the anarchist mentality. The anarchist position knows only 'one formula' and not 'two': it either professes ideas or it abandons them by 'overcoming all scruples'."

"These infiltrations inevitably destroy all libertarian feelings in their victims and transform them sooner or later, but generally quite rapidly, into nationalists, fascists, Bolsheviks, politicians, labor leaders."

"This inevitable debris represents the results of a kind of process of self-purging of weak and inconsistent elements, who believe they are anarchists without ever really having become anarchists. And just as a great river cannot be polluted by the deleterious substances poured into it, the long-lived worldwide current of anarchism is automatically purifying itself and will continue on its forward progress."

"Every day it is becoming clearer that the definitive struggle will be neither economic nor political, or between classes or parties, but intellectual and ethical, and it will take place, under multiple forms, between the intellectually and morally advanced progressive individuals, and the backward elements who are hardly developed. It is necessary to state frankly: this struggle must result in complete, healthy and ro-

bust Anarchy, and not this sad miscarriage that is being engendered by the tireless ‘infiltrators’, which is clear to anyone that is paying attention.”

D. Abad de Santillán, the single person who bears the greatest responsibility for the disasters suffered by the Revolution of July 19, 1936, proclaimed that he completely identified with the views of the deceased Nettlau, in his address on the occasion of the master’s death. And he did so without blushing even once over having “jumped over the barriers of accepted doctrine at the opportunity provided by the elections of February 1936, when he recommended voting to block the progress of fascism.”

Max Nettlau, who noted the deviations that were introduced into the tactics of the FAI when the great maestro D. A. Santillán and the no less famous Juan García Oliver imposed them with the help of their bodyguards and their bravado at meetings and assemblies, raised the alarm. Unfortunately, the course of events and above all the apathy of the world proletariat smothered the ethics of Spanish anarchism, and the voice of reason chose to retreat rather than unleash a suicidal struggle in the midst of a full-blown revolution among the workers that aimed at the overthrow of capitalism and the State.

We shall conclude this discussion with a few fragments from Manuel Azaretto’s biographical sketch of D. Abad de Santillán, captioned “The capers of a fool”, in his book, *Las Pendientes Resbaladizas (Slippery Slopes)*, published by Germinal in Montevideo in 1939.

“We shall not deny that he is an accomplished writer and we shall also say in his favor that, besides his intellectual background, he is quite photogenic, but all his good qualities cannot erase the disappointing impression we get from his life as a militant anarchist, so full of inconsistencies, and his sociological works plagued with disconcerting contradictions.”

“It would seem that he possesses a mentality that is open to every suggestion; adaptable to the influences of the environment, of the climate and of the men with whom he is in contact; he displays an exaggerated impressionability which causes him to lose control of his reflective faculties, going so far as to deny today what he proclaimed yesterday, and then to say the opposite tomorrow morning of what he said the evening before.”

“Uriburu’s military coup takes place in Argentina, and Santillán becomes an enthusiastic propagandist in favor of an alliance between the radicalized syndicalists, the Marxist political parties and the anarchist groups that are affiliated with the FORA.”

“... As a result of some measures taken by Uriburu’s police which presaged danger for those who would abuse violent language in order to appear revolutionary, Santillán was forced to flee to Montevideo and here we see him among the circles of café society hanging out with political exiles.”

“The president of Uruguay, Terra, declared himself dictator and dismissed all the *Blancos* and *Batllista Colorados* from their government posts. Santillán began to hobnob with those who now passed themselves off as member of the “opposition” and, from a disgraceful amalgam of *Blancos*, *Batllistas*, socialists, Bolsheviks and anarchosyndicalists, created the ‘Committee for Agitation against Dictatorship’, and attempted

to drag the FORU onto this confused terrain, which led to an open breach between him and the anarchists of Uruguay.”

“After his ‘brilliant’ intervention in Montevideo and after advocating concepts of alliance-building that were incompatible with those he supported in his writings, he took his leave, ‘cheerful and confident’, from this environment, in which it was not possible for him to successfully advocate his ‘new circumstantialist’ theory.”

“Shortly afterwards he made his triumphant appearance on the Iberian Peninsula, and one would have imagined that a man of such intellectual accomplishments and with such a history of experiences gained in his adventures with ‘democratic’ politicians, would have gotten the reception he deserved from the Spanish workers, and that he would have given them the opportunity to test his sociological ‘discoveries’. The environment must have been most conducive to his designs.” (*Slippery Slopes*, pp. 111–112).

Upon his arrival in Spain he met us at the *Café de las Delicias de la Barceloneta*; there we were, and we were shocked by his proposals, which called for a revolutionary alliance. He wanted to take advantage of the military leaders like Ramón Franco, Romero, Farrás, Medrano, etc., in order to carry out the Revolution in Spain, which had not yet been able to transfer power from the Monarchy to the new-style republicans. After that we only saw him occasionally, but we could not help but be aware of his existence after seeing Bolshevism making headway in the organization and that he had become the factotum of the FAI. There could be no more disastrous ideologue; therefore, together with Eusebio Carbó, we distributed the weekly *Further*, already in the latter part of 1935, in order to confront these deviations from anarchism. Santillán himself, together with his entire entourage, which comprised the group, ‘Astros’, and ‘the Argentinians’ who were in control of the Secretariat of Public Relations, spread the word to sabotage our newspaper. We received death threats. But our paper was published and distributed. This explains why E. Carbó, at the very beginning of the movement, was sidelined and only later was given secondary responsibilities where he could not influence anybody.

Now Santillán associates with the schismatics, with the supporters of collaboration: that is what he is like, and many are those who refreshed themselves from his fountain who lost their paradise, as he lost his, by losing the Spanish Revolution, but they are not the same people who lost the most in the struggle, since they were subsequently granted lifestyles that none of them could have ever dreamed of enjoying in a capitalist regime. The theoretician of the revolutionary economy was ousted by Cardona Rossell, the genius who discovered the National Committee. Now we shall examine the characteristic traits of the Cardonian economy; it is much like the Santillanian one. We shall also document the resistance of the collectives to submitting to the economic dictatorship of the higher committees.

P. Besnard, *Universo*, No. 6 (p. 11, text dated April 1947)

The CNT Impresses a New Course on the Economy

Numerous critics have entered the fray, most of them in order to distort the social economic concept of the collectives, without devoting any profound attention to the spirit that guided the

confederal workers in their establishment of a new regime of collective production and distribution. Instead of examining any defects this new economic idea may have displayed, the detractors of the Revolution limit themselves to simply and straightforwardly condemning the system. Why? Because it was an idea originated by the confederal workers and the anarchists who were more concerned about the interests of the people than about trying to discover obsolete political formulas to keep an economic corpse on life support with oxygen tanks, an economic system that must inevitably and historically die at the hands of the organized workers. The CNT, that turbulent organization, that headless centipede, which has so often been criticized and attacked because it did not have a definite program for political, economic and social policy, was the organization that assumed the burden of ensuring that the economy, in full social chaos, would not collapse, but would progressively and actively develop within the purview of the imperious needs which circumstances had imposed on life. It would do this, after having carried out a referendum of the great assemblies of workers, from its positions in the Government. And quite logically it would be from the position of the Government of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia that the CNT would declare to the entire world that the capitalist system, with its old ways of organizing production and distribution, no longer works and as a result it will be replaced by a new economic order. This decree, with all the defects it contains from the integral point of view of the libertarian economy, is a declaration of economic rights conquered by the workers, and not many years would pass before they would also be seen in capitalist Constitutions, for the purpose of preventing the social revolution, just as the famous declarations of the Rights of Man of the French Revolution have been inscribed in the general consciousness of the times since that event. In order to give it the attention it deserves, which is of signal importance in the development of the Spanish Revolution and sheds light on the responsibility of the CNT in its political and governmental stage, we reproduce the Decree that granted legal recognition to the juridical personality of the collectives controlled and led by the Syndicates:

“It is decreed: the criminal military rebellion of July 19 has produced an extraordinary disruption in the country’s economy. The Council of the *Generalitat* must attend to the reconstruction of the damages caused to the industry and trade of Catalonia by the treason of those who are attempting to impose a regime of violence on our country. The popular reaction produced by the rebellion has been of such intensity, that it has provoked a profound social-economic transformation, the foundations of which are being consolidated in Catalonia. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of an ever smaller group of persons, was followed by the accumulation of misery in the working class and by the fact that that small group of persons, in order to preserve its privileges, did not hesitate to provoke a bloody war; the victory of the people will amount to the death of capitalism.”

“Therefore, it is now necessary to organize production, to orient it in such a way that the sole beneficiary will be the collective, the worker, to whom the managerial function of the new social order corresponds. The concept of income that does not proceed from labor is hereby abolished.”

“The principle of the social-economic organization of big industry must be collectivized production.”

“The Council of the *Generalitat* thus conceives of the replacement of individual property by collective property, by collectivizing the wealth of big businesses, that is, capital, and leaving the private ownership of consumption goods and small businesses to their own devices.”

“The revolutionary effort of the working class, by rising with arms in hand to crush fascism, places this transformation of the economic and social structure which had lasted until a short time ago on the agenda. One of the fundamental problems it poses is that of the organization of labor, which must articulate the sources of wealth and order their distribution in accordance with social necessities.”

“After July 19, the openly fascist bourgeoisie deserted their posts, most having fled to other countries; a minority disappeared. The affected industrial plants cannot remain without supervision and the workers decided to intervene, creating committees of workers control. The Council of the *Generalitat* had to sanction and provide direction to what the workers had spontaneously implemented.”

“Due to the situation of some of these enterprises, the workers, to safeguard their own interests, were obliged to proceed to confiscate them, thus creating the need for the collectivization of industry. The Council of the Economy, attentive to the wishes of the working class and complying with the program the working class had previously approved, responds to this impulse and orients the whole economic life of Catalonia in accordance with the will of the workers.”

“But the collectivization of enterprises would have little significance if its further development and reinforcement was not assisted. Towards this end the Council of the Economy has taken upon itself the task of studying the basic norms by means of which the establishment of a Bank of Industrial and Commercial Credit may be implemented, which would allocate financial aid to the Collectivized enterprises and organize our industry into large-scale concentrations that would assure the maximum income and make possible the best terms for our foreign trade. The necessary studies for the creation of an institution for research and development that would give industry more efficiency and progress are also underway.”

“In consideration of the previous facts and in view of the report of the 20th, the Council of the Economy, in response to the proposal of the Minister of the Economy and with the agreement of the Council decrees as follows:”

“Article No. 1. In accordance with the norms which are established in the present decree, the industrial and commercial enterprises of Catalonia are classified as follows:”

“a) Collectivized enterprises, in which the responsibility for management falls upon the workers themselves in each enterprise, represented by an Enterprise Council, and,”

“b) Private enterprises, in which management is the responsibility of the owner or manager with the collaboration and financing of the Control Committee. (In Article No. 2 and the subsequent Articles, legal and juridical norms are set forth concerning

the collectivizations, and it is stated that any enterprise with more than fifty workers must be rigorously collectivized.)”

On October 31, with this Decree, the revolutionary conquests of the working class were officially recognized. What was going on in the minds of those militants who chose to leave intact the principle of private property in those businesses that did not have more than 50 workers? It would be interesting to hear how those persons who were driving the CNT towards political power, and who held that the theories of libertarian communism or economic federalism cannot be implemented without a monetary denominator, would answer that question. They would undoubtedly respond that the indifference and the indolence of the workers outside Spain with regard to the Spanish Revolution, forced them to make concessions to that petit bourgeoisie with a liberal tradition that had joined the fight against fascism from the very beginning. Under the cover of this concession, however, the petit bourgeoisie organized sabotage against the collectives. This counterrevolutionary work was especially practiced by the Communist Party and the other political fractions of the so-called anti-fascist Left. The passage of time will shed further light on this enormous responsibility, and do honor to the generosity of the National Confederation of Labor and the Iberian Anarchist Federation, neither of which ever abused their numerical superiority to impose their social ideas, but which only sought to make accommodations in order to fortify the principle of revolutionary unity that had been established in the streets during the fight against the age-old enemy of the oppressed.

Not all the collectivized enterprises, or all the syndicates, complied without objections to the decrees of the Council of the *Generalitat* with regard to the collectivized economy, nor did they unconditionally submit. These resisters thought that the incorporation of the confederal economy under the official control of the State was equivalent to stabbing the revolution in the back. Until the end of the war there was a powerful core of opposition to the incorporation and legalization of the collectives as ordered by the Government. And, curiously enough, those which thrived and operated most smoothly were the ones that did not accept either the tutelage or the control of the Economic Council of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia.

The Minister of the Economy of the *Generalitat* himself would complain about this opposition at the Congress of the Syndicates of Catalonia. And the Minister D. Abad de Santillán, who would replace Fábregas on the Council of the Economy, in the June 1937 issue of the journal, *Tiempos Nuevos*, wrote a few carefully-chosen words which indicated that he sought to justify the tortuous detours that he and so many others were imposing on the Revolution:

“The correlation and dependence, however, notwithstanding the harmony that should always reign between words and deeds, between ideas and the facts to which they give rise, between the doctrines and the practical conduct of those who uphold those doctrines, do not proceed hand in hand, and general principles, which are the essence, are confused with tactical means, which depend on the circumstances and are influenced by them.”

“The principles, the ideal, are like the compass that guides one’s steps towards the goal. They are the straight line traced in our abstractions. Tactics is the application of these principles, of this trajectory, to the contingencies and tortuous pitfalls of the road. It is often the case that it is the straight line that leads most rapidly and most surely to the goal; sometimes you get there more quickly by following a zigzag

course. It will even happen that one makes the most progress and gets to the goal first by retracing one's steps."

"With respect to all of these matters, the most important thing is not to lose sight of the ideal, even when it is ebbing, the magnetic north to which the compass of our *raison d'être* points. But a thousand roads lead to Rome and the choice of the best one depends on a multitude of circumstances and factors prevailing at the moment the choice has to be made...."

This thesis and the Jesuit theory that "the end justifies the means", which was embraced by the Moscow communists, are like two peas in a pod. These contradictions expressed by those who had been the mentors of the libertarian Revolution gave rise to doubts, and sowed distrust among the militants who did not want to make any concessions to the bourgeoisie or to the State. This consequently led to a split between the minority and the majority. But the sense of responsibility that was so deeply rooted in the anarchist conscience, prevented the minority from ever engaging in systematic obstruction, and caused it to restrict its criticisms to pointing out the defective interpretations of libertarian ideas. History will not pass a very kind judgment on the men of the CNT and FAI who drove the Revolution towards a goal that was more political than social, forgetting the postulates that were, are and will be the *raison d'être* of those two organizations. All the excuses and all the justifications offered will never erase their responsibility for not having tried to integrally implement the theories of Libertarian Communism as defined at the Zaragoza Congress of May 1936, which are reproduced below, copied from the official report:

(We shall not transcribe the commentaries from the introduction to the Zaragoza Program written by the Program Committee (for the full text, see *Concepto del Comunismo Libertario*, published by "Acción Social" in Lyon) due to their length. We shall only quote from the Preliminary Statement.)

"Proletarians! On a war footing against the monarchist and fascist conspiracy! Day by day the suspicion is growing that rightist elements are ready to provoke military intervention... Insurrection has been deferred, pending the outcome of the elections. They are to implement their preventive plan if there is a leftist victory at the polls. We are not the defenders of the Republic, but we will do unstinting battle with fascism, committing all of our forces to rout the historical executioners of the Spanish proletariat. Furthermore, we have no hesitation in recommending that, wherever the legionnaires of tyranny launch armed insurrection, an understanding be speedily reached with antifascist groups, with vigorous precautions being taken to ensure that the defensive contribution of the masses may lead to the real social revolution and libertarian communism. Let everyone be vigilant. Should the conspirators open fire and should their fascist rebellion be defeated in its first stages, then the act of opposition must be pursued to its utmost consequences without tolerating attempts by the liberal bourgeoisie and its Marxist allies to hold back the course of events. Once hostilities begin in earnest, and irrespective of who initiates them, democracy will perish between two fires because it is irrelevant and has no place on the field of battle. If, on the other hand, the battle is tough, that recommendation will be redundant, for no one will stop until such time as one side or the other has been eliminated; and during the people's victory its democratic illusions would be dispelled. Should it be otherwise, the nightmare of dictatorship will annihilate

us. Either fascism or social revolution. The defeat of fascism is the duty of the whole proletariat and all lovers of freedom, weapons in hand, yet the most profound preoccupation of members of this Confederation is that the revolution should be social and libertarian. If we are to be the greatest source of inspiration of the masses, if they are to initiate libertarian practices and create an unbreachable bulwark against the authoritarian instincts of the whites and the reds alike, we must display intelligence and unity of thought and action."

"The revolution, therefore, has its origins in the moment when the gulf between the state of society and the individual conscience is realized, when the latter finds itself, either through instinct or through analysis, obliged to react against the former."

"So, in a few words, our belief is that revolutions come about:

1. as a psychological phenomenon opposed to a given state of affairs which stands in contradiction to individual aspirations and needs;
2. as a social phenomenon, whenever that response takes collective shape and clashes with the capitalist system;
3. as organization, whenever the need is felt to create a force capable of imposing the realization of its biological objective."

"In the external order, these factors deserve to be stressed:"

1. breakdown of the ethic which serves as the foundation of the capitalist system;
2. the economic bankruptcy of that system;
3. failure of its political manifestations, whether the democratic system or, in its ultimate expression, state capitalism or, to all intents and purposes, authoritarian communism."

"When these factors coincide at a given point and time, a violent act is needed to lead into the truly evolutionary phase of the revolution."

"In the belief that we are now at the precise point when the convergence of all those factors may bring about this tantalizing possibility we deem it necessary to frame a proposition which, in broad outline, profiles the basic pillars of the future social edifice."

"Constructive conception of the revolution. Our understanding is that our revolution should be organized on a strictly equitable basis."

Later in the text the constructive concept of the revolution is discussed as follows:

"... If all the roads that lead to Rome also lead to the Eternal City, all the forms of labor and distribution that lead towards the idea of an egalitarian society, also lead to the realization of justice and social harmony."

"Therefore, we believe that the revolution must be founded upon the social and ethical principles of Libertarian Communism. And these are:"

1. "Provide to every human being with what his needs require, without any limits other than those imposed by the possibilities of the economy;"

2. "Ask every human being to contribute the maximum of their efforts, with a view to the needs of society, taking account of the physical and moral conditions of each individual."

The definition continues with a discussion of the organization of the new society after the revolution:

"Once the revolution has moved beyond its violent phase, the following will be abolished: private property, the state, the principle of authority and, consequently, the classes which divide humanity into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed."

"With wealth socialized, the unfettered organizations of the producers will assume charge of the direct administration of production and consumption." (pp. 5-6)

In the Economic Decree we examined previously, one or two aspects of the declaration of these principles of Libertarian Communism shine through, although dimly. This shows that, in the conscience of the men of the CNT, they intended to carry out a profound revolution, but they stumbled up against the ramifications of trying to do so during a war, with a series of foreign difficulties; which prevented them from taking radical measures against capitalism. By mentioning these facts and causes we are not attempting to justify their vacillations, nor are we trying to vindicate those who followed the course that we are outlining with the maximum of objectivity. We are only guided by the intention to serve the future interests of the revolution. And we shall be satisfied if the workers, as a result of their study of these passages of the history of the revolution, take these contradictions into consideration in order to restore their faith in the incalculable possibilities offered by workers organization, which proceeds resolutely towards the integral conquest of individual freedom.

Not all the Syndicates or collectivized enterprises submitted unconditionally to the decrees of the official bulletin of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. A significant minority was refractory to yielding to political power. This minority salvaged the dignity of the confederal organization. These individuals, who have been subjected to a major campaign of slander because they refused to surrender to government control, will someday be vindicated as integralists, that is, those who capitulated to neither fascism nor the antifascist power, despite having submitted to the majoritarian agreements of the organization, with the exception of a handful of people who, as a result of their exalted individualism, could be said to have lived on the margins of all these organic battles and tactical principles.

Inside or outside the Government, the confederal organization never ceased to serve the interests of the people. Some of its militants may have prostituted themselves, but the cadres and the Organization as a whole preserved their integrity.

When we review the work of the collectivizations, we shall have the opportunity to assess the importance and the value represented by the workers in their collectivized economy. Their achievement is a refutation of the State-run planned economy. It is this aspect which provides incontestable evidence that libertarian socialism is the guarantee of individual and collective freedom, that federalism in production is the perpetual powerhouse that produces, without being externally imposed, more than twice the output without the need of moral or material forms of coercion; duty played the role of the greatest stimulus for society to develop without the miseries of the capitalist system.

Let us say once again that the Confederal minority never undertook a project of systematic obstruction; it restricted itself to pointing out errors and deviations from libertarian ideas.

There is no greater dualism than that displayed by ideas in their crystallized forms. This is significant and must be taken into account, because it represents the central nervous system of confederal organization.

P. Besnard, *Universo*, No. 8 (on p. 18 there is a letter dated June 1947)

The Introduction of the Political Virus into the CNT

Now that we have had confederal and anarchist government ministers, it is not inappropriate to acquaint ourselves with the main proponents of this tendency by examining the texts of their interventions in the debate. If we refrain from naming those who worked the hardest to turn the CNT into just another government institution, alleging that they did so in order to wage the war and protect the revolution, this is because their names are known, and if they are not, they will be exposed as they appear on the following pages. One of the elements who did the most to put an end to all revolutionary activity, was Horacio Prieto. Prieto held a conference in the meeting hall of the CNT-FAI of the Regional Committee of Catalonia which left the majority of the spectators utterly astonished. This conference is a monument to bourgeois politics and economics, a denial of the constructive capacity of the worker and his own organizations. The speaker confided everything to the technical management of the existing power structure. On that day, January 9, 1938, Horacio Prieto took off the kid gloves.

“... As for us, we cannot say that we are going to live in libertarian communism, because that is not possible in Spain. A strict regime of anarchist collectivism, of that autonomy characteristic of anarchist collectivism, is not possible, because it would signify the atomization of our confederal economy; we cannot live in other more advanced, more perfect systems, because that is just a dream. What we have to do is to live in coexistence with and offer to the other sectors the necessary confidence so that the war can be won. That is why our organization has said: we have to be discriminating regarding the possibilities of our economy. The nationalization of certain sectors of industry and commerce has been accepted, and so has the system of collectivization for the secondary industries of domestic consumption; we also accept, we recognize it as something inevitable, and irreplaceable, the existence of the petit bourgeoisie. But the existence of the petit bourgeoisie must be defended for the purposes of the development of our system, of our experiments, of our economic realities. Wherever they exist, the institutions of political administration must be defended, for they are the institutions that really give the orders. If the Bolsheviks were able to achieve—and do not be disturbed by such comparisons—if they were able to do what they did; to create a basic industrial economy, which has been the salvation of that kind of hybrid socialism that exists in Russia, this was because, above and beyond the economic difficulties, they had the political power that they had absolutely no intention of abdicating, and in the early days of the economic reconstruction of the USSR, the Executive Committee of the Soviets had to rely on foreign businesses in order to build the industrial foundation of the country’s economy. And naturally they entered into temporary economic agreements with those businesses; and the interference of foreign capitalism was incapable of disrupting the country’s political order because

the latter is composed of the world's most formal and serious economic organizations, because not even the economic organization of North America possesses the systematic perfection and the functional coordination that characterizes the Soviet economy..."

This little sample is more than enough for us to see where the northerner Prieto wants to lead the confederal economy. And whatever his intentions may have been when he was a member of the National Committee ... his admiration for the constructive potential of the USSR is a blindness with regard to the issues of control that obsessed him, and his admiration for the political system of the USSR is the expression of the power he held in his hands and his desire to make everything run like clockwork.

We shall not provide a biographical sketch of the speaker, because we do not write biographies of anybody. That day will come when the moral process of the Spanish Revolution is revealed. Then the workers will have the last word when they pass judgment on the co-authors of the moral regression their collaboration in the name of the CNT represented for Spanish anarchism, and on their political and economic alliances that strangled the Revolution and thereby brought about the loss of all of its conquests at the hands of fascism, which took advantage of the circumstances. No one should forget that revolutions are swallowed by the men who turn them from their natural course by means of backroom political deals.

Another very important document, despite its other aspects, is an article by A. Gilabert entitled "Anarchism's Moment", written on November 5, 1936 and published in the Buenos Aires journal, *La Protesta*.

"Some enemies of anarchism, disguised as comrades, are now beginning to speak to us of principles, of tactics, and of ideas. They believe that anarchism has deviated from its normal trajectory, compromising with the bourgeoisie and violating its anti-state principles."

"This criticism is by no means inspired by healthy motivations. They have a false bottom, which we must penetrate. So, then: anarchism in Spain has taken new road. It has rectified all its negative tendencies. When anarchism was a movement of permanent opposition, it advocated that everything that was established must be rejected. But in Spain we live in special circumstances. Here we have ceased to be an opposition in order to become a determining power. Anarchism, rather than rejecting, must create. Those who will create will be those who are victorious."

"We cannot advocate a classical negative position characteristic of international anarchism for the Spanish people. The situation is too serious to spend our time looking on from the sidelines. Is there a positive example, an effective precedent from outside Spain that can help us find the way? International anarchism is too small to dictate terms to Spanish anarchism. We have to proudly show that Spain has to serve as an example to the anarchists of the whole world."

"... We anarchists have the obligation and the duty to criticize and to lead the war against fascism and the revolution against capitalism, not only from below, from the rank and file, but also by assuming responsible positions in the institutions that rule the destiny of the country."

“Those who criticize the position of the anarchists are concealed enemies, agents of the bourgeoisie, individuals who are not very pleased with the libertarian influence that has gravitated around the Spanish people.”

“This is the time of anarchism, and we must accept the struggle with all its consequences, assuming all responsibility for these decisive moments!”

The words of Gilabert, who was a Municipal Councillor of the Barcelona City Government, express a profound authoritarianism, a very significant position that can be compared with that of any Mandarin. No criticism of the course taken by the revolutionary movement of the CNT-FAI is allowed. He calls this the decisive moment for anarchism, but it is really the critical moment for Anarchy, the attempt to banish the last hopes that the world had in the Spanish workers movement.

And Mariano R. Vázquez proclaimed:

“We are coming to terms with reality. And we are moving away from, even if just a little, the venerated beards.... They have fulfilled their mission. We must now fulfill ours. And if they return, they would blame us for our incompetence, our sectarianism, our stubbornness, for staying anchored in the past, when circumstances have changed so much.”

The General Secretary of the National Committee shows us in just a few words the extent of the psychological transformation that took place within those who assumed positions of responsibility. Such directives were declared at meetings and in the Confederal press. No one could challenge or criticize the responsible management of the Committees or the Ministries, without being branded as an enemy of the regime, or maybe even a fascist.

And Mascarell, widely considered to be the No. 1 diplomat, said:

“I say, and this is how much faith and hope I have in the CNT and the FAI and their militants, that once the war is over, Spain, despite the fact that the confederal organization intervened in the official direction of the government in order to save it from the invasion of world fascism, will still be the cradle of anarchism and anarchosindicalism.”

Not such a bad prediction from the prudent diplomat Mascarell.

Somewhat more symptomatic are the following words of García Oliver, who was addressing the students of the Military Academy upon the occasion of the Academy's inauguration, as director of the Academy:

“You, officers of the people's army, must observe iron discipline and impose it upon your men, who, once incorporated into the ranks, must cease to be your comrades in order to become the gears of the military machine of our army. Your mission is to assure victory over the invading fascist forces; and to maintain, once you are victorious, a powerful people's army upon which we can rely to respond to any fascist provocation, open or veiled, carried out by a foreign power and to make the name of Spain respected as it was so long ago in international affairs.”

Here we have an impassioned speech bordering on the patriotic with the most exacerbated chauvinism. It would seem to have issued from a person intoxicated with imperialist power; a strong army that will support the winners, the great men of a new generation of Spaniards.

You could fill more books with such declarations than were written by the famous novelist Blasco Ibáñez. We need only recommend reading the official organs of the CNT and the FAI from this sad and painful episode of the Spanish Revolution. From the pages of the Barcelona newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera*, Jacinto Torhyo did more damage to the Spanish Revolution and anarchism than the mercenary hordes of Franco, and we are only taking a very small sample.

We are provided with clear evidence of the existence of an opposition by the newspaper of the Libertarian Youth, *Ruta*, in its May 12, 1938 issue:

“There are some ‘responsible’ comrades who, having been established in official positions, forget where they came from and what their purpose is. We shall remind them that, in the pursuit of a temporary function, they must not relinquish principles that are the core of our organizations for the purpose of an imprudent positive re-evaluation of the State.”

In the journal *Ideas* of Hospitalet, we find intelligent critical dissertations against this corrupt current of Spanish anarchism; we shall not quote them because this chapter is too long already. But we shall reproduce a few words spoken by Sébastien Faure, whose beard was not shaved by M. R. Vázquez when he met him in Barcelona; his words are more relevant now than ever:

“... That a politician who belongs to a political organization should consent to becoming a cabinet minister, that he should have this ambition, that he should seek this honor and the advantages it confers, is quite natural; this man plays his cards, tests fortune, eagerly follows the course he has chosen and takes care not to miss any opportunities. But that an anarchosyndicalist, or an anarchist, should consent to becoming a cabinet minister, that is something else entirely.”

“The anarchosyndicalist has inscribed the following words on his banner in huge letters: ‘Death to the State’. The anarchist has written these words in flaming letters on his banner: ‘Death to Authority’.”

“The two are linked by a clear and precise program, based on clear and precise principles. Nothing and nobody forces them to advocate these principles. They have subscribed to these principles in complete independence and with full knowledge and deliberately, and they have supported, defended and propagated this program.”

“In view of these facts, I maintain that the anarchosyndicalist must refrain from joining with those who have the mission of steering the ship of State, because he is convinced that this ship, this famous ship, must be absolutely destroyed. And I say that the anarchist has the duty of refusing any authoritarian function, since he is fully convinced that authority must be destroyed.”

“There will be no lack of those who will respond by arguing that I am only taking principles into account and that it is often the case that the course of events, circumstances and the facts, that is, what is ordinarily called Reality, contradict these principles and leads those who go so far as to cultivate the worship and respect of

principles to the need to provisionally distance themselves from their principles, so as to quickly resume their old positions when the new Realities make such a return possible.”

“I understand this objection and here is my answer: First—either one or the other must be the case—our principles are false, proven false by reality. In this case, we should hasten to abandon these principles. In this case, we must have the decency to publicly confess the falsehood of these principles and we must have the courage to combat them with the same passion that we formerly devoted to advocating them; and we should immediately set about seeking more reliable principles, principles that will be more correct, precise and infallible.”

“Or, to the contrary, the principles upon which our ideology and our tactics are based preserve, regardless of the facts, all their consistency and are just as valid today as they were yesterday and in this case we must remain faithful to them. To distance ourselves—even in exceptional circumstances and for a brief time—from the line of conduct that has been traced for us by our principles, and to renounce the method of struggle that is in accordance with these principles, would imply committing a mistake whose consequences gradually lead to the provisional abandonment of our principles and, by making one concession after another, to their definitive abandonment.”

“Once again: it is the mechanism, the fatal slope that can lead us very far indeed.”

“Second: It might be objected that the experiment carried out by our Catalan comrades, far from having compromised the firmness of our principles and weakening or destroying justice, can and must have the result, if we know how to take advantage of and utilize the precious lessons they have taught us, of demonstrating the correctness of our principles, and strengthening them.”

“The anarchists have resolutely conducted against one and all a relentless struggle; they are determined to pursue it relentlessly until victory is achieved. This struggle implies: on the one hand, to do whatever is necessary, regardless of the cost; and on the other hand, not to do what is not necessary under any circumstances. I do not disregard the fact that it is not always possible to do what is necessary; but I know that there are some things that it is rigorously necessary to prohibit, and consequently to never undertake.”

“The Spanish experiment can and must be a lesson for us. This experiment must put us on our guard against the danger of concessions and alliances, even under particular conditions and for a limited time. To say that all concessions weaken those who make them and strengthen those who receive them, is to utter an indisputable truth. To say that every agreement, even temporary ones, made by the anarchists with a political party that, theoretically and practically, is anti-anarchist, and is a trap that will always victimize the anarchists, is a truth that has been proved by experience, by history and by simple reason. Throughout the course followed together with the authoritarians, the faithfulness and sincerity of the anarchists are always cofounded by the perfidy and cunning of their provisional and circumstantial allies....” (*Le Libertaine*)

These extremely accurate reflections of Sébastien Faure, by shedding light on the archives of the Spanish Revolution, seem to us like an oasis amidst the confusionism that was engendered in the milieu of the Spanish libertarians when political collaboration began. Today, as we assess these facts with the benefit of hindsight, we cannot forget those who did not lose their faith in the ideal, or in their principles. As we have pointed out, there was an oppositionist current against governmentalism and militarism, but these voices were stifled and the comrades were unable to express what they felt and thought. They had their places reserved in the jails and the cemeteries.

That this is true and that the oppositionists were legion, only the future will reveal.

P. Besnard, *Universo*, No. 9

The FAI suffers from the political disease

So that we may continue to pursue our analysis of the deeds, official decrees and positions of organizations, committees and individuals, we need some more information about the FAI, an organization that had survived the most powerful authoritarian attacks, only to succumb to the opportunist maneuvers of those elements who were its guiding spirits barely two years before the outbreak of the military-fascist uprising.

And nothing is more eloquent when it comes to proving this than the documents themselves, whose production was inspired by the activities, during that era, of those elements I mentioned above; with the exception of Mascarell, who was a key proponent of *treintismo* and an irreconcilable enemy of the FAI. Even so, Mascarell was promoted from the very first moments of the revolution to the dignified position of Extraordinary Ambassador. This is altogether symptomatic and one may see that all of those who had joined Pestaña's opposition against the guiding principles of the FAI-inspired CNT, were later appointed to positions of the highest responsibility in the Confederal Movement. This is why we shall reproduce the text of the Resolution approved at the National Plenum of Regional Federations of the FAI held on February 1, 1936, five months before the CNT's Confederal Congress, which took place in Zaragoza during the first days of May in 1936; this is what it says:

“Considering the extreme gravity of the present moment in Spain, which is as much due to domestic economic and political difficulties, as it is to the influence and the repercussions of the international situation, and taking cognizance of the lessons we have learned from the experiences of other peoples as well as from the very logic of the unfolding events;”

“Considering that, in view of the magnitude of the revolutionary proletariat in Spain, the latter bears a greater responsibility here than in other countries should it face any revolutionary situation;”

“Considering that the phenomenon of fascism, embodied in the totalitarian State, is a reactionary system, in the context of which street brawls and coup attempts represent nothing but single aspects of a vast complex of liberticidal ideas and aspirations, which are manifested in the absolute suppression of any and all rights to criticism and all human dignity and which are furthermore gaining more adherents with every passing day; and considering that the fascist reaction is the direct result of the collapse of the economic system of capitalism, and that it cannot be effectively resisted

except on the terrain of the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a regime of life that will render the monstrous contradictions of the economy, privilege and monopoly, impossible;”

“Considering that the experiences of world history have demonstrated the impotence and the deception of so-called democracy, and of the alleged political equality grafted onto the most irritating economic inequality, in order to modify the essence of the existing order;”

“The Regional Federations of the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* set forth their position as follows:

- a. They regret that workers organizations that had resolved in October 1934 to follow an openly revolutionary and proletarian road, have changed course and moved towards the democratic-bourgeois political parties in an attempt to find a solution where it does not exist;
- b. They call upon the proletariat to make a clean break with all statist democratic illusions, and to concentrate instead on the workers and peasants solution, which implies the possession of the social and natural wealth by the producers themselves;
- c. They maintain that only in the world of labor, only at the point of production, can an effective and definitive remedy be found for all forms of reaction.”

“They further assert that the concord of the producers is possible under the following conditions:

1. Exclusion from the workplaces of those elements affiliated with fascist organizations, by means of the joint action of the anticapitalist trade unions;
2. Employment of the insurrectional method for the conquest of the social wealth usurped by privileged minorities, and its administration by the producers themselves;
3. Establishment of a regime of life, of labor and of consumption which responds to the common needs of the population and allows no form of exploitation or domination of man by man;
4. The defense of this new regime of life will not be relegated to professional armies or political bodies, but must remain in the hands of all the workers, without the latter losing contact with their workplaces;
5. Respect for and tolerance towards the diverse social, proletarian and revolutionary ideas and their rights of free expression;
6. The struggle against fascism, an international phenomenon, must be conducted internationally, by workers and revolutionary organizations, and must exclude any and all nationalist sentiments or ideas.”

You will notice, in this resolution, the appeal made on behalf of the principle of alliance with the *Unión General de Trabajadores*, and, if we read between the lines a little, of an alliance with the

anti-fascist parties. How else can we interpret the attempt to cast a positive light on anti-fascism in the context of possible future contingencies? Another valuable document is the Manifesto of the National Committee of the CNT published on February 14, 1936:

“... With each passing day the suspicion that right-wing elements are prepared to launch a military uprising becomes more widespread. It is even a matter of public knowledge, now that left wing newspapers are constantly publishing articles warning about machinations that are ostensibly secret, but are in reality shameless and open, carried out by the reactionary officers in the barracks and in the civil and ecclesiastical circles of the counterrevolution.”

“Morocco appears to be the main focal point and epicenter of the conspiracy. Whether or not an insurrection takes place is contingent on the results of the elections. The planned preventive action will be implemented if the left wins the elections.”

“We, who shall not defend the republic, but who relentlessly fight against fascism, will contribute all the forces at our disposal in order to defeat the historical executioners of the Spanish proletariat.”

“Furthermore, wherever the legionnaires of tyranny may rise in arms, we have no hesitation in calling for an immediate understanding with antifascist groups, vigorous precautions being taken to ensure that the defensive contribution of the masses may lead to real social revolution under the auspices of Libertarian Communism. If the conspirators open fire then the act of opposition must be taken to its utmost consequences, without allowing the liberal bourgeoisie and its Marxist allies to apply the brakes, in the case where the fascist rebellion is defeated in its first stages; in the course of the people’s victory, its democratic illusions would be dispelled; should it go otherwise, then the nightmare of dictatorship will annihilate us. No matter who opens the hostilities seriously, democracy will perish between two fires, because it is irrelevant and has no place on the field of battle. Either fascism or social revolution! Defeat of the former is a duty incumbent upon the whole proletariat and all freedom-lovers, weapons in hand: that the revolution should be social and libertarian ought to be the most profound preoccupation of members of the Confederation. It depends upon our intelligence, and the unity of our thought and our action, whether or not we will be the most authoritative inspiration for the masses and that they will put into practice modes of sociability that conform to the spirit of libertarian ideas, and whether these ideas will be the impregnable defensive shield against the authoritarian instincts of the whites and the reds.”

“Once more: Keep your eyes open, comrades! It is better to take courageous measures to be safe, even if they are mistaken, than to be sorry due to negligence.—The National Committee.”

Two days after this Manifesto was published the legislative elections were held. The National Committee neither condemned the elections nor did it call upon its supporters to boycott them. It is quite curious; such a position is unprecedented in the annals of the Spanish libertarian movement. This mystery is explained by D. Abad de Santillán, in the course of a *mea culpa*, in which he presents himself as the seer of the movement, its *eminence gris*, when he writes:

“With regard to the elections of February 16, 1936, we faced in Spain one of the most critical moments of our existence as a movement. We had the key to the future in our hands. But anti-electoral propaganda had become a routine that was hard to overcome. And everyone remembered the anti-electoral campaign of November 1933, the most intense such campaign ever waged. And what some people insisted on was almost an exact replica of that experience. The situation, however, was clear. If we resolved upon electoral abstention, as we had always done before, the victory of the right wing would have been inevitable. The victory of the right wing would have been fascism with legal and popular sanction.” (*Op. cit.*)

It is as clear as glass. Were there, or were there not, backroom deals? Santillán does not say, nor do any of the other people who were in the front ranks of these machinations that we would depict as quaint were it not for their serious consequences! How much harm did these elements inflict on the Revolution? Our generation will never know. We need time and we need to piece together the documentary record of the archives in order to determine the extent of the damage done to the movement and to the revolution itself. We may predict that the historians and the workers will be most severe in their future judgments against those whom they shall characterize as capitulators, traitors, etc., and who dragged Spanish anarchism down a fatal slope.

But there is more. D. Abad de Santillán continues:

“There were many militants who did not want to understand this and vehemently protested against our position. There were several weeks when it was very much touch and go for our position. If we had not borne such a great responsibility, we would have left the field open to the demagogues who had suddenly arisen as the sacred guardians of our principles and were attempting to teach us lessons about Revolution and Anarchy. We resisted. Under no circumstances could we hand over power, with our abstention, to the right wing, to the supporters of Gil Robles. But neither was it possible, due to the still excessive lack of understanding, to openly carry on electoral participation. This would have been interpreted as a renunciation of our principles. Fortunately, the good instincts of the masses came to our assistance. We raised the issue of the liberation of our comrades in prison and in our press we published reasoned propaganda that prevented abstention and thus led to the victory of the republican left.”

Whoever does not understand Santillán’s words, does not understand them because he does not want to understand them: he is saying that we should try new procedures for the revolution and discreetly prepare the terrain for what they would someday call the Libertarian Party, in order to engender confusion among the workers and make them relinquish the weapon of “Direct Action”, incorporating them into a party that would take its turn to attempt to save the capitalist game. They would take their place on the left wing of the political parties since they have been practicing everything that is involved in the life of the parliamentary system. In this manner, anarchism will be discredited. And the world will still be ruled by the privileged few over the majority that will suffer and toil so that the manufacturers of revolutionary laws of social purification and economic transformation, laws which only end up reinforcing the bastion of the State by imposing blind obedience on those who do not have a place in their budgets or their real property registries.

Regarding the question of how the anarchist milieu was influenced by a handful of elements who only revealed their intentions when they joined the Government, as we have seen, there is no better witness than the texts of the FAI itself:

“All the propaganda and all the activities of anarchism are based on anti-capitalism and anti-statism. These two forms of economic rule imply the negation of the rights of the producer and the freedom of the individual.”

“Capitalism finds its instrument of self-defense in the State. The exploitation of the workers, the peasants, and the technicians, allows for the accumulation of economic wealth and power—the decisive force by means of which the disinherited are made to submit—in the hands of an unproductive minority. By means of the laws that assure the bourgeoisie’s property rights, with its entire repressive system, and with its armed forces, the State constitutes the most powerful stronghold of the capitalist system. In opposition to the Marxist position that attributes to the State transitional functions in the creation of a new society, and which maintains that the State will be gradually weakened until it disappears when class divisions have disappeared, anarchism proclaims the uselessness of the State and asserts that its presence after the revolution signifies the resurgence of a new power, a new dictatorship, with the resulting creation of a privileged bureaucracy and, as the next logical step, the establishment of a party government or preferably a government of the leaders of the ruling party.”

“Economic organization on a socialist basis, being feasible, implies that the new economic order requires a new political form. The anti-capitalist and anti-statist position of anarchism is reinforced by historical experience and by the knowledge that collective life can be organized, giving everyone the opportunity to satisfy their own needs, in exchange for labor in a regime of the socialization of the means of production.”

“Federative organization, from the bottom up, from the base to the apex, will take the place of the state system. This reaffirmation of principle is relevant at the present time. Constrained by circumstances brought about by the war, the FAI and the CNT have had to join the government machine. This collaboration imposed by the supreme and ineluctable necessity of defeating fascism, as well as our coexistence alongside other anti-fascist sectors, has led us to regretfully abandon our ideological position. But this does not mean that we have renounced the anarchist ideal and anarchist tactics. The occupation of responsible posts in the departments of the central government and the *Generalitat*, posts that we have had to occupy due to the circumstances of the war, by no means imply a change in our theoretical conceptions. No, we shall continue to be anarchists just as before, and we will always have the same opinion of the State and dictatorship (regardless of the name it assumes).”

“Before the entire world, before our comrades of the anarchist movement, before those who have deliberately presented a distorted interpretation of the events in Spain and our temporary participation in the Government, we can assert without any exaggeration that this resolution of the FAI possesses an incalculable historical value.” (*Tierra y Libertad*, December 1936)

This document is a veritable monument of inconsistencies, and belies the ambition of those who wrote it. Neither those comrades who had demanded an anti-electoral proclamation during the February 1936 election campaign, nor those who, because they were indispensable, were then at the front fighting the State and Capitalism, played any role in the deliberations and subsequent vote for this resolution; much less the volunteers who were the ones who gained the victory in the streets on July 19. These comrades did not have to think anymore, all they had to do was to obey those who imposed the new circumstances through the mouths of the new Mandarins of the Revolution. We shall see how the petition for “unitary command” was brought before the workers, another complete negation of the ideological conceptions that they proclaim they have not forgotten. But before we do so, we have to show that neither Santillán, nor García Oliver, etc., represented the views of either the anarchist MLE (Spanish Libertarian Movement) or those of the confederal movement.

P. Besnard, *Universo*, No. 10 (1947–1948?)

The opposition to the political malady

In early February 1936, the Regional Committee of the CNT held a Regional Conference of Syndicates. At this Conference, the two concepts regarding political, economic and social views confronted one another. The Movement of Asturias had initiated heated debates concerning the “Workers Alliance”, and the so-called *Treintistas* objected, and naturally the FAistas of the García Oliver, Santillán, Torhyo, variety also dissented, to mention only a few.

Since history is written on the basis of the texts of the relevant era, we shall abstain from reflecting on what we recall of those acute struggles and turn to the authentic documents. They were true yesterday, they are true today, and they will be true tomorrow. We therefore allow Germinal Esgleas to speak for himself:

“A Regional Conference of Syndicates, convoked by the Committee of the Regional Confederation of Syndicates of Catalonia, will take place in a few days: After a long period of arbitrary actions on the part of the government, which is a chronic problem in Spain, regardless of the ruling regime, a period during which the workers were persecuted and their syndicates closed, and it was impossible to legally fight for their interests in public, when they did so in whatever way they could and in accordance with the counsels of their own self interest and dignity, the workers will hold their regional meeting in the same spirit, they will exchange impressions and pass resolutions, although the most important point on the agenda is to begin from the bottom, that is, from the workers in each Syndicate, in each locality; and even if there are already precise measures being taken in this direction, we believe that neither the legal safeguards nor the moral and material resources of each local organization are sufficiently developed to convey, in this brief span of time, at the upcoming Conference, the importance and significance it deserves, not only in our view, but in the view of public opinion; nor will the resolutions it approves be seen to possess the moral value of what is in itself worthy of respect because they are the real product of the full exercise of recognized collective rights and the explosion of this freely manifested collective will rather than simple reflections of individual opinions, which are always to be respected and honored, but which are always just

individual opinions if they are not endorsed by the collectivity in the name of which they were elaborated, resolved upon and implemented.”

“The great haste with which this Conference has been organized could in part be explained if it were a matter of issues that involved only internal organizational affairs, without reference to anything else, but this is not the case and the points to be debated touch upon delicate questions, which will become known outside the organization, and which even within the organization itself could give rise to deep divisions, and the maximum of circumspection is required especially among those who bear a representative responsibility, and on this occasion it seems to us that this Regional Committee does not have a clear idea of its task nor does it have the proper tact or sound judgment that is necessary to set the agenda for debate at the first Regional Conference to be held since the end of the state of emergency that cannot be said to be definitively terminated.”

“We shall not take the time for a thorough examination of the first point on the agenda for debate established by the Catalan Regional Committee: What position should the CNT take towards the proposal to form an Alliance with institutions which, although not affiliates of the CNT, have pronounced working class orientations? We cannot thoroughly examine this question because of the confused way the question has been phrased; no matter how hard we try, we cannot clearly understand it. Are we speaking of class ‘organizations’? In that case, how are we to understand what is meant by ‘working class orientation’? Are we to understand by this, more or less working class or political parties or groups? Why are they not named, and what relation can and must the confederal organization have with regard to the question of such an alliance, this confederal organization that is genuinely class-based and possesses a well-defined goal and course of action? Or are we just speaking of ‘institutions’? What is behind this word? What institutions? In the name of what, for what purpose and why does the CNT have to decide upon a position to take with regard to such an Alliance?”

“The questions that we shall formulate, which seem to us, in the most sincere good faith, to be logical and to partake of common sense, in view of the fact that some confederal workers and some Syndicates have already formulated them as well and undoubtedly have experienced the same confusion that we have, cannot be more precisely elaborated due to a lack of clarity among those who should be most clear; and speaking of Syndicates, in this case, how can we discuss and pass resolutions to bring to the Regional Conference concerning a point that is already confused from the very start? Proceeding logically and correctly, the Syndicates cannot provide mandates to their delegates with regard to this first point on the agenda but can only direct them to gather more information and ask for explanations from the Regional Committee concerning just what this point means, and cannot therefore vote on any resolutions on the basis of these explanations because the respective Syndicates will have to be informed and will have to decide for or against the proposal based on their complete understanding of just what it means, and this matter will have to be made public from the very moment that the Regional Conference is announced, which is

why there is no reason to allow the question to remain obscure when it is proposed to the Conference.”

“The caption of the second point that figures on the agenda of this Regional Conference: What concrete and definitive position should the National Confederation of Labor adopt with regard to the electoral moment? What is it about this ‘electoral moment’ that should detain us? Since when does the CNT, which must abide by the positions upheld since the time of the First International regarding direct action in the emancipatory struggle and scorn for the conservative systems of the State, call upon the workers to consider electoral issues, and how and why do these issues have to be debated in a workers assembly, if the Syndicates are economic institutions and not political groups? Because discussing the electoral moment is equivalent to opening up a discussion about the electoral reality and its antecedents and derivations.”

“This issue that has been placed on the agenda, even though it has a different purpose, is too reminiscent of that no less famous Point No. 8 of the Agenda for the Extraordinary Congress of the CNT held in Madrid in 1931, ‘Our position regarding the Constituent *Cortes*, and a Program of demands to present to them.’ And if these points were fought, and we fought against the inclusion of this topic for debate at the deliberations of that Congress, because we considered it to be alien to the purpose of the confederation, we can do no less than to express our absolute disagreement with the proposal, ventured at this crucial moment, to debate an electoral issue at a Confederal Congress concerning which any discussion at all is idle and which the confederal workers cannot, if they are to abide by the principles of the CNT, consider at all.”

“This second point of the Conference agenda, as we understand it, need not be debated at all. At the present time the CNT can take the position that it considers to be more in conformance with its principles and its goals: with regard to the ‘electoral’ moment, no ‘concrete and definitive position’ need be taken because the concrete and definitive position was already taken by the CNT on the very day it was formed as a class organization which, according to its statutes, has the goal of ‘working to develop among the workers the spirit of association, making them understand that only by such means can they improve their moral and material conditions in today’s society and prepare the way for their complete emancipation in the future, thanks to the conquest of the means of production and consumption, which are wrongfully held by the bourgeoisie’. And according to the second article of these same statutes: ‘For the achievement of these proposals, the Confederation and the sections that compose it will always fight on the most exclusive economic terrain, which is to say that of direct action, remaining immune from all political or religious interference,’ and which, in addition, since 1919 has observed the resolution that, ‘taking into account the fact that the trend manifested within organizations in every country is that towards the complete, total and absolute liberation of humanity in the moral, economic and political order, and, considering that this goal cannot be attained as long as the land and the instruments of production and exchange have not been socialized and as long as the engrossing power of the State still exists, in accordance

with the essence of the principles of the Workers International, it is declared that the goal pursued by the National Confederation of Labor is anarchist communism’.”

“How can the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT have overlooked these facts and, if it did not overlook them, just what is it proposing? For there is no reason, neither before nor after October, absolutely no reason, to retreat or to make doctrinal concessions or to consider electoral politics to be a significant factor with regard to the definitive or the immediate conquests of the proletariat.”

“Furthermore, the Catalan Regional Committee cannot be unaware of the fact that the Syndicates cannot debate this second point of the agenda of the upcoming Conference; and if they do debate it, so much the worse for them. The Reason? The CNT is a class organization which embraces workers of all tendencies, who are not required to renounce their political ideas, since the CNT accepts them only on the condition that they are workers, wage workers, exploited workers, and insofar as the act in accordance with its organic statutes and its goals.”

“It is taken for granted that these workers are not all anarchists or syndicalists, and that many of them have been influenced by diverse and even contradictory political ideologies, and should the question of electoral politics be raised within the Syndicates, regarding which the workers are incapable of demonstrating unanimity, the workers whose political ideologies require that they participate in elections, will defend their point of view and will obtain a majority of the votes; if this takes place in various Syndicates, and is carried through to the date of the Conference—we fear the worst because we know the confederal milieu—the Conference will vote for direct or indirect political intervention on behalf of one or another party or bloc of parties; where will the Catalan Regional Federation stand in relation to the CNT, and to the statutes and resolutions under which it operates? Can a resolution be considered to be valid that contradicts the statutes of the CNT, which clearly state ‘that it will remain immune to all political or religious interference’? And if the Regional Committee already knows that such a resolution cannot be valid unless the statutes of the confederal organization are first revised and its resolutions renounced, how can such an irresponsible and reckless debate of this nature be staged?”

“The propagandists of the CNT, in order to make their voices heard throughout the world, have a precious heritage in all that is descended from the struggles and the progress of the revolutionary workers movement from the First International down to our time as well as the history and struggles of the CNT itself, of Spanish revolutionary syndicalism in all its aspects. There are the resolutions approved by the CNT itself and even the conclusion of the eight point of the resolution quoted above which asserts that the ‘basic principle of our organization is antiparlamentarism and revolutionary action’.”

“The whole history of the CNT rejects electoral politics. On the terrain of electoral struggle, neither the opinions nor the wills of the workers can ever be unified. They can only coincide on the terrain of the economic struggle, in the social struggles for the transformation of society.”

“The position of the CNT cannot be modified by the mere accident of an electoral contest, regardless of the importance that one may want to confer upon such an affair. In the end, neither parliament nor voting determine the final outcome, but only the revolutionary action of the workers reinforced by their class institutions, the Syndicates, and always on a war footing, putting pressure on capitalism and the state and trying to overthrow them. It is this pressure that determines the rise and fall of the political barometer. Woe to the workers, if they confide solely to the ballot box and rest on the laurels of such a victory!”

“‘The CNT’s stance on the electoral moment’, in our opinion, does not require a major effort to discuss it, whatever our adversaries may say. The CNT does not have to deal with the elections at all. Every worker who is a member of the CNT, not as such, but as a mere individual, whose personal freedom and opinions are not the property of the CNT, will do whatever seems best to him. If he has a revolutionary consciousness, he will know what his duty is and what stance he must take. As a member of the CNT he does not have to adopt any position with respect to the electoral moment. This, in our opinion, is the correct interpretation of the doctrine and the principles of the CNT.”

“By maintaining that debates relating to electoral politics must not be pursued within the confederated Syndicates, we reaffirm the spirit set forth in the Resolution of the first Spanish Workers Congress held in 1870 (which mirrors the resolution approved at the Chaux-Les-Fonds Swiss Regional Congress that same year), which said:”

“‘Whereas the definitive emancipation of labor cannot be achieved except by way of the transformation of political society, based on privilege and authority, into economic society, based on equality and fraternity; and whereas every Government or political State is nothing but bourgeois exploitation, a form of exploitation whose formula is known as legal right; and whereas the participation of the working class in the governmental politics of the bourgeoisie cannot lead to any result but the consolidation of the existing order, which would paralyze the revolutionary action of the proletariat, the Congress recommends to all the sections of the International that they renounce any activity whose objective is to bring about the transformation of society by means of political reforms on a national scale, and that they devote all their efforts to the federative trade bodies, the only way to assure the victory of the social revolution.’”

“The resolutions of the Regional Conference of Syndicates cannot deviate from the above-quoted resolution if they are to be faithful to the guiding spirit of the CNT, and these resolutions have no reason to be debated now anyway, since the resolution quoted above shows that the CNT has throughout its entire history upheld the same principles at all times and that there is no need to modify any of its positions, because the terms in which these problems are posed to the workers struggling for their integral emancipation are the same.”

“No one should think that we are the only people who hold the opinions we have just expressed publicly, because our choice of the public forum shows that we have

not the least intention of doing harm, or giving offense or trouble to the CNT or to its responsible Committees, and we trust that the workers who are members of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* of Catalonia, despite the confusion that surrounds the topics of the agenda for discussion, will know how to provide this Regional Conference with the voice of a healthy and straightforward insight, with a clear and unequalled interpretation of the realities of our present moment, without contradicting the essential positions of the CNT.” (*Revista Blanca*, pp. 1278–1280, January 24, 1936)

Esgleas situated the internal problem of the Confederation within the context of the fundamental essence of the movement. We cannot improve upon his explanation of the Catalanian Regional Committee’s actions in contradiction of the Confederation’s principles; actions which, as he maintains, are inclined towards a personal or cliquish orientation of activity. Tactics absolutely divorced from the essence and positions of the Confederation that have been its lifeblood.

The fact that there was a conspiracy to drag the CNT towards a government-oriented course of action was not only exposed by *Germinal*, but has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. The veteran combatant and incomparably intrepid journalist, Eusebio C. Carbó, even though he was a writer on the staff of the Barcelona *Solidaridad Obrera*, had to resign from the confederal newspaper led by Villar, an Argentinian and close friend of Santillán, because he did not want to submit his writings to the dictates of its editor in chief who followed the opportunist path of those who occupied the highest levels of the CNT leadership. In order to fight against these tortuous deviations, he founded the weekly, *Más Lejos*, which preserves in its columns a precious refuge for those who would defend the CNT’s principles. These voices were joined by those of Liberto Calleja, Felipe Alaiz, Antonio García Birlan, “Dyonisios”, Peirats, Hermoso Plaja, etc....

The resolutions approved at the Conference were just as confused as the points of the agenda for discussion. The responsible Committees had been packed with elements who had no hesitation about joining a political-style conspiracy, and who said that this was necessary to ward off the fascist threat. As grave as the situation of the Spanish people may have been, there was no justification for the CNT to renounce its revolutionary essence, or the social revolution. Once the movement of July 19th took place, the consequences of these machinations were to make themselves felt as they dragged the masses towards governmental and political collaboration by brandishing the bogeyman of the grave and imminent danger of losing the war, when in fact it was the Revolution that was being lost.

We now have enough documentation to judge those who were the moral and material authors of the deviations suffered by the CNT. And there is also enough to enable us to say that they never represented the majority of the members of the CNT, or the FAI, and that they took advantage of their representative positions to serve their vanity and their ambitions. This reckoning is necessary, because it is necessary to do justice to the workers and militants who never lost their faith, or capitulated, or surrendered to the dictatorship that represented the obligation to submit to the discipline of majority rule, which was actually nothing but the camouflaged voices of opportunist politicians who saw their chance for power arise.

P. Bernard, *Universo*, No. 11 (1948?)

The CNT Moves Toward Unitary Command

With the fall of Málaga, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* was forced to accept a military-style campaign and the demand for unitary command in order to prevent worse consequences. This was the prevalent view among many militants in the responsible Committees and the representatives of the confederal organization in the Government. It would be one of many concessions that would resolve nothing.

In the days preceding the fall of Málaga, fully aware of what it was doing and with a well defined purpose, the government was only sending men and equipment to the Madrid front. These were the early days of the famous “international brigades”. These units, commanded by Russians, only participated in plots of a political, economic and military type. Specialists of the GPU, communist police, only came to Spain in order to form a school of intrigue in the Spanish political parties and working class organizations. Those who came from distant lands in order to fight in the “international brigades” were for the most part unemployed workers, as was the case with many who came under the auspices of the French Communist Party, which was performing a service for the Government of France. We shall speak of the “international brigades” at length elsewhere.

In order to study the consequences of the fall of Málaga, the Regional Confederation of Labor of Catalonia met on February 17, 1937 in a Regional Conference.

The Conference took place in a tense atmosphere. We saw an unprecedented amount of pressure applied to the delegates, who were overwhelmed by the press campaign spearheaded by the official CNT newspapers that had joined the chorus in favor of Government collaboration, just as the political press had done.

The most important resolution approved at the Catalanian Regional Congress held on February 17 is this report that was later ratified by the Regional Congress at the end of April:

“Faced with the grave situation of the last few days and particularly the fall of the city of Málaga into the hands of the rebels, the Conference of Militants agrees as follows:”

“1. Unitary command is nothing but a single commanding center for the anti-fascist struggle; therefore, we understand that, in view of the state of the battlefronts, we have to take into account the General Staff in Catalonia, which is responsible for proposing the operational plans being implemented on the Aragon front.”

“Of course, we accept the General Staff of Valencia as the highest authority in the battle at the fronts, to which all the plans that are being deliberated by the General Staff of the Aragon front will be submitted, so that it can raise all the issues that its knowledge of the situation of the other fronts may suggest.”

“If the General Staff proposes an operation in which the Aragon front plays a role, in order for the plan to be put into operation, it will consult the General Staff of the Aragon front, so that the latter, with the knowledge it must always have through direct contact with the forces on the front lines, can at the same time make suggestions that it believes are of vital importance.”

“In order to attain this goal it is sufficient for the Central General Staff to send two delegates to join the General Staff of Catalonia, whose function will be to remain at

all times fully informed concerning the situation at the front; and for our part we shall also send a delegation.”

“Once the General Staff has approved the plans of the General Staff of Catalonia, the commander of the Aragon front must implement them, and attempt to realize the goals set forth in the plans with all the means at his disposal.”

“And if the General Staff is the origin of the operational plan, once the plan is submitted to the General Staff of Aragon and once the latter has made suggestions which it considers of vital importance, the directives of the Central General Staff will also be implemented without hesitation by the forces of the Aragon front.”

“Ultimately, it is the Central General Staff that gives the orders with respect to all those operations which can have an impact on all fronts.”

“In small operations, as is already the case, the Unitary Command at the Aragon front, under the aegis of the commander and his general staff, is to carry them out.”

“With regard to the question of officers, the divisions will choose them from corporal to captain, and the other ranks will be selected by the Defense Council, who will themselves be approved by the *Generalitat* and the Ministry of War.”

“2. A rapid and general mobilization of the entire population of Catalonia and the establishment of a weekly war tribunal for the civilian population, maintaining the suspension of the laws concerning the length of the working day, and increasing the latter so as to apply the maximum of personal and collective effort in all industries, eliminating all those industries that are unproductive and unnecessary at the current time, finding places for all personnel of suppressed industries in war industries.”

“3. All the funds in the possession of all the collectivized and socialized industries of all the various organizations, will be placed at the disposal of the *Generalitat* (Committee of War Industry) and devoted to the purchase of materials for the production of war materiel; and all individuals or political groups or entities that try to conceal their possession of anything that can be exchanged for foreign currency, such as gold, artworks, jewels, etc., will be considered to be rebels.”

“4. If the central Government does not fulfill the aspirations of the CNT with respect to our idea of Unitary Command, war materials, and the raw materials for the production of the latter, without limitations of any kind, within a span of 72 hours, and considering the seriousness of the current situation of the war, the Confederal Organization of Catalonia will withdraw the four representatives that the CNT has sent to the Government.”

These resolutions demonstrate the eagerness of the militants of the CNT to wage war to the end in order to gain victory. It is a patriotic and military agreement, which we shall not debate because the time for debate has passed. The only thing we can do is to indicate how far those who have shared the governmental and collaborationist views have gone, without fear of abandoning their principles. Only a sense of discipline—innate in the workers who are members of the CNT—can prevent these two concepts from clashing violently. The supporters of non-collaboration, and of the militias—and who were in the minority as a result of causes that are now known—demonstrating evidence of a highly developed sense of organic responsibility, did not take up

arms against the majority. All the disputes were reflected in the minutes of the assemblies and the only witnesses were those who attended them. Once these resolutions were approved, they were obeyed according to the understanding of each individual and in the context of the sacrifices that he was ready to make.

The situation was grave. This is true, all too true, but the stain of collaboration will never be erased from those elements that led the CNT into all kinds of military and political concessions, and even after the war was over they were still trying to justify their activities in favor of collaboration. It is among these persons that one must seek those who were morally and materially responsible for the contradictions experienced by the proletariat of the CNT during the war. These same people, in 1947 and again in April of this year (1948), even though they are the ones who are obstructing the struggle for the liberation of Spain from the Francoist yoke, are the same persons who are now playing the game of the great powers with their position of “neither victors nor vanquished” which amounts to nothing but the oft-repeated appeal to form an alliance with all the anti-fascist forces, even with monarchists and Catholics.

Clear proof of the intrigues of the communists is provided by the letter that the socialists of the Madrid group made public in mid-September 1936, in which the following is written:

“.... Divisive and spectacular politics, at the cost of many thousands of dead and wounded, without any strategic benefits; that has been, and still is the policy of the Communist Party in Spain. What do they propose to accomplish by means of this catastrophic policy? If we were as suspicious as they are, we would suspect that with this policy of fomenting splits and demoralizing the fronts and the rearguard, of the futile squandering of lives in the war, they are only attempting to create the moral and material conditions of discouragement that would favor either defeat or a compromise—a new Abrazo de Vergara—with national and international fascism....”
(*Claridad*)

The tense atmosphere created by the communists, as the Madrid socialists pointed out, also put moral pressure on the members of the CNT to accept militarization in the spirit of the resolutions approved by the Catalan Regional Congress. No just anyone who demonstrated a little common sense could be stigmatized as a fascist, as the communists were trying to do. The communists abused their moral leverage—the alleged Russian aid that never arrived, except for what was required for the spectacular politics of the Communist Party of Spain. This propaganda found a good reception in the minds of many Spaniards, because they did not see any other part of the world showing any sympathy for the Spanish struggle against fascism. By saying this we are not trying to excuse the actions of the militants of the CNT. We do so only so that in the future, class conscious workers will not once again become victims of the excessive confidence they may place in their agents designated for the purpose of orienting and governing their collective interests from the Committees of the Syndical Organizations.

Neither Unitary Command, nor the Military Academy, nor the Commissars in the Army were enthusiastically accepted by the confederal masses. The National Committee of the CNT often had to insistently call upon the Regional Committees to remind the syndicates that they had to designate comrades to oversee compliance with the resolutions on the military question and to meet military recruitment quotas. Few people with a real interest in military affairs entered the War College, but a vast number of young militants were pushed into its schools and one could say

they were forced to attend its courses in military techniques. Everything tends to corroborate the claim that the CNT was increasing its collaboration in the State from imperious necessity and out of a voluntary desire to cooperate; the idea was to cooperate effectively in the struggle against fascism. Because there was never a predisposition towards collaboration among the militants who, due to their responsible positions in the organization, were in the positions to exercise moral pressure, the majority of the members of the CNT were never inclined to support collaboration.

We have to provide evidence for this assertion. A correct judgment of this matter can never be pronounced if we do not take into account the actions of the parties concerned or the resolutions regarding agreements with other sectors that were approved by the responsible Committees, often without previous consultation of those who were in every instance supposed to make use of their sovereignty and their freedom of action. These matters have been obscured, not to say forgotten, with the passing of the years. We must not allow the words of a person to be forgotten who summarized certain confused policies that must not be repeated. It would be prejudicial to the Movement if it does not subject the policies of this period to review. The confession of error, where error was possible, is to do an immense service to the cause. It is obvious, an endless series of proofs corroborate it; the fact is that the concessions brought nothing in their wake but organic disturbances and splits that got worse with the passage of time. The results are displayed by the activities of those who are today, as they did then, circumstantially defending antifascist collaboration on every level up to the point of demanding participation in governmental administration. This is what they sought during the war, in order to win it, and the war was lost. It was lost precisely because they did not want to fight the war under the conditions and for the goals that the majority of the Spanish people supported.

In the clandestine journal, *Alerta*, in its June 1937 issue, a balance sheet is presented of the political situation and the advantages obtained, which are of course null and the article says so in the following terms:

“Let us go back in time, for a moment, to that glorious and historical date when the ‘backward’, ‘uneducated’, ‘uncivilized’ Spanish proletariat, as it was viewed by those barbarous countries that cultivate civilization, wrote the most brilliant pages of their long political history in letters of blood.... Let us relive those days, when our people, disarmed, without combat experience, flooded into the streets, assaulted barracks, seized arms on their own account, generalized the struggle, took artillery emplacements by leaping over piles of corpses and defeated the fascist uprising in Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, in a plethora of Spanish cities.... That was when the libertarian Revolution was alive. The CNT and the FAI, and the proletariat in general, were the arbiters of the situation. Nothing could be done without their consent; the black and red flags were everywhere.”

“But columns had to be organized to be sent to other places where the struggle was still being waged, and most of our comrades left. They did not think that the work they left behind was only half done. They only thought of advancing, striking, and conquering towns and cities.”

“No one destroyed the prison, because no one thought that they might one day end up there. We were so intoxicated with our victory, that we did not remember that there was a Government that had to be abolished, a State that had to be destroyed,

a very complicated society that had to be overthrown. And, while we fought, the Government recovered from its fright. We, candid and confident, as always, believed in the goodness of those around us and let them run the Government. We let them run the Revolutionary Government that was passing from the hands of one group of men to another group of men, until it was in the hands of those who are running it now.”

The Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias

“For the purpose of coordinating the military personnel and attending adequately to the needs of the fronts, this Committee was constituted on the initiative of the libertarians. It was open to the antifascist parties and tendencies, which in Catalonia have had no other framework for military organization.”

“This was our first mistake. Granting recognition to those who did not know how to fight, and establishing the disciplinary norm that killed the enthusiastic impulse of the guerrilla comrades.”

“The Committees of Antifascist Militias with their political representatives, constituted the seed of the counterrevolution against the libertarian quality of the revolution. These committees became centers of political agitation, and the political elements began to conspire against those who had so generously allowed them to join them.”

“With the excuse of ‘international complications’, the *Generalitat* and with it its President, were left intact. It was left intact in order to provide a façade of appearances, but the appearances crystallized and the *Generalitat* and its President were left with all their power and their reality.”

Unitary Command

“This slogan came next, Unitary Command. With it an attempt was made to impose strict discipline and a single orientation on military operations, and the Unitary Command fell into the hands of high level military officers, whose anti-fascism was so false, who helped us lose some very important cities. When the situation was favorable for military operations, they did not take action, and they attacked when the chance for success was slight. We could cite hundreds of cases. There were few weapons; but the few weapons there were, were not all distributed. We had a small air force, but it did not regularly engage in military operations. We had most of the navy on our side, but it was not mobilized for battle. The enemy’s preparations were awaited. The officers who should have been shot were not shot and later they managed to escape in order to fight against us.”

Militarization

“Then came the slogan of militarization, as an imperative of war, and our organizations, already accustomed to accept everything, accepted this, too; and the militia forces, the guerrillas of the Revolution, became regular soldiers, under barracks discipline, subject to the military code and all the atavisms of the old militarism.”

“Many comrades left the front because they did not want to be regular soldiers, and many of those who remained at the front were aware of the fact that things had changed and no longer fought with the same enthusiasm.”

“In addition to all of this, there were violent attacks against the CNT and the FAI on the part of the communists. In Valencia they killed more than thirty of our members; in Madrid, in Andalusia, everywhere, militants were assassinated.”

“The Minister of War, for his part, shows favoritism with regard to the distribution of arms; most go to the socialist and communist battalions, and our units are forced to go into battle without adequate combat equipment.”

“The commanding officers of our battalions must pass a rigorous review before they are officially approved. The General War Commissariat, in the hands of the Communist Party, has appointed Communist Party members to the majority of the commissar posts and even carries out party propaganda within the Army.”

“Military disasters, retreats and desertions of Army officers to the enemy are still taking place. And the Minister of War does nothing; he does not even tender his resignation.”

“During this entire period the rearguard has been reorganized in a bourgeois sense and the forces of Public Order have been reinforced. Thousands of Civil Guards, Assault Guards and National Police invade the cities and the towns, and a generalized repression is unleashed against the CNT and the FAI.”

The CNT Government Ministers

“Allowing for the survival of the State in view of ‘international exigencies’, and because of the need to neutralize Marxist influences within the Government, the CNT inopportunely joined the Government, because a few days before it could have joined under better conditions, with more ministerial posts.”

“The Government called upon the CNT at a truly dangerous moment, and the CNT, always generous, offered its hand; it sent Ministers without any mandate, because no Congress had authorized this tactical innovation.”

“Our representation in the Government did no good for the libertarian Movement at all. Instead, it did harm to the Movement, because it handcuffed the Organization so that it could not respond in kind to the offensive that was directed against it. Militants were still being assassinated, others imprisoned, and the Syndicates were under attack in many towns. And our armies were without supplies in the front lines.”

The May Movement

“We had a golden opportunity to teach our political enemies a good lesson in Catalonia with the May Movement that was provoked by their premeditated attack on the Telephone Exchange.”

“We failed to take advantage of the opportunity, despite the fact that we completely controlled Barcelona, due to compliance with the orders of the higher Committees.

This was most unfortunate. The movement should have been encouraged and supported until it totally crushed the provocateurs. This would have allowed us to recover the personnel and the positions we had lost, and today we would not have to be enduring the assaults on the Collectives, nor would the Workers Patrols have been dissolved, nor would the Defense Committees have been neglected, nor would the trucks and taxis of the Transport Syndicate have been seized, nor the dairies of the Food Supply Syndicate have been taken over, nor would we have in the Modelo prison 600 of our comrades.”

Summary

“Fifteen months of Revolution have passed, during which we have lost thousands and thousands of comrades, the flower of our militants, the cream of our Movement, after so many sacrifices, we must sadly admit that the proletariat has gained nothing compared to what it has lost in the struggle.”

“Hardly anything remains of the Revolution, and the little that does remain is not secure. We must go back, to seek the spirit of July 19, in order to rejuvenate it and to keep it strong, without making any excuses whatsoever, bypassing all the old institutions that conserve the stagnant spirit of Francoist Spain with its crucifix in hand and dagger under the cassock.”

“The proletariat will not allow so much blood to be spilled, so many comrades killed, without enjoying the fruit that such sacrifices must yield. Above all, despite all those who want to impose their will upon it, Spain will reconquer its lost social positions, and will be free, because the hundreds of thousands of Spaniards who are at the fronts are fighting for freedom, and fall with a smile on their faces, trusting to the victory of the cause of the ideal that led them to fight. This is the voice of the minority, expressed at the margin of the implacable censorship of the Government, and the official control of the higher Committees.”

We consider this article a sensible, reasoned effort at hindsight with respect to the tortuous steps that had been taken. There are no insults against the management of this or that comrade or committee; no, this would have sowed the seeds of internal discord in the Movement, something that was not intended. But these voices were drowned out by the very comrades who represented them in the highest levels of the Organization. What motives were used to justify the collaborationist position? This question is always answered with the same excuse of “international complications”, “special circumstances”, and “the necessities of war” and with these excuses the Organization became trapped in an impasse that could only be fatal. The opposition provided proofs of its advanced civic sense of responsibility, of a spirit of coexistence, with respect to majority discipline, and of a high level of revolutionary idealism, taking care not to break the moral unity that is the indispensable factor for the crystallization of the Revolution in all the concepts and principles that caused it to surge forth from the hearts of the masses fighting against the foreign foe.

Those who held responsible positions in the Confederal Organization, and in the FAI itself, and in the Committees, with that sincerity always evinced by the militants, should publish their memoirs, noting their interventions in one or another position. They would thus provide a valu-

able contribution to the ideas of the Movement, and to the Spanish Revolution, concerning which the last word has not yet been spoken.

We have reproduced this retrospective critique because we prefer to allow the living documents speak for themselves, that is, branded with the character of the instant when the events were taking place, rather than to rely on memories which can sometimes be unreliable, or may be subject to influences that are no longer relevant to the time when the events, activities and official acts transpired which must be recalled in order to educate present and future generations.

We shall conclude this narrative with a few words from our comrade, Emma Goldman, who came from Canada, and obtained vivid first-hand experience of the Spanish Revolution. Revolutionaries should always remember them.

“I am deeply convinced, absolutely sure, that if the FAI, taking affairs into its own hands, had blockaded the banks, dissolved and eliminated the Assault Guards and the Civil Guards; closed down the *Generalitat* instead of entering it to collaborate, delivered a mortal blow to the entire old bureaucracy, swept away its enemies both near and far; if the FAI did this, one could be sure that we would not be suffering our current humiliating and harmful situation, because the Revolution would have had to consolidate its logical development. This being said, I am not saying that the comrades could have brought about Anarchy, but would be moving towards it, and approaching as nearly as possible to that Anarchist Communism that is discussed here....” (Quoted in Manuel Azaretto’s book, *Slippery Slopes*, page 246)

If the CNT had taken over the banks, there would have been no need for the Catalanian Regional Conference to drain the funds of the Syndicates and the Collectives, which in short signified a stab in the heart of the confederal economy. The CNT liquidated all its assets in order to purchase arms. The other political organizations and the UGT reserved their wealth for their political ends. And the Madrid Government itself, like the *Generalitat*, did the same thing. The fabulous quantities of gold shipped out of Spain, and which during their exile have supported and will continue to support official bodies and bureaucrats, ministers and other representative personages, comprise a public accusation of sabotage of the war effort and of counterrevolution against these persons and institutions. What can be expected of these men, parties and organizations? Nothing, absolutely nothing. The liberation of Spain from the Francoist yoke will be the work of the Spanish workers themselves, and they will accomplish this, without any doubt at all, under the glorious black and red flag.

P. Besnard, *Universo*, No. 13 (May 1, 1948)

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