

Anarchism in Action — 100 years of the CNT

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST DISCUSSION NIGHT



2010 marks the 100th anniversary of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT), a militant anarchist union in Spain with a history of successful struggle and revolution.

The CNT: a different kind of union

The CNT was consciously anti-bureaucratic and revolutionary. It was anti-state, against parliamentary action and in favour of direct action and general strikes. Its goal was the overthrow of capitalism and the state and the establishment of an anarchist-communist society. It didn't limit itself to the workplace, setting up community social centres which ran educational programs and cultural events. Women were also very active.

Anarchism in action

The union itself, its strikes and struggle was organised from the bottom up. The union made decisions at general meetings/ assemblies in the workplace. These assemblies operated via direct democracy where everyone had an equal voice. Any person or group delegated to administer the wishes of that assembly was rotated and could be recalled at any time, and had no power other than what the assembly gave them. These workplace assemblies were horizontally linked together (federated) both regionally and nationally, with power remaining in the assemblies at all times. This meant the CNT and its struggles were directly controlled by the members themselves. There were virtually no paid officials in the union that at one point had over 1 million members.

The Spanish Revolution

In 1936 the CNT helped bring about a profound social revolution in Spain. After initially suppressing the military

rising the workers seized their factories and introduced self-management; they took supply, transport and social services into their own hands, and organised a new way of life without capitalism, bosses or the authority of the state. Whole suburbs were directly run by its occupants.

The CNT union of food workers opened communal cafes where people could eat for free. Communities set up food committees to arrange food supply with the countryside — market commerce and money was replaced in many areas by distribution according to need. Free schools, universities and health programs were set up and administered by the workers themselves. Rural areas were collectivised. This experience, in which about 8 million people participated, showed that anarchist organisation of society could indeed work in practice.

After the Revolution was suppressed in 1939, the CNT continued either underground or in exile. When Franco died in 1975 the CNT revived and continues to this day in promoting revolutionary anarchist struggle.

Puerto Real

In 1987 the CNT successfully fought shipyard closures in Puerto Real. Every Friday the CNT organised assemblies where anyone — including the wider community and those not in the CNT — could get involved and make decisions. This ensured wider support and gave the community equal part in the workplace struggle. It also meant any direct action taken was mass approved and equally shared, building solidarity through struggle.

Some questions

- What can we learn from the way the CNT is/ was structured and the tactics it uses?
- What lessons can we draw from the Spanish Revolution and the Puerto Real strike?

The anarchist communist discussion nights take place at 7pm on the first Wednesday of every month at the WEA, 59 Gloucester St, Christchurch. All welcome!

*Organised by Beyond Resistance:
www.beyondresistance.wordpress.com*
