



**A
grass root
C.N.T.
militant
Remembers**



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Remembers**

The oral memoirs of
Luis Parés Adán

Translated into English by Vicente Ruiz (hijo)

The flame of the Spanish Social Revolution has never stopped burning.

Eighty years since it was lit one can still find anarchist innovations in the folds of its contents. All its political adversaries through the decades have been unable to discard or permanently hide the constructive and positive social achievements implemented by the libertarian movement.

Thousands of printed works describing the events that transpired during those captivating days have travelled around the world, many of them written by renowned authors. Others books have been written by research academic historians giving their individual interpretations of the proceedings. Unfortunately not too many books have been written by the individuals that experienced the events at first hand, that were in actual fact making history with their militancy, with their direct participation, with their contribution in spontaneous actions and decisions be it at meetings, behind the barricades or on the battlefield.

At the beginning of the second half of the 1970's a small group of compañeros in France, in Spain and where ever there were exiled Spanish anarchists set themselves the task of recording the verbal memoirs of militants whose singular actions contributed to the social changes, the collectivisations as well as the constant struggle against fascism. This is the history of personal experiences.

We now have the pleasure of presenting in the following pages the testimony of Luis Parés Adán who recalls his war. These memoirs were first published in the pages of "Espoir" the weekly publication of the French C.N.T. - A.I.T., number 825, July 1978.

Pueblo Nuevo, an outer suburb of Barcelona, on the 19 July 1936. At 4 o'clock in the morning I am awoken from my sleep by the sound of howling sirens. In Barcelona the military came out of the barracks and moved towards the strategic points of the city. For quite sometime everyone knew, except the Government off course, that the military wanted to give a coup d'état. The C.N.T. had organized surveillance groups near the barracks and through the night vehicles with armed workers patrolled the city.

We heard on the radio, that the military had plotted an insurrection in Morocco. The Government did everything in its power to make the incident look as insignificant as possible, and said they had the situation under control. But by July 1936, it was quite a long time since the Government had lost all credibility in the eyes of the workers.

In any case the morning of the 19th of July, saw the successful implementation of warning mechanisms instigated by workers.

By the time I go down into the street I find half the pavers already removed. The entire neighbourhood is there, men women and children, have created a human chain all the way up to the barricade.

Antonio Navarro, my friend and compañero in arms from a long time, found two rifles. Now we were armed. We hear the echoing firing of a canon at a distance. The fighting is moving towards the centre of Barcelona. Pueblo Nuevo is ruffled with barricades. The vehicles of the C.N.T. fitted with loud speakers, which came to ask the population to build barricades can no

longer circulate due to the promptness in erecting them. It was spontaneous, as the sirens sounded we built the barricades and got the weapons we needed.

We have defence committees that function like the *sindicatos*. Our sector is calm. The Civil Guard remains for us an unknown force; they have not as yet shown their allegiance. No matter what, we have taken our precautions in that respect. That night we were on guard duty at the barricade when all of a sudden I noticed a suspicious shadow. I yell out for the person to identify themselves. The unknown individual responds insulting the revolution and glorifying the Falange.

I have him on my sight and as I am about to shoot him he yells out:

-“stop being a bastard, it’s me, your brother Jaime!”(1)

He had just been released from the Modelo prison of Barcelona where he was incarcerated awaiting trial for transporting explosives, and having recognized me straight away, he thought it would be a good joke to play on me.

After spending a very brief time with our mother, my brother

(1) Jaime Parés Adán was born in Barcelona in 1910 and joined the C.N.T. at a very young age. Amongst his compañeros he had been given the nick name “El Abisinio” because of his *Afro* hair style. By 1926 at the young age of 16 he was a member of the clandestine defence groups. During the Civil War he belonged to the transport unit of the Durruti Column. He was later appointed as a bodyguard to Eugenio Vallejo, the armaments secretary of Catalonia. He also participated on numerous occasions in actions aimed at freeing anarchists imprisoned by the communists. At the end of the Civil War he exiled himself in France where he joined the guerrilla warfare group which included resistance fighters such as Francisco Sabaté Llopart and his brothers, Jose Lluís Facerías, Ramon Capdevila also known as “Caraquemada” to only name a few.

“El Abisinio” was murdered on the 9th of May 1946 whilst entering his home. The police shot him in the back in a hail of gun fire on his own staircase. Jaime Parés Adán died without being able to put up the least show of resistance.

returned to Barcelona.

Pueblo Nuevo is under our control. Only the priest refuses to get out of the Church. Dozens of our companions surround the building and yell:

-“Open the door or we will set the Church alight.”

A truck of the F.A.I. arrives from Barcelona. Volunteers are needed to go and fight in the centre of the city. Upon seeing the church undamaged and the door closed, the *compañeros* from Barcelona laughed at us.

-“Get out of the way” they told us,

-“we are going to make your priest come out of that church!”

The crowd moved away and the C.N.T.-F.A.I. *compañeros* hurled a couple of *bombas de mano* “hand bombs” blowing up the door way. When the smoke had vanished, the priest came out hands in the air bellowing:

-“long live the republic, long live the republic”.

Because he was a decent human being we suggested that he should find some plain clothes and disappear. I met him again after the war, and I must give credit that he never reported me to the fascist authorities.

When we arrived as reinforcements to Barcelona, the city was almost under our control. The Plaza Cataluña is littered with dead men and horses. The fighting was horrific.

With Antonio we go to the offices of the *sindicato* where we learnt that columns of volunteers were being organised to disembark in Mallorca. We go and register our names with the Defence Committee.

Whilst awaiting to embark, I went to my old place of employment. When my manager saw me with a shotgun, he threw himself onto me to embrace me.

I pushed him away. He is a former member of the infamous *sindicatos libres* “the right wing unions”, made up of “pistoleros” whose only activity was to assassinate the better known militants of the C.N.T.

I said to him:

-“my responsible duty should be to take you to the Defence Committees in order that you may be executed, however, as unlike you, I am not an assassin, I strongly suggest that you disappear before they come looking for you to line you up against the wall”.

I unfortunately have had to regret my humanitarian gesture, since at the end of the war, that bastard denounced me to the Francoist police.

We do not proceed to Mallorca, rather to the township of Rosas, near the French border, where it is feared fascists might disembark. Meanwhile Antonio married my sister. We are family. At the end of the war this civil union will be annulled by the fascists, as well as all the civil marriages that were held in the Republican zone. The children will be registered as being born to unknown fathers and those who have not been baptized will be deprived of ration cards.

In Rosas, we have a few field guns, unfortunately they have a fairly short range. We strengthen our positions by digging a series of trenches, in the process we also dig up quite a number of Roman relics such as bowls and cups which we immediately began to use. Within a short time a Committee of archaeologists arrived from Barcelona and ejected us from our location accusing us of misusing the Roman relics. As a result we moved



Trucks bringing C.N.T militants into Barcelona



some 100 metres down the road to await the fascist landing.

One of the mornings the “Canarias”, a fascist cruiser, appeared at the entrance of the bay where the township of Rosas is located. We rush to where our artillery guns are positioned and await the instructions from the military officer in charge to show us how to use them. As the captain is not at his post we go to look for him. We eventually find him in his quarters crying. Our political Commissar, who is a compañero from my neighbourhood in Pueblo Nuevo, grabs the officer and demands an explanation. He confesses that he is incapable to be in charge of an artillery post, that up to a few days ago he was a mere sergeant whose only military acknowledge was to teach the new recruits how to march in step.

It is the revolution that has made him a captain and he sincerely regrets it. As there are many traitors amongst career military personnel we do not know what to make of him. Nonetheless because he appears to be a good person we do not insist any further with the matter.

There is amongst us a young schoolteacher whose knowledge of trigonometry allows us to prepare the canons for firing. However this young person advised us against firing onto the “Canarias”, because our guns reach a maximum distance of 12 km whereas the cruiser's is 25 km. Whilst the “Canarias” is bombarding the township of Rosas, we waited patiently for it to move into our distance range, this unfortunately did not happen.

The sector of Rosas having been quiet for a number of days we return to Barcelona where the C.N.T. is organising militia columns for the Aragon front. Both Antonio and I are incorporated into the “Roja y Negra” (Red and Black) column.

In Aragon we find ourselves in the sector of Huesca. The township is under the control of the fascists and we need to take it so as to facilitate our attack onto Zaragoza. General

Villalba is the military officer in charge of the republican troops.

We attack Huesca; following an intensive bombardment from our artillery posts, the infantry rushes onto the enemy's trenches. The event is somewhat confusing. We notice the fascist troops retreating and soon evacuating the township of Huesca.

Only a machine-gun company remains in place. (*We learnt much later that this last group of soldiers awaited the arrival of the republican forces so as that they could join our side*). With the battle turning in our favour, we hear the trumpets from our side sounding retreat. There is confusion within our ranks, some compañeros are already in the outer suburbs of the township, whereas others obeying the orders retreat. The fascists take advantage of the situation, they re-group and organise a counter attack.

Huesca will not be taken. We feel betrayed by the military high command, we send a delegation to Villalba's general quarters. He no longer is there, he has taken refuge in Barcelona, where he explains to the Generalitat, that the anarchists want to kill him. To compensate him for having failed to take Huesca, the Republic gives him a new command.

In the meantime the church in order to incite us organizes a big procession in the township of Huesca to give thanks to the saints for not having allowed the "rojos" (*reds*) take control of the township. The priests have also taken the precaution to put the women and children at the front of the parade. We also learn that 60,000 of our compañeros have been executed by firing squad in Zaragoza. A few amongst us take the initiative to fire a few warning shots in an endeavour to stop the procession. Those bastards of priests force the women and children to sing religious hymns and proceed with the parade. We subse-

quently use our artillery and fire a few warning shots with the positive result that everyone scattered. We did not kill one single person, yet the international Press accused us of machine gunning a religious procession. We lost all respect for the international Press.

The Confederal columns have not taken Huesca. I learnt that my brother had however saved the honour. Following a stupid bet he went into the township to have a coffee at a bar. He was able to get in and out of the town disguised as a priest.



C.N.T. militias awaiting to go to the front



C.N.T. militias displaying a banner saying “onto Zaragoza”



Antonio Navarro and Luis Parés Adán
two amongst thousands that fought with the C.N.T. Militias.

May 1937

Antonio and I are on leave in Barcelona. One morning whilst resting and recovering from the fatigue of the front, I am pulled from my bed by Antonio:

- *“Quick the communists are murdering our compañeros.”*

Barcelona is bristling with barricades. The dead are no longer being collected. People are remaining in their homes. We have a few canons that we took from the military barracks of San Andrés. We position one of them in front of the Park of the Ciudadela where the Communists are encircled. We are going to try and break through their defence lines so that our compañeros can get inside the park.

The Avenue leading to the park is filled with compañeros, and in particular young ones from the Juventudes Libertarias (Liber-tarian Youths) who were quietly lying down and waiting, with bayonets fitted at the end of their rifles, so as to be able to rush an assault.

It was at this instance that some compañeros come looking for me, because they are in need of a welder. I need to cut with a torch a cast iron plaque that will be placed next to a canon so as to provide some protection. This canon is to be positioned in front of the Karl-Marx barracks.

We find a piece of cast iron in a foundry near the barracks. Once cut, we position it using sandbags next to the canon. We await dawn to make our assault. There is with us some very young compañeros from the Juventudes Libertarias, who have distinguished themselves by having taken several communist barricades with bayonet assaults. The Communists are caught in the trap, we feel that now we are going to finish them.



Some of the barricades erected in the streets of Barcelona
During the May 1937 events.





Sand bag structures were also raised outside buildings occupied by the C.N.T. and anarchist organizations to protect themselves from attacks by the counter-revolutionary communist and Generalitat forces.

That night the appeals made via the radio by the main representatives of the C.N.T. will discourage us. They plead with us to cease the fight. We must first of all win the war against fascism. Antonio, disgusted, throws his rifle on the ground. It's finished. We know that with the revolution betrayed, the war is also lost. We decide not to return to the front to get killed for nothing.

However the republican government begins to enlist new conscripts, and Antonio is one of the many drafted. As we do not want to be separated and as this war no longer concerns us, we are not sure as to what to do. Fortunately I met up with the former political commissar we had whilst in Rosas.

He has just arrived from the Extremadura front, he is looking for trust worthy compañeros, to return with him. The socialists and communists are taking over all the command posts and they want to militarise the anarchist militias within that sector. We like his suggestions and propositions and take the train for Extremadura.

We are in the township of Don Benito in the province of Badajoz, the front is fairly calm when there are no aerial attacks. We have no aeroplanes, nor any anti aerial batteries to defend ourselves. Our morale is quite low, we no longer trust the rear guard. The revolutionary momentum and spirit has been broken. We see the arrival to the front of the first communist officers with elegant uniforms. Because they fear us, they establish a new front behind ours. For the wellbeing of the war the new recruits are not allowed to fraternise with us, we also notice that with each arrival of new recruits, the conscripts are getting younger.

One day both Antonio and I decided to go into town to get some supplies. Because I walked in front of a group of officers without saluting them, I am stopped and told:

-“Have you not learnt to salute your superiors?”

To which I respond:

-“I only salute my friends”

I am grabbed by the patrol and told:

-“We are going to execute you by firing squad, you bastard!”

A few officers intervene, by suggesting that I should firstly face a court martial. I find myself in prison together with fascists.... In the meantime, Antonio has gone to advise the compañeros that I am going to be executed by firing squad.

A delegation from my battalion arrives in town. The issue at hand is to make sure that those cretins cannot do a thing to me. My compañeros reach a compromise. Since I am a gunner, I must be tried by artillerymen and not by infantrymen.

My life is saved. But I still have to be punished, I am sent to an observation post located in between the fascist front line and ours. My task was straight forward and simple, I had to observe the activities and movements of the enemy troops and notify our high command. Antonio has become a motor bike messenger. He spends his time criss-crossing the front as a dispatch rider. Whenever he is given leave he comes to see me at my observation post. He brings me tobacco, cold meats and some sweets. Antonio is the only courageous person willing to spend his leave with me, in a location which is so dangerous. It must be said that our troops are at the bottom of a small pocket past the fascist line of defence and that we all have a worrying anxiety in being cut off.

Every now and then I leave my observation post with a few compañeros to go and collect supplies. On one of those occasions, returning to the observation post we came across a fascist patrol. They broke through our lines and no one informed us. We stopped the truck and tried to reverse. The fascists began

shooting at us. The driver is killed. We jump into a small ravine on one side of the truck and try to escape. I am shot in the leg but I do not stop running. I fell, got up and continued running so many times it was unimaginable. I finally saw one of our soldiers unhurt and safe. I called him. He came over to help me and together we escaped. Along the way we crossed path with one of our tankers, the driver not being aware that the fascists had broken through our lines was rushing straight into a trap. We explain what had happened to the driver, he turned the truck around and we all returned to the safety of the township.

In town the entire population has been commandeered to build and fortify a new front. The hospital has been evacuated. I am sent to another hospital. But it would take the driver three days to find a hospital where they could take care of me. I ask myself what has become of Antonio.

I am healed but not fully recovered. I leave the hospital with not much enthusiasm. This was the only place where I had been treated like a human being during the entire war.

I am sent to a rehabilitation centre in Ciudad Real, awaiting to be given the final discharge by the medical staff to either return to the front or to be sent home. The communists control the rehabilitation centre. All the patients are wounded, maimed or disabled, and we are all treated like beasts. There are no beds, no mattresses, no linen, no blankets, no clothes and ofcourse no food.

I arrived at the rehabilitation centre in pyjamas and I do not have any other clothes. A compañero manages to find me a vest and a pair of trousers. The hunger is just unbearable. One day whilst queuing up for some soup (and by the way you have to find your own container if you want to eat), I see a young lieutenant slap one of the severely wounded patients, the officer's excuse was that the soldier had already had his ration and

he re-joined the queue for a second serving.

I threw myself on him and the words just came out:

-“You shit, you bastard with a cushy position, all of us lined up in this queue have been wounded in the front lines, and you have the audacity to slap a person that is hungry!”

I am grabbed and thrown into jail. In front of the tribunal I was able to defend myself fairly well, and because I was looked upon as an invalid due to my leg wound I was sent to a supply centre.

The supply centre's work force is made up of down-and-outs, wounded and injured of any kind, those judged unfit for the front, and it is supervised by non-commissioned officers and career officers all of which are members of the Communist Party. Following an incident with an arrogant Sergeant, I am ordered to report to the new commander of the centre.

-“Where are you from? he asks me.

-From Barcelona.

-Hum! Are you an anarchist?

- I am a militant of the C.N.T.!

-Good, if you are from Catalonia and a *cenetista* (a member of the C.N.T.), I am from Asturias and a member of the F.A.I. (the Iberian Anarchist Federation). Look (he shows me his leg) I too am badly wounded. Here in this centre all the officers and non-commissioned officers are communists, they have never seen the front, and I have been given instructions that within eight days they have to be on the front lines. Here, I am giving you the only rifle that works properly in this centre. Do not hesitate to use it against these bastards, I will protect you.”

We succeeded in shifting all those wonderful officers to the front. This supply centre was notorious for its black market

operation and corruption, within a couple of days we were able to feed 700 children from our surrounding area.

The news from the front are catastrophic. We receive the order to evacuate everyone that is unable to fight. We take the train for Valencia. Upon arrival the city is already under the control of the fascists. Everywhere there are vehicles with loudspeakers instructing republican soldiers to congregate at the plaza de toros (the bullring) where we will be fed, and from there sent to our respective families. I start walking towards the arena when an old man stops me:

-“Where are you going?

-To the bull ring, to eat and from there I'll be able to go home.

-Do not go there. It is a concentration camp. Those that go there only come out dead.”

I'm with a friend from Mataró, who was wounded in the leg and who has scabies. We decided to try our luck and reach Barcelona by our own means. We begin our long walk.

Everywhere, in each and every village along the way, the church bells are ringing nonstop to celebrate Franco's victory. We have to constantly hide, walk during the night, finally we arrive in Mataró, and we go to my friend's house.

His family give me two pieces of silver, their only fortune, and I depart for Barcelona.

Barcelona! Barcelona defeated, humiliated, hungry. The return is terrible. I am ashamed, I feel miserable, old, beaten.

My home is still there and untouched. I find my family, at least those that have not died and those that have remained in Spain. My brother is in exile in France. Antonio is in prison. There is nothing to eat, the black market is flourishing. The fascist are

relentlessly killing people. I need to find work. I learn that I cannot return to my old place of employment, because I have been denounced for all sorts of crimes which I have not committed. I ended up obtaining employment at Hispano-Suiza.

There I found some compañeros, but no one speaks to anyone, shame, fear, disgust, hunger, are our daily lot. I analytically look at those old compañeros. They have aged, they are thinner, they are arched, and they appear to be in a trance.

The spanish people have entered the long night of Franco's fascist tyranny. The second world war has been declared. Hitler's forces are victorious everywhere. At Hispano-Suiza, the first strike has been declared. And although we are under a military regime, the strike is victorious.

The C.N.T. begins to rebuild, I again have my militant's card. Antonio is also back from prison. We believe that if the Germans loose the war, Franco will most definitely go. The first activities of militant action by the C.N.T. restores our morale. I get married. My brother arrives clandestinely from France with a delegation sent from exile. The first Plenum of the Catalanian Regional since Franco imposed himself takes place. We are armed to the teeth so as to protect all the delegates.

Yet, it appears as if all the political and social world events are rushing past without effecting our lives. The second world war is over, the fascists have been defeated, and Franco remains, the allies rather have him as the “Caudillo de España” (the head of the Spanish nation) before risking the possibility of a new revolution. He will remain in power for quite some time.

The clandestine organization suffered numerous harsh blows. Francisco Sabaté “El Quico”, arrives in Barcelona and instructs us to put a stop to every activity we were undertaking, the police were on our heels, they knew every single one of our safe houses, etc.



Francisco Sabaté "*El Quico*"
during one of his many
clandestine visits to
Barcelona

Jaime Parés Adán
"*El Abisinio*"



My brother Jaime, “El Abisinio”, is caught in a police ambush whilst entering his home. Because he is too dangerous to be taken alive, he is shot in the back by the police. They find on him my identity card. It is now time for me to disappear.

I am able to enter France by crossing the Pyrenees on foot. For me the war is over. I find work. My partner also crosses the Pyrenees covertly. Soon it is Antonio's turn together with his family.

In France, the C.N.T. is reconstituted. Life in exile begins for us. It will last for many long years.

Sometimes a factory siren reminds me of Barcelona. At night, the sound of a motor bike awakens me, and I once again see Antonio on his motor bike, speeding and zig zagging along our front lines in Extremadura.

It is then that I have this incredible desire to pick up my grandson, sit him on my knees and talk to this little Frenchman about Spain. But his mother's severe looks stop me short.

-“Come on abuelo, don't go putting your rebellious ideals into this little head, we no longer are in 1936.”

