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Facts about Spanish Resistance - 2

José Peirats



WHAT IS THE C.N.T. ?

WHAT IS THE C.N.T. ?

by

Jose Peirats

Foreword

"What is the C.N.T.?" was first published in RUTA, an excellent Spanish language review published in Caracas.

When Jose Peirats spoke here in London at the Iberian Centre, I promised myself to translate the work. So often in my conversation with militants here and sympathisers with anarchism in Britain I had heard the question asked in the title.

Jose Peirats enjoys great prestige as a historian not only in the Spanish and international anarcho-syndicalist movement, but amongst professional historians, many of whom owe their entire research upon the Spanish labour movement to a scrutiny of his definitive works. His famous book "The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution", so sought after by students, has incomprehensibly not been translated into English.

It hardly seems possible that a writer so prodigious and authoritative as Peirats, indefatigable with his pen as ever, lives in exile, in impoverished circumstances, at 65 years of age dependant upon social security after a lifetime as a worker, while academics on comfortable grants utilise his research as their own.

MIGUEL GARCIA GARCIA

INTRODUCTION

The Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (the National Federation of Labour) has been a thorn in the side of politicians in Catalonia, and for that matter in the rest of Spain, since its inception (in 1911) right up to the end of the civil war (in 1939), which was also the end of its open existence. These gentlemen loathed it as a hotbed of organised upheavals in the even tenour of public life, and did not mince their words in choosing the worst epithets they could think of for it.

In the days of the First International, a Spanish Prime Minister, Sagasta, called the predecessor of the CNT, the Regional Federation of Spain, "a philosophic Utopia of crime"; under the Second Republic, Azana termed its members "bandits with union cards". Somewhat more objective than either of these gentlemen, the English writer, Gerald Brennan, declared that the anarchist movement in Spain was the most Spanish of all south of the Pyrenees.

Some persons who may have personal reasons for forgetting about the untameable spirit which has historically characterised the Iberian race, whether in confrontation with the invader or in opposing a parade of native officiousness, would be better employed than in looking for the origins of anarcho-syndicalism outside Spain. Joint offspring of crude Catalan capitalism and the feudalism of Andalucia, it established itself as a robust movement of protest against political corruption, against an outdated system of landholding, against the plutocrats or the nouveaux riches, and against a narrow-minded ruling class from which Spain has never ceased to suffer.

It will be noted that anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism have been spoken of in the same breath. In Spain they are in reality two words which connote the same thing. If there has almost always been a movement called specifically anarchism, with its press and editorials and with other groups attached to it - such as the Free Youth movement, the women's organisations, Anti-fascist Solidarity, clubs, schools, etc. - always at the centre of this pullulating swarm has been found the workers' organisation, the C.N.T., the heart of the entire movement, as well as its fecund source. The reaction, the bearing, in a word the climate of thinking of the greater part of its component bodies bears the indelible stamp of federalism, the mark of the C.N.T., for all those who were born of it and died in it were its men.

NOTE

The C.N.T. was the confederation of anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain. The 'orthodox' socialist trade union, the U.G.T. (General Union of Workers) was created later. Unlike other countries, it was the social-democratic U.G.T. which was the 'splinter' organisation. It bolstered its position within Spanish society by political action, and the Socialist politicians and U.G.T. officials entered the governments of the monarchy and the Republic (even the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, when permitted to do so). It was this factor which made for difficulty in union during the Civil War.

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THE CONSTITUTION OF THE C.N.T.

A revolutionary organisation of the working class such as the C.N.T. cannot be judged by the overt meaning of its constitution. Always in conflict with legality, the C.N.T. found it necessary to have recourse to subterfuges to enable it to obtain the legal recognition which it needed for its trade unions to be able to operate. The rules and regulations submitted to the government only expressed in a summary form what were the principles, tactics and aims of the organisation. Quite often the provincial governors to whom they were sent imposed finishing touches of the text submitted as a condition of according legal authorisation.

As far as our information goes, the rules that can be called characteristic of the movement began to crystallise at the regional congress of the Catalan unions, which was held in Barcelona in June-July, 1918. It was at this congress that the C.N.T. decided that its structure must be based on one single union for each industry. And having done so it went on to lay down the aims of its unionism. A commission at this same congress put forward a draft constitution which was hastily completed afterwards, according to the ups and downs of circumstances. As far as this account is concerned, this was laid down by the commission:-

"An organisation under the name of the Catalan Regional Confederation of Labour has been set up with the following aims and objects: To put into practice the ideal of solidarity between the bodies forming the federation, directed towards the complete emancipation of the working class from monopoly capitalism and from all those who oppose the free development of productive workers. To be prepared to extend its activities, through federal pacts, with similar federations which either already exist or may come into being in the rest of Spain, in Europe and anywhere else in the world."

The second article is concerned with tactics and says:-

"To carry out the foregoing aims, the local and district federations - which shall be the only bodies constituting the Catalan Regional Confederation of Labour, with the exception of such special cases as the trade unions may decide to admit into their fold - shall always struggle in the purely economic field, that is, by direct action, untrammelled by any political or religious prejudice. As regards questions of tactics or procedure, these shall be appraised according to circumstances, even though the action to be taken shall be the preferred mode of combat."

Even though this constitution was formulated by the Catalan Region, the Mentor of modern syndicalism, it was adopted by all the other regional federations of the C.N.T., as can be seen from the following excerpt, for example, from an interesting work by Juan Peiro (The Path of the C.N.T., Barcelona, 1925):

"It is certainly true that the Congress of 1919 laid down that Free Communism is the basic ideology of the C.N.T.....; but it is no less true that this body, six months after, in submitting its rules for the approval of the (civil) governor of Valencia stated in Article II that 'in the attainment of these aims the Confederation and its constituent bodies will struggle in the purely economic field, that is by direct action, untrammelled by any political or religious prejudice.'

Let us note in passing that the 1919 Congress had laid down categorically the use of revolutionary direct action (cf. the records of these two congresses).

The Catalan Regional Congress referred to had discussed thoroughly the question of 'direct action'. It was reluctant to accept such a tactic openly; but nevertheless when submitting

its rules to Valencia for approval, the criterion of full direct action seems to have won the day, even though it was a matter lying within the competence of the National Confederation.

Then came 1930, and the end of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, which had driven the C.N.T. underground. This time the National Committee sent its rules for approval to the (civil) governor of Barcelona, Despujols. And it was this Despujols, doubtless with the permission of General Mola, Director-general of Intelligence, who signed them after making certain changes which jump to the eyes of an expert. The new text read as follows:--

"An organisation has been set up in Spain under the designation of the C.N.T. which sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To work for the development of the spirit of association among workers, getting them to understand that only in this way can they raise their moral and material condition in modern society, and so prepare the way for their complete emancipation in the conquest of the means of production and consumption.
- b) To practice mutual aid between the different bodies in the Federation, always when necessary and called for by them, both during strikes and on any other occasion that may arise.
- c) To foster realations with all similar working-class organisations, whether national or international, with a view to sharing their experiences and thus hasten the total emancipation of workers everywhere."

In Article II it was stated;

"To carry out the foregoing aims, the Confederation and the trade unions which are its constituent

bodies shall confine their struggle to the purely economic field, and shall resolve their differences with those concerned directly; with the bourgeois, such as may be of an economic nature; and those of a social kind or concerning public order and services, with the government or with the departments concerned, freeing themselves completely of any political or religious alignment."

DIRECT ACTION During the regional congress of 1918 an interesting discussion took place on the subject of the tactics to be followed; Should the movement base itself on direct action, multiple action or a mixture of the two? On this proposition, the platform issued the following directive: "Even though the principles which inform the regional federation are based on the doctrines of revolutionary syndicalism and its tactics, there exist in its midst some unions which do not carry on their struggle with Capital in this spirit and even act on a multiple base, we recommend that the Congress resolves that no bodies should belong to the Confederation which do not accept in its full extent the principles of direct action."

In course of the debate it was evident that although no one, or almost none, was against direct action, the emphasis with which the platform put forward its recommendations did not take into account, in the opinion of some, the backwardness of many workers. If the principle of direct action was accepted in all its rigour, such workers would implicitly find themselves outside the organisation. Even Juan Peiro himself, who might be considered the most representative theoretician of Spanish revolutionary syndicalism, took the view that a declaration of principles should be made which was not so extreme as that contained in the motion before congress. He said: "Direct action, even if accepted by all of us, has not yet been absorbed thoroughly by any but small groups. Hence the acceptance of the motion would result in the exclusion from the Confederation of many forces which already accept direct action in principle, even though it is not felt dogmatically."

In the end, Congress resolved: "In the battle between Capital and Labour, those unions belonging to the Federation are under the obligation of adopting by preference the system of direct action in circumstances of real gravity, they do not call for the use of other distinct formulas."

In the upshot, as we have seen, the constitution of the C.N.T. was characterised - at least when not deleted by the governors, as happened with Despujols - purely and simply by the statement that the tactics of the C.N.T. were to be direct action.

In practice, there was a certain amount of confusion. Direct action came into conflict with the alleged impartiality of the government when arbitrating in conflicts between Capital and Labour. Revolutionary syndicalism well understood that, far from being neutral between employers and workers, the authorities were fiercely allied with the capitalists, since they had a host of common interests which bound them to the side of the 'bosses'. Their awards were necessarily, it followed, against the interests of the working class.

If the authorities confused direct action with violence, certain militants who were not sufficiently instructed thought it a mortal sin if a strike committee paid a visit to government offices. In this respect, if the rules established in 1930 leave out mention of direct action, in turn they define it perfectly by stating that conflicts between capital and labour shall be settled directly, with the employers, while those of a social nature or having to do with the services shall be taken up with the authorities.

"ONE UNION" "One Union" as defined by the same Congress of 1918, is not what its sworn enemies have been propagating about it. With mala fides, they allege that it discloses a wish for monopoly; One Union means a Single Union (for all). The sole monopolists are those totalitarian regimes which have imposed a single monopolist union, shackling employers and workers together by decree in something

which is proclaimed to be the end of the class struggle without abolishing classes.

The idea of a single union for each industry ("One Union") was not invented by the 1918 congress. In the first workers' congress, that of June 1870, a form of organisation was adopted, which when perfected the following year at Valencia evoked the admiration of the internationalists who met in London that same year around Karl Marx (he will be mentioned again later).

Let us note in passing that in every period of reorganisation after a spell more or less prolonged of suppression, the working class militant is faced with the fragmentation resulting from different workers' groups in the same place of work, ironically called "chapels". This is to say that, in the same locality, there are to be found different groups of carpenters, or locksmiths, or smelters, run by little local "bosses", who defend their petty fiefs against the syndicalist organisation with cloak-and-dagger tactics.

The "One Union" came to put an end to such gangster-chiefs. And in doing so, it ended their parochial quarrels and emphasised the unity of the working class. Further, the "One Union" carried the federalist enterprise to the furthest extent, spreading it throughout the region and the whole country. For all that, the One Union was already in existence in Barcelona before 1918.

INDUSTRIAL FEDERATIONS

Anselmo Lorenzo recalls in his "The Proletarian Militant" the defence which Garcia Meneses made of the Report on Organisation. The movement was at that time developing in two parallel directions. On the one hand, on the grounds of solidarity, of defense and of militant education, the basic units - the 'locals' - were federating themselves into local, district and regional organisations of all trades mixed; but apart from this, at the same time, the 'locals' of each separate trade were joining themselves together to form federations of the same industry on a local, district and regional basis. In this way,

during the last century, the Council of the Spanish Regional Federation had to take on the duty of representing both federal structures; the same had to be undertaken by the National Committee of the C.N.T.

The Federation of the different trades unions came into being in 1911, as someone recalled at the 1918 Congress: "It was at the last Congress held (in 1910) at the Bellas Artes Palace (in Barcelona) that the lines and outlines were traced along which were to be modelled the national organisations of the working class. It was in this congress that it was agreed, and that in no uncertain terms, to direct workers' unions to form themselves on a basis of a federation of 'locals' in the same industry in regional and national groupings, these groupings being the only units that were to make up the grand Confederation of Workers."

"It was on the basis of this decision," said the speaker, that was formed the Metallurgical Federation, "which was a local one to begin with, but later became a regional one, resulting ultimately in the formation of the National Metallurgical Federation." (Reminiscences of the 1918 Congress of Catalonia, Toulouse, 1957). But this same 1918 Congress left in the air the necessity for the formation of federations in each kind of trade. Their resolution was as follows: "It is not considered useful to form federations in each trade on a national scale, but as this question falls within the competence of a national congress of the C.N.T. it is left to such a congress to resolve it."

The next national congress, that of December 1919, dropped such trades unions from its plans, but those already in existence refused to dissolve themselves. Not only that, but other trades federated themselves on a national basis, such as the telephone workers, and those in the oil industry.

From the moment the Second Republic was declared (1931), there began a renewed interest in the question of federating within each kind of industry. As the advocates of the system were the German anarcho-syndicalists, an outstanding Spanish

militant sarcastically observed that these federations were being importéd into Spain "inside a barrel of beer".

Juan Peiro, the champion of Federations of Industry, was to write: "In our opinion, it was a grave error of judgement which the Congress at the Comedy Theatre (Madrid, 1931) made in agreeing to the abolition of federations of locals on a basis of a nationwide industry. Their existence was in no way incompatible with the existence of those called 'one union' groupingsIt is true that some of the trades federations in being at the time were over-centralising, being at fault in sucking dry the individuality of the local unions of which they were composed; but this should not have been a reason for breaking them up....

To national organisations of the bourgeoisie there should undoubtedly correspond national organisations of the working-class, grouped according to industries....Otherwise, it is not possible to confront or resist the capitalists....The general tendency of bourgeois capitalism, we have pointed out many times, does not limit itself to an economic-industrial concentration, nor even to the formation of national federations; their objectives go far beyond such limits and seek to find them, and already begin to find them, in international organisations and understandings. It would be absurd to agree for one moment that such a state does not call for a corresponding economic-industrial purpose in the defense of the productive class." (Anarcho-syndicalist Themes, Barcelona, 1930).

The national congress of 1931, after a long and passionate debate, accepted the industrial superstructure, but the split that occurred the same year put off an agreement to such an uncertain future that the most fervent advocates of the new formula abandoned the organisation. When in 1937 at long last the industrial federations began to be reformed, it was too late. The C.N.T. had scarcely any time left to run.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE C.N.T.

The federal congress of 1919 declared that "the aim of the C.N.T., in accordance with the essence of the principles of the (First) Workers' International, is Free Communism." However, since at the same time there was adopted another motion to join the Third International provisionally, some may draw the conclusion that the Free Communism of the C.N.T. and the communism of the Soviets were one and the same.

Soviet communism derives ultimately from the "Communist Manifesto" of Marx and Engels; free communism descends from the doctrines developed by Peter Kropotkin in his book, "The Conquest of Bread". Here are two conceptions fundamentally opposed to each other.

The Russians seek to build communism by means of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Free Communists are opposed to any authoritative body, and consider that it is possible to bring about socialism directly, without any dictatorship, for socialism without freedom is not socialism at all, neither can despotism ever lead to liberty. They trust in the social forces inbuilt in Man, which will rise to the surface and grow when oppression by the state and by capitalism ceases, and through the enjoyment in common of the sources of natural wealth and of the means of production.

REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

The C.N.T. calls itself revolutionary syndicalist because it is a fighting organisation both in the immediate present and with the prospect of overthrowing the State through armed revolution by means of a revolutionary general strike. Revolutionary, too, because through its own bodies located in the centres of production and its federal organisations such as the trade unions and its agro-industrial co-operatives, it considers itself capable of taking over the tasks of production and of distribution after the revolution has taken place.

With vistas of ambitious projects such as these Peiro assigned a most important role to the industrial federations, which were to prepare themselves beforehand by learning the economics and technology, the application of technological developments to industry, the fluctuations of supply and demand, the statistics of export and import etc. In the factories, the shop stewards' committees of today, fighting for the interests of their union members in the place where they work, should become tomorrow the technical committees who will administer the enterprises in a socialised economy.

The same Peiro gave a very important part in a socialist economy to the existing consumers' co-operatives as centres of distribution in the future: "The distribution of produce will similarly hold as important a role in the society of tomorrow as the articulation of production. This, not so much in respect of the development of production, exactly, as because organised distribution will be a factor in the orientation of the people from the first moment of the Revolution as far as the provision of food is concerned - we all know already how much the triumph of the revolution depends on this. That is why, further, that the Co-operatives have to be unflinching in their function as the means of distribution in the new society freed from the trammels of Capitalism and the State.

THE QUESTION OF FEDERALISM

Both the Unions in the thick of the class war and also the industrial federations and co-operatives in a constructive age of revolution, regard federalism as their driving force. Libertarian communism has within its hold trade unions, industrial federations, co-operative societies and free communes (municipalities). In fact, the word Communism is derived from the commune or municipality. In the Iberian peninsula, there is a tradition of independent communes in history, which goes back to the fueros or local laws, public charters, and free communes of the Middle Ages.

Politically and administratively, Spanish libertarian communists thought of the commune as a self-governing unit capable of federating itself with other similar units, that is to say, sovereign within its own boundaries, but linked by a free pact with its neighbours. Federation always implies the freedom and self-government of the federating bodies, but this does not mean their independence.

Pi y Margall, who has been the moving spirit of Spanish anarchism as much as, or perhaps even more, than Bakunin or Kropotkin (for beginning with Salvochea and Mella, many Iberian anarchists drew their inspiration from him), has written in his book, "Nationalities" : "Federation comes from the Latin word foedus, which signifies an alliance or compact; it cannot be arrived at without the contracting parties being free, that is to say, sui juris." He added, on the subject of the municipalities of the Middle Ages: "The citizens not content with their fueros or own law codes, attempted all the time to extract further privileges to buttress them. If for any reason they united with their neighbours, it was to defend their local freedoms, even against the king himself, whom they always looked at with cautious and suspicious eyes. With this sole aim, there were organised chiefly in Castille and in Leon, those famous brotherhoods or groups which were so powerful in the last third of the Middle Ages, and unfortunately went down with Juan Padilla at Villalar. They acquired great power in this fashion, and so far from being for the benefit of the State, brought the State into their service."

In the C.N.T. before the Civil War, all decisions to act were taken in a meeting of the branch, whether in an office or a factory. There it was that the tasks were laid on the men who were to carry them out. In general, these jobs were not remunerated. In this there was a scrupulous tradition no less rigorously followed. Because of this rule, it was difficult to turn the militants into bureaucrats, since they were regularly replaced at the end of their term of office, usually annual, and so did not come to feel like functionaries. This sacred custom was only broken during the three years of the war. This bureaucracy,

being carried over into the exiled organisations, became a bad habit and led to deplorable consequences, bureaucracy led to an acute crisis for federalism, and to an asphyxiating growth of centralisation.

Under normal circumstances, the federal organs are the local federation, which is the grouping of all the union 'locals' in an important centre of industry, or the One Union, which links together all the agro-industrial 'locals' of a district. Then come the District Committees, the regional committees and the National Committee. Deliberative bodies are in the following line: the assemblies of all affiliated bodies - which in times when the C.N.T. is functioning 'underground' are replaced by meetings of the militants; the regional or national congresses, in which direct representatives of the previously mentioned assemblies take part, being summoned to discuss a 'slate', the motions forming which have been selected by the basic units themselves; the plenary sessions, which cannot, however, discuss fundamental propositions, which are the prerogative of the congresses, nor can they modify resolutions agreed to at the latter; finally, the conferences, which are empowered to discuss fundamental themes, but have to submit the propositions agreed to, however, to the referendum of the individual unions.

Resolutions can be adopted by acclamation if no dissentient voice is raised against them; but normally voting by a majority is required ('majority law'), or by proportional representation, dropping progressively a certain number of votes for every one thousand members represented. Proportional voting was established to prevent the small unions from the villages being crushed by the huge concentrations of members in the capital. At congresses and at grand plenums, where the unions are directly represented, committee members have no voting rights, cannot put forward resolutions, nor present reports on their own behalf. They can only intervene of their own accord to announce that such and such a previous agreement is being contravened, or to inform the assembly of their activities.

APOLITICISM OF THE C.N.T. Following a line which goes back to the days of the First International, the C.N.T. proclaims its complete independence of all political parties. The congress of 1918, so often referred to in this account, laid down that "professional politicians can never represent workers' organisations, and the latter should make sure that they never affiliate themselves to any political club". We have already seen that by its constitution the C.N.T. must "fight in the purely economic field, untrammelled by any political or religious prejudice". Although any wage earner, whatever his political or religious notions, could belong to the C.N.T., no one could represent it who had appeared as a candidate in any local or parliamentary elections, or who had accepted political undertakings.

Faithful to the principles of revolutionary syndicalism, as proclaimed by the French C.G.T. at its 1906 Congress, the C.N.T. set itself to develop by acting outside political and parliamentary institutions. Its energies were directed to strengthening the unions, to organising industry, and to preparing its affiliates on a techno-professional basis in its revolutionary setting.

Fundamentally, all politicians were alike, those of the left as much as those of the right, above all in their approach to power. They all made the same promises and undertakings to the public at the beginning of their career and on the eve of elections. They all turned their coats in the same manner, betrayed their principles and rode roughshod over their electors once they got into office. Since they are incapable of altering their nature, these judgements took on the character of dogmas in the C.N.T. It can be said that as time went on and with the growth of the movement outwards - in 1919 its membership reached one million - it was due solely to the discovery made for themselves by the workers that such a growth came about.

Democracy remained defined, no less sarcastically, as a lure to "catch the unwary", a sleeping draught, or an iron for deformed limbs, twisted by the contradictions of capitalism.

It provided no solution for the fundamental problems of the capitalist system - the division of society into exploiters and the exploited - neither in the municipalities nor in the councils nor in parliaments. The very commune itself, so close to the life of the people, had been turned into an engine of oppression, used to collect taxes and to select conscripts for the army.

The militant literature of the C.N.T. distinguishes between authoritarian socialists and communists on the one hand, and those who do not limit themselves to anticapitalist demagogy, but attack the State as well, because they believe it to be the source of all evils. It is from this attitude that all those anarchist anathemas against power find a loudspeaker in the CNT: there is no such thing as revolutionary power, for all power is reactionary by nature; power corrupts both those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised; those who think they can conquer the State in order to destroy it are unaware that the State overcomes all its conquerors; there are no good and bad politicians, only bad ones and worse; provisional governments turn into permanent ones inevitably; the best government is no government at all; the Nation is not the People, nor is the State the same as Society; instead of the government of men, let us have the administration of things; peace to men, and war on institutions; dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship without the proletariat and against them; to vote for politicians is to renounce ones own personality; your union is yourself: in defending it, you are defending yourself; if you find that society is bad, you are there to improve it...and a thousand other aphorisms.

THE C.N.T. AND THE COMMUNISTS

At the height of the Russian Revolution, when the Bolsheviki were employing anarchistic phraseology (which hid their real aims at seizing and holding on to power), the C.N.T. allowed itself to be led astray into joining the Third International. At that time, the Entente had set about broadcasting the most tendentious 'news' about Russia, and thereby stimulated the sympathies of proletarians the world

over in favour of the great Russian people who had overthrown the legendary tyranny of the Czars. All the same, the C.N.T. announced its adherence with reservations. It was to be provisional, and subject to the outcome of an enquiry on the spot by a representative, and to the decisions of a World Congress to be held in Spain, at which a true Workers' International was to be set up.

In 1920, a delegate was sent to Russia who took part in the second Congress of the Third International. On his return, he declared that under the pretext of revolutionary power there had been set up in Russia the naked dictatorship of a single party. As soon as the C.N.T. was able to meet after the frightful repression of 1920-22, it broke completely with Moscow, which evoked against it the hatred of Cain on the part of the Bolsheviki and of such few disciples as they had been able to find in Spain.

It can be stated without fear of denial that it was the C.N.T. who first unmasked in Spain the new gang of Czars in Russia, who behind their revolutionary mask were able to poison the stream of old liberalism in Europe, and to break up the former centres of trade unionism by means of a disruptive and centralising policy at the service of the foreign interests of the totalitarian Russian State.

The U.S.S.R. invested untold financial resources in Spain, and was lavish with the number of its agents; it made use of venal spirits with persistence, for the purpose of conquering by every means possible the powerful centres of revolution in Spain. But they broke their teeth on a proletariat deeply imbued by the C.N.T. with the principles of one of the most original philosophies of liberty.

Just before the Civil War broke out, the communists had the luck to penetrate the U.G.T., which they found ideologically unarmed, and whose Youth movement they were able to take over at the beginning of the war. From this party base, the gains they made through the Popular Front in the February 1936 elections,

and those provided for them by the blackmail of Russian aid to the Republic during the war, was initiated the totalitarian enterprise which aborted the promising popular rising of July 19th, 1936.

Finding anarcho-syndicalism the chief obstacle in the path of their ambition to take over the Republic, they used every possible means to destroy it, leading to a series of provocations which culminated in the furious battle of May 1937 in Catalonia. After this, the C.N.T. lost in a maze of negotiations a battle it had won on the barricades against the communists, masterminded by the OGPU and their eventual allies, the assault guards of the Generalitat. But even though they had to undergo the humiliation of seeing their collectives destroyed by stormtroopers of the stalinist military chiefs, heroes of the baseline, the C.N.T. had sufficient forces in reserve to touch off the last episode of the war, an offensive of all liberal elements against those who till the very last moment were waging war for and on behalf of Moscow.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY The C.N.T. is the successor of the Spanish section of the First International which with ups and downs lasted from 1868 down to 1910. From its first congress in 1911, the C.N.T. remained 'underground' until 1914. In 1916, together with the U.G.T. it called for a general strike against shortages of food. In August 1917, again in common with the U.G.T., it brought about a revolutionary general strike. In 1918, it is seen re-organising itself in industry-wide unions. In 1919 was unchained the most complete general strike in the history of the Spanish working class, against the 'Canadian' group of industries, who had the full support of the civil and military authorities in Catalonia. The same year saw a disastrous lock-out by the bourgeoisie, at the very moment when in Madrid was being proclaimed that the aim of the C.N.T. was Libertarian Communism. At this juncture, it numbered one million members.

During the years 1920-22, the C.N.T. resisted heroically the repression let loose by the 'Viceroy' Martinez Anido, the despotic governor of Barcelona. Its militants were hunted through the streets of the capital and shot down like animals. They returned blow for blow, and in their turn there fell two ex-governors and one Prime Minister (Eduardo Dato). During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-30), a 'health cure' was effected in secrecy, the C.N.T. participating in all the conspiracies against the monarchy.

In 1930 the C.N.T. surfaced. Its first trumpet call was the appearance of "Solaridad Obrera" (Workers' Unity) as a daily. The king fled and the Republic arrived. Would the C.N.T. be allowed to consolidate itself? Both the Home Minister (Miguel Maura) and the Labour Minister (Largo Caballero) persecuted it: the first with his assault troopers, the second with his coercive laws, such as mixed tribunals and compulsory arbitration. The majority decided to set in motion the processes of revolution. A minority withdrew itself from this activity.

At the beginning of 1932 there was a preliminary uprising in the Catalan Pyrenees. The government replied with deporting those taking part to Spanish Equatorial Africa. In August of that same year, the C.N.T. helped to stifle the 'pronunciamento' of General Sanjurjo in Seville. 1933 opened with a more extensive uprising in Catalonia, Andalucia and the Levante (East Coast). It was put down with the utmost cruelty in an Andalucian village, where 'Seisdedos' (Sixfingers) and some of his associates were besieged in a shepherd's hut and burnt alive by the Guardia Civil.

Because of these oppressive measures, the C.N.T. waged a vast anti-parliamentary campaign during the elections of November 1933, in consequence of which the Republican-Socialist coalition lost, and the Right parties formed the new government. Against both right and left the C.N.T. let loose yet another insurrection, which reached its greatest intensity in Aragon and the Rioja district. In October 1934 the C.N.T. and the U.G.T. jointly brought about an uprising in the Asturias, which was liquidated

at the cost of hundreds murdered and 9000 sent up for trial. Under the protection of an amnesty, the C.N.T. took part in the campaign for the next general election, which took place in February, 1936. The C.N.T. observed a calculated objectivity, which this time contributed to the victory of the Popular Front. Lastly in July of the same year, the C.N.T. triumphantly put down in Barcelona the officers' rising against the Republic, and so made it possible to offer a prolonged resistance to their revolt during the Civil War.

During that tragic period, there were three main stages:

1. By the immediate impulse of the victorious resistance in the streets, the most warlike militants took the road towards the combat front, at first as columns of militiamen, subsequently as units of the People's Army.
2. Those militants experienced in the day-to-day organisation and running of unions understood that the hour had struck to put into practice the economic transformation foreseen in the term libertarian.
3. The top cadres of the movement acknowledged the crushing weight of a situation which they had been incapable of foreseeing seriously. They never outgrew their apprenticeship in which, paradoxically, they had to act the unwelcome part of acting as a brake on the inexperienced revolutionary impulses of their own comrades. They had to take on an ungrateful task, for which they were neither prepared nor felt a vocation.

Apart from the epic tale of the barricades and the trenches the most glorious page in the history of the C.N.T. was written by the anonymous membership which manned the industrial and agricultural communes. Expropriating those who were fascists and uniting the petty parcels of land owned by small peasants,

the C.N.T. decided to work them collectively. They put into practice the free exchange of products, so far as they were permitted by the obstruction of the bureaucracy, or by the punitive squads sent out by the counter-revolutionary communists.

In the centres of industry, hundreds of businesses were collectivised, and there were established small workshops which were left to continue on their own but were brought into the sphere of practicality. Plans of advanced socialisation such as the formation of the Timber Collective of Barcelona, or the Union of the cowherds and the bakers of the same district, were fulfilled at last. The heroism of the workers in these collectives could be gauged not only by the constructive capacity of which obscure militants of the unions gave proof, but also by the way in which difficulties were surmounted in course of their unaccustomed burdens. For everything was against them: the atmosphere of war, the backwardness of the peasantry, whether large or small, the malice of petty civil servants whose jobs had been reduced in importance or were about to be abolished, the obstruction offered by the old governing class as they increasingly began to raise their heads again, the all-embracing network of regulations and ukases which they issued, lastly, the hounding by the assault troops and officers of the regular army.

THE HUMAN MATERIAL OF THE C.N.T.

Before all else, let us pay a tribute to the militant, who always has been the inexhaustible source of the strength of the movement. In general, his name never appears in its publications, and scarcely ever in the rollcalls of its congresses. His sphere of action has ever been the union branch, the district assembly, the committee listening to highly excitable workers' claims, the bargaining table facing the employer, the strike committee, etc.

In normal times, this very struggle gave birth to militants in large numbers, by reason of the opportunity it offered the man of good will and spontaneity. But, above all, it created the fighting material, the traditional repudiation of servility and of mercenary

work. The militants were the soul of the organisation, its nervous system and its blood vessels.

Then there were the militants whom one could call those of the top rank. They emerged from the mass of militants mentioned above, and took on the heaviest responsibilities in the local union branches, the federation's committees and in the industry-wide union offices. They did not thereby become a separate class of workers, it being borne in mind that they turned up daily at their place of work, whether field, factory or mine, and carried out their devoted labour of love outside working hours. An old tradition, become established law, laid down that no one could belong to the C.N.T. who did not work for a wage and have an employer. This little rule was a barrier which shut out self-employed workers, those belonging to co-operatives, intellectuals and some kinds of technicians.

Much later, when unions had been set up for the liberal professions and for intellectuals, the door was opened to workers by brain as well as those by hand. In many ways these new recruits to the movement were looked on with suspicion by the older membership. Those who joined with the arriere pensee to find some self-advantage in the C.N.T. soon discovered that because of the critical atmosphere surrounding them, and the lack of any messianical spirit, this was not the organisation for them.

As regards the highly qualified technicians, they sought shelter in the C.N.T. for other than merely speculative reasons. An organisation ever in the thick of the battle, under a constant hail of blows aimed at it by the government, was not able to offer them anything other than the reward of imprisonment or an occasion to shed their blood. It was because of this circumstance that the white-collar workers retreated into their quiet self-important little strongholds. The C.N.T. suffered from a double allergy: that which it inspired in these gentry, and that which they elicited from it.

To those intellectuals who had been forged within the movement, and had acquired thereby an iron will, there were held out only the vicissitudes of the struggle and the joys of secret literature. These self-taught heroes ran and edited newspapers and reviews, essayed the writing of books, novels, poems and speeches, and taught in schools as well.

This is no more than a mere sketch of that important aspect of Spanish life which was the C.N.T. To obtain a more complete idea of it, recourse must be had to the enormous literature of the movement, of the multitudinous piles of newspapers and reviews that give the real feel of an organisation which was above all a never-failing dynamism in the service of a great idea, which embraced both illusion and sacrifice.

There are in Peirats' work a few strands of thought which do not bear close analysis. We may dismiss as naive his belief that State Communism derives from the 'Communist Manifesto' (in which there is no mention of dictatorship and little with which anarchists would disagree) while anarchism derives from 'The Conquest of Bread' (a socialistic exposition which does not deal in any way with the differences between State and Free Socialism).

This in any case contradicts his belief that Spanish anarchism is 'Spanish' and one should not look for its roots elsewhere. The same belief in the 'national origins' of anarchism is expressed by Rudolf Rocker (in 'Anarcho-Syndicalism' he gives it entirely English origins), Voltairine de Cleyre (in 'Anarchism and American Traditions' she gives it American origins) and Liu Shih-pei, who assumes it to be of Chinese origin (see 'Origins of the Anarchist Movement in China'). No doubt all are right. But nothing could be more 'Spanish' than the Roman Church and that was, to a large extent, an 'import'.

It may also be questioned whether, even if the Spanish capitalists and government had been more liberal, the workers would have compromised with them. But the pamphlet remains a fascinating introduction to the one labour movement of Western Europe that resisted equally Capitalism, Reformism and Stalinism.

THE RULE BOOK OF THE CONFEDERACION
DEL TRABAJO (CNT)

The constitution of the Confederation was printed in the membership card, set out in full here:-

The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves.

Anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism recognise the validity of majority decisions.

The militant has a right to his own point of view and to defend it, but he is obliged to comply with majority decisions, even when they are against his own feeling.

A membership card, without the corresponding confederal seal, is no longer valid. The confederal seal is the only means of income that the Regional and National Committees have. Not to keep it paid is to sabotage the work that has been recommended to these committees, for they are unable to carry out decisions without the economic means to do so.

We recognise the sovereignty of the individual, but we accept and agree to carry out the collective mandate taken by majority decision. Without this there is no organisation.

We must never lack the mental clarity to see danger and to act with rapidity. To lose time in talking in meetings by holding philosophical discussions, is anti-revolutionary. The adversary does not discuss, he acts.

The most fundamental principle of federalism is the right of the members to examine the role of the militants and to have control of their delegates, no matter what the circumstances or what position they have given them.

We must allow a margin of confidence to our delegates. But we must also retain the right to replace them if necessary.

To criticise in public those comrades given places of confidence in our organisation is to devalue the organisation. No conscientious comrade criticises

the committees in public, because this only favours the adversary.

The choice of delegates is discussed internally, and it is essential that this takes place, but one should remain silent in public. Think as you wish, but as a worker you need the syndicate, because it is there to protect your interests.

Comrade: This membership card is the safeguard of your working life. It has no price, but you will prize it above everything. And you will be ready to defend the card of the CNT wherever you see it attacked. UNITY IS STRENGTH.

Worker: The syndicate is your means of solidarity. Only in it are you able to form a united proletarian movement that will go forward to emancipation.

FACTS ABOUT SPANISH RESISTANCE:

- No. 1. Unamuno's Last Lecture. Facts about Spanish Prisoners & What can be done.
- No. 2. What is the CNT? - Poirats.

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Volume 1: ISBN 1 901172 05 8;

Volume 2: ISBN 10: 1-873976-24-0;

Volume 3: ISBN 1 873976 29 1.

Hardback editions are also available. Further details are available on the ChristieBooks website: www.christiebooks.com

