

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE SPANISH REVOLUTION:
ANARCHIST OPPOSITION TO STATE
COLLABORATION IN 1937

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the opposition mounted by anarchists to the policy of state collaboration, which was adopted by the principal organisations of the Spanish libertarian movement at the outset of the civil war. Collaboration is understood in broad terms as the involvement of libertarian individuals and organisations in the reconstruction of the Republican state following its near collapse in July 1936, a process that implied not only participation in the organs of governance, but also in the ideological reconstitution of the Republic as a patriarchal and national entity. Using original sources, the thesis shows that the opposition to this process was both broader and more ideologically consistent than has hitherto been assumed, and that, in spite of its heterogeneity, it united around a common revolutionary programme. Focusing on the strategies adopted by oppositional anarchists over the course of 1937, from the radical interpretation of the CNT's socialisation campaign to the insurrectionary mobilisation of May and finally to the defence of federalism within the libertarian organisations, the thesis also sheds light on the turbulent relationship between the responsible committees of the libertarian movement and its 'mid-level' union and affinity group delegates.

The 'conscience' of the Spanish revolution, like its Russian precursor, both recognised and struggled against the role that the principal revolutionary organisation in the country had assumed in the reconstruction of the state. In the Spanish case, the resistance to state reconstruction was informed by the essential insight of anarchism: that the function and purpose of the modern state cannot be transformed from within. By situating the struggles of the radical anarchists within the contested process of state reconstruction, the thesis affirms the continued relevance of this insight to the study of the Spanish revolution.

At the beginning of my research I had the privilege of corresponding with the late Antonia Fontanillas, a former member of the *Juventudes Libertarias*, whose commitment to preserving the memory of her generation and its struggle for a better world belied her years and serves as an inspiration. This thesis is dedicated to her.

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Index of Abbreviations

AAB – *Agrupación Anarquista de Barcelona* – Barcelona Anarchist Grouping

AAD – *Agrupación Amigos de Durruti* – Friends of Durruti Grouping

AJA – *Alianza Juvenil Antifascista* – Anti-Fascist Youth Alliance

CAP – *Comisión Asesora Política* – Political Advisory Commission

CCMA – *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas* - Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militia

CGT – *Confédération Générale du Travail* – General Confederation of Labour

CGT-SR – *Confédération Générale du Travail – Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire* – General Confederation of Labour – Revolutionary Syndicalist

CNT – *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* – National Confederation of Labour

DAS – *Gruppe Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten im Ausland* – Group of German Anarcho-Syndicalists in Exile

ERC – *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* – Republican Left of Catalunya

FAF – *Fédération Anarchiste de langue Française* – Francophone Anarchist Federation

FAI – *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* – Iberian Anarchist Federation

FECL – *Federación Estudiantil de Conciencias Libres* – Student Federation of Free Thinkers

FIJL – *Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias* – Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth

FJR – *Frente de la Juventud Revolucionaria* – Revolutionary Youth Front

GEPCI – *Gremis i Entitats de Petits Comerciants i Industrials* – Associations and
Bodies of Small Traders and Industrialists

IFTU – International Federation of Trade Unions

IWMA – International Working Men’s Association

JCI – *Juventud Comunista Ibérica* – Iberian Communist Youth

JDM – *Junta de Defensa de Madrid* – Madrid Defence Council

JLL – *Juventudes Libertarias* – Libertarian Youth

JSU – *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* – Unified Socialist Youth

MMLL – *Mujeres Libres* – Free Women

POUM – *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* – Party of Marxist Unification

PSOE – *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* – Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party

PSUC – *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* – Unified Socialist Party of Catalunya

PCE – *Partido Comunista de España* – Communist Party of Spain

SO – *Solidaridad Obrera* – Workers’ Solidarity

UGT – *Unión General de Trabajadores* – General Union of Workers

Notes

Regions and cities within Spain are given their Spanish spelling, with the exception of the Basque Country, presented in its English form, and the areas and institutions within Cataluña, which are rendered in the Catalan spelling. All translations are the author's.

Preface

The revolution that accompanied the outbreak of the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) was one of few occasions in world history when a conscious attempt to change the fundamental relations of a society has been undertaken by masses of people. At the forefront of this process were the organisations that, in several Spanish cities, had taken the lead in opposing the attempted coup launched on 17 July 1936 by officers in the Spanish army: the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of Labour – CNT) and the anarchist *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Iberian Anarchist Federation – FAI). Such was the prominence of these organisations in suppressing the Nationalist mutineers that, with the smell of gunpowder still lingering in the air, several of the CNT and the FAI's most prominent members met at the Casa Cambó, an imposing building in the heart of Barcelona soon to be renamed the 'Casa CNT-FAI', to discuss the question of whether it would be possible to proceed immediately to their shared objective of libertarian communism.¹ There it was decided, on a provisional basis, that no such attempt would be made, and that the Spanish libertarian movement would collaborate with other political tendencies, such as communists, socialists, liberals and Catalan and Basque nationalists, in fighting the common fascist threat.

These were days of euphoria for the anarchists of Spain. As the activist José Peirats, then an organiser in the brick-makers' union in Barcelona, put it: 'It is impossible to describe the joy registered by a people that feels itself sovereign and sees

¹ The Casa Cambó had been expropriated along with the adjoining building, belonging to an employers' association, the Foment Nacional del Treball. According to José Peirats, this expropriation was carried out in the name of the CNT Construction Workers' Union: José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Vol. 1*, trans. by Chris Ealham (Hastings: PM Press, 2011), p. 144. However, according to her own account, Concha Liaño, at nineteen already a veteran activist of the CNT and a founder member of the *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) grouping, had entered the building on her own initiative at the head of her equally youthful action group during the streetfighting. See her recollections in Eulàlia Vega, *Pioneras y revolucionarias. Mujeres libertarias durante la República, la Guerra Civil y el Franquismo* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2010), pp. 135-6.

its feared enemy defeated at our feet'.² CNT members were at the forefront of organisational efforts that saw militia columns established, workplaces taken over and land collectivised in the summer of 1936. The state, reduced to a phantasm by the upheaval of July, was marginal to these developments. However, in the absence of any attempt to dissolve governmental and administrative bodies, and in a spirit of co-operation that was variously described by anarchists as pragmatic, magnanimous and indicative of a new era of social harmony, many revolutionary phenomena were, from the first, formally subordinate to the national or regional organs of state, in spite of being self-managed or union-controlled in their day-to-day functioning. Consequently, within months of the outbreak of the civil war, scores of Spanish anarchists found themselves working in what would come to be considered 'official' positions of responsibility, but which at the time appeared to be temporary or ad-hoc postings corresponding to the urgent organisational requirements of the moment.

Few voices of disquiet were raised at this juncture because, during the first months of the conflict, the limits of state power were far more apparent than was the subsistence of the institutions that would form the basis of its reconstruction. The novel and highly visible working-class hegemony on the streets familiar from eye-witness accounts was considered a sufficient safeguard against a return of hierarchical social relations. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the first signs of radical anarchists opposing the process of collaboration were in response to challenges to that hegemony, as moves were undertaken to disarm workers' militia in the rearguard. That regional governments were, by the autumn of 1936, in a position to dispute the monopoly of violence with the conquerors of July, was at least partly due to the legitimacy that had been ceded state bodies by the CNT even in the revolution's first, 'heroic' phase.

² Chris Ealham, *Living Anarchism: José Peirats and the Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015), p. 88.

In spite of its prominent role in the developing revolution, therefore, the collaboration of the libertarian movement in Spain with the state can be understood to have begun months before this process was accelerated and formally consummated in late October 1936 by the unprecedented acceptance of ministerial roles in the central Republican government by four Spanish anarchists. Consequently, this thesis understands collaboration in a broad sense, incorporating not only the participation of anarchists in government, but also the legitimacy accorded state power by the organising committees of the libertarian organisations – the so-called *comités superiores* – and their acquiescence to the everyday violence of state reformation, such as the disarmament of workers and the re-appropriation of buildings. Further, it considers collaboration to incorporate anarchist involvement in the ideological aspects of state reconstruction, most notably the reassertion of patriarchal, militaristic and nationalist values.

The focus of this thesis is on the equally multi-layered opposition that many anarchists mounted to this process of state collaboration, whether this was undertaken from within the CNT and the FAI, or in the name of organisations whose relationship to the internal discipline of these organisations was more ambiguous, such as the Barcelona defence committees, the libertarian women's organisation *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women - MMLL), the Catalan and Aragonese *Juventudes Libertarias* (Libertarian Youth – JJLL) or the *Agrupación Amigos de Durruti* (Friends of Durruti Grouping – AAD). The thesis therefore examines the attempts by anarchists in Spain to demonstrate their hostility to the state in theory and in practice during the period in which the CNT and the FAI participated in its reconstruction and consolidation. Through a focus on anarchist opposition to this policy over the course of a single year, 1937, when state collaboration was already an established fact, the thesis attempts to answer the historiographical questions of how anarchists resisted the reconstitution of the

Republican state, and what alternative strategies to that of collaboration were envisaged or attempted by anarchist opponents of the policy. To that end I have examined anarchist activity, publications and meetings to discover: how anarchists attempted to push the revolution beyond the control of the state, how contributors to the oppositional anarchist press argued against state collaboration, and how an anti-state position was defended at assemblies and meetings of the libertarian movement. I assess the historical significance of this oppositional current, and the extent and limits of its appeal in the wider libertarian movement.

A revolution, as James C. Scott has pointed out, is an interregnum. Between the collapse of one regime and the consolidation of another there is a period in which the experience of the state - the experience of being governed - is no longer a feature of daily life.³ In Spain, the interregnum of 1936 has been termed the ‘short summer of anarchy’.⁴ During this period, relations of production in the town and country, gender relations, and the physical and cultural expressions of a class-bound and Catholic country were fundamentally, if only temporarily, altered for a great many of the millions of people caught up in the revolutionary experience in the Republican zone. The way people dressed, spoke and carried themselves changed, apparently overnight. By studying the ways in which a re-imposition of governance was resisted over the following months this thesis will therefore shed light on the perennial question of how states are (re)constituted. It will also affirm the importance of the Spanish revolution and the ideas and programme that animated it, which were defended and expanded upon by those sectors of radical anarchism resistant to the reconstitution of the state, an importance that several historians of the Spanish civil war have sought to diminish.

³ James C. Scott, ‘Foreword’, in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p. ix.

⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *El corto verano de la anarquía. Vida y muerte de Durruti*, trans. by Julio Forcat and Ulrike Hartmann (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2010).

‘State reconstruction/reconstitution’ is used in preference to ‘counterrevolution’ in this thesis, although not out of a reluctance to describe the agents of this reconstitution as counterrevolutionaries.⁵ Such reluctance may be due in part to an interpretation of the Spanish revolution as an essentially minor event in the context of the civil war, and one which, to all intents and purposes, had ended by the autumn of 1936.⁶ A further complication in this regard is the reticence among historians sympathetic to the Spanish Republic to describe anti-fascists as counterrevolutionaries.⁷ In the work of other academics, there is a suggestion of distaste for such apparently dated and ‘sterile’ language.⁸ For the purposes of this thesis, ‘reconstruction of the state’ is used to refer to the broad process by which the ‘interregnum’ of the Spanish revolution was brought to an end, a process in which many anarchists participated. When the term ‘counterrevolutionaries’ is referred to, it is in reference to the contemporary conception among anarchists of a threat to the revolution, perceived for the most part as external to the libertarian organisations.⁹

The rich libertarian historiography on the revolution and civil war has generally persisted in this emphasis on the external opposition to the revolutionary process, particularly that mounted by the *Partido Comunista de España* (Communist Party of Spain – PCE). By contrast, the recent, influential work of Helen Graham has been important in establishing the reconstruction of the Spanish Republican state as a cross-class, multi-party process that was not driven primarily by the ideological priorities of

⁵ For examples of this reluctance see Ferran Gallego, *La crisis del antifascismo. Barcelona, mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Random House, 2008), p. 307; Manuel Aguilera Povedano, ‘Los hechos de mayo de 1937: efectivos y bajas de cada bando’, *Hispania*, 73. 245 (2013), 789-816 (pp. 790-1). According to this perspective, the term counterrevolution can only be usefully applied to the Francoist destruction of the Second Republic. An example of a work which does not share this reluctance is Ferran Aisa, *Contrarevolució. Els fets de Maig de 1937* (Barcelona: Edicions de 1984, 2007).

⁶ See, for example, Julián Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain: 1931-1939*, trans. by Andrew Dowling and Graham Pollok (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 150-1.

⁷ This concern is expressed in the works cited above by Ferran Gallego and Aguilera Povedano.

⁸ Susanna Tavera, ‘Anarchism or Anarchisms? The history of a heterogeneous revolutionary deployment, 1930-1938’, *Catalan Historical Review*, 5 (2012), 101-16 (p. 109).

⁹ On the complicated response of radical anarchists to a ‘counterrevolution’ that was at once an external threat to the libertarian organisations and a process of state reconstitution in which these organisations participated, see Chapter Two.

the PCE.¹⁰ The participation of the Stalinist organisations in this process undoubtedly gave it peculiar and bloody characteristics, yet it has also served to obscure the broader and more complex question of state reconstruction in the Spanish Republic and anarchist participation in this process.¹¹ In his consideration of the libertarian contribution to historiography on the Russian revolution, Edward Acton suggests that, in spite of being largely vindicated by later research in regard to its understanding of the nature and achievements of the initial revolutionary period, libertarian histories have failed to adequately explain the defeat of those revolutionary achievements, relying on a caricature of the Bolshevik party that recent research has comprehensively refuted.¹² As a consequence, libertarian historians have failed to address the question of how a mass democratic and revolutionary organisation became a hierarchically organised opponent of the revolution's achievements.¹³ It is my opinion that this question has relevance to the Spanish as well as the Russian experience, and that attempts to answer it might be enriched by what is perhaps the essential historical insight of anarchism: that those who control the administration of a nation state are unable to prevent it from fulfilling its repressive function in human affairs.¹⁴ While the twentieth century revolutionary experiences of Russia and Spain seem to confirm this prognosis insofar as the depth and

¹⁰ See Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 158-64. The success of the PCE in this context is explained primarily in terms of its organisational capabilities, its willingness to 'think as republicans' and the cross-class appeal of its uncomplicated and patriotic slogans: *ibid.*, pp. 180-4.

¹¹ I do not share Graham's scepticism as to the role of Soviet agents and Spanish communists in the respective murders of Andreu Nin and Camillo Berneri. On the former case, see Pelai Pagès i Blanch, 'El asesinato de Andreu Nin, más datos para la polémica', *Ebre* 58, 4 (2010), 57-76. On the latter, see Francisco Madrid Santos, 'Camillo Berneri, un anarquista italiano (1897-1937)', (Unpublished PhD thesis: Universidad de Barcelona, 1979), pp. 501-13, and Chapter Three of the present work.

¹² Edward Acton, 'The libertarians vindicated? The libertarian view of the revolution in the light of recent Western research', in *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, ed. by Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, Baruch Knei-Paz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 388-405.

¹³ This is the principal research question addressed in Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ For influential anarchist expositions of this point see P. A. Kropotkin, 'The State: Its Historic Role', in P. A. Kropotkin, *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, ed. by Martin A. Miller (London: The MIT Press, 1970), pp. 259-62; M. Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. by G. P. Maximoff (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 210-6. This was also the substance of an 1872 letter from Mikhail Bakunin to one of the earliest and best known Spanish anarchists, Anselmo Lorenzo. Cited in Frank Mintz, 'Las influencias de Bakunin y Kropotkin sobre el movimiento libertario español', *Historia Actual Online*, no. 21 (2010) <<http://www.historia-actual.org/Publicaciones/index.php/haol/article/viewArticle/415>> [accessed 28 October 2015].

extension of social transformation in both cases grew and declined in inverse proportion to the power and reach of the state, traditional anarchist hostility to Marxism and Marxist organisations, whether justifiable or not, appears to have militated against the emergence of a libertarian historiography of these revolutions animated by this insight. By focusing on the question of state reconstruction, and more particularly on resistance to this process, this thesis is intended as a contribution to just such a libertarian historiography.

To that end, the thesis expands on historical research conducted by Josep Antoni Pozo González, Anna Monjo and Carme Vega, Juan Manuel Fernández Soria, Martha Ackelsberg, Chris Ealham, François Godicheau, Miquel Amorós, Frank Mintz and Agustín Guillamón. Pozo González has provided a rigorous account of the revolutionary process in Cataluña that has shed a great deal of light on the regional CNT and the untenable nature of an anti-fascism that contained both defenders and opponents of the revolutionary process.¹⁵ Monjo and Vega had already contributed greatly to our understanding of this latter problem through a focus on the socialisation campaign as a cause of division within the workplace and wider Catalan society.¹⁶ Fernández Soria has provided us with a detailed and richly sourced monograph on the anarchist youth organisations during the civil war, while Ackelsberg's study of the *Mujeres Libres* grouping is both illuminating and analytically innovative.¹⁷ Ealham's work on the pre-civil war CNT is fundamental to understanding the internal divisions within the organisation and the social and cultural universe of Spanish anarchism, while this thesis also builds on his suggestive article regarding the fall-out in the libertarian movement

¹⁵ Josep Antoni Pozo González, *Poder legal y poder real en la Cataluña revolucionaria de 1936* (Sevilla: Espuela de Plata, 2012); *La Catalunya antifeixista, El govern Tarradellas enfront de la crisi política i el conflicte social (setembre de 1936 – abril de 1937)* (Barcelona: Edicions DAU, 2012).

¹⁶ Anna Monjo and Carme Vega, *Els treballadors i la Guerra civil* (Barcelona: Editorial Empúries, 1986).

¹⁷ Juan Manuel Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad. La educación en las Juventudes Libertarias (1936-1939)* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 1996); Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005).

after the uprising in Barcelona in May 1937.¹⁸ This latter subject has also been treated by Godicheau and Amorós.¹⁹ While the present work is more detailed in its discussion of the post-May crisis in the libertarian movement, the work of these two authors has been indispensable in bringing this period into focus, and both have provided additional monographs on little-studied figures and phenomena.²⁰ The final two chapters of this thesis also take up the suggestion in an article by Godicheau on the underground anarchist press of including a more detailed discussion of the content of these underused sources.²¹ The tireless and militant commitment of Mintz and Guillamón to deepening our understanding of the Spanish revolution has resulted in a prodigious output that has shed light on the organisational and intellectual life of the libertarian movement, on the achievements of the Spanish revolution, and on little recorded events and personages.²²

This brief and not exhaustive survey suggests that Stanley Payne's observation that 'there has been little effort to account for Spanish anarchosyndicalism in analytic and theoretical terms' in the last forty years is somewhat misplaced.²³ Payne's suggestion, accompanied by the claim that the same is also true 'on the broadly comparative level' is countered by a recent article by Barry Pateman, in which the state of anarchist historiography, in qualitative and quantitative terms, is shown to have

¹⁸ Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-revolution in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010); 'De la unidad antifascista a la desunión libertaria', in *La España del Frente Popular*, coord. by Àngel Bahamonde Magro (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011), pp. 121-42.

¹⁹ François Godicheau, *La Guerre d'Espagne. République et révolution en Catalogne (1936-1939)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004); Miquel Amorós, *La Revolución Traicionada: La verdadera historia de Balius y Los Amigos de Durruti* (Barcelona: Virus, 2003).

²⁰ François Godicheau, *No callaron: las voces de los presos antifascistas de la República, 1937-1939* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2012); Miquel Amorós, *José Pellicer: El Anarquista Integro* (Barcelona: Virus, 2009); *Maroto, el héroe: Una biografía del anarquismo andaluz* (Barcelona: Virus, 2011).

²¹ François Godicheau, 'Periódicos clandestinos anarquistas en 1937-1938: ¿las voces de la base militante?', *Ayer*, 55 (2004), 175-205 (p. 179).

²² Frank Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management in Revolutionary Spain*, trans. by Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2013); Agustín Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona. La CNT de la victoria de Julio de 1936 a la necesaria derrota de Mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Ediciones Espartaco Internacional, 2007); *Los Amigos de Durruti. Historia y antología de textos* (Barcelona: Aldarull and Dskntrl-ed, 2013); *La Guerra del pan. Hambre y violencia en la Barcelona revolucionaria. De diciembre de 1936 a mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Aldarull and Dskntrl-ed, 2014).

²³ Stanley G. Payne, 'A Critical Overview of the Second Spanish Republic' in *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited. From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931-1936)*, ed. by Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando Del Rey Reguillo (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), p. 18.

‘changed beyond recognition’ in the last twenty years.²⁴ Pateman cites as particularly noteworthy what has perhaps been Agustín Guillamón’s greatest achievement: placing the defence committees at the heart of the revolutionary process in Barcelona, and explaining the causes and consequences of their central role.²⁵ This thesis expands on Guillamón’s work and attempts to draw out and give context to the internal complexity of the defence committees and their relationship to the CNT and the FAI. In so doing, it aims to provide a more general account of the libertarian movement’s radical currents than has been offered hitherto, and to explain the complex affinities that linked their different manifestations.

The works cited above have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that there was in Spain, to paraphrase Christopher Hill’s observation on the English revolution, ‘an intellectually significant and numerically not insignificant congeries of radical ideas’, put forward in defence of the revolution of July 1936 and its legacy.²⁶ What they do not do, when looked at in isolation, is establish the breadth, consistency and intellectual probity of both the radical anarchist critique and anarchist activity as they developed prior to and after the May events of 1937. Understandably, works on the defence committees suggest their ‘hibernation’ in the first part of 1937, those on the youth organisations stress their disorganisation and incoherence and those on the *Mujeres Libres* their isolation from the CNT and the FAI, while in general there is a tendency to depict radical anarchist thought and activity in this period as characterised by picaresque quixotism. None of these conclusions are unsupported by the literature, but they present a partial picture. By examining the radical currents of Spanish anarchism as they cut across these different formations, we can perceive how opposition to collaboration and

²⁴ Barry Pateman, ‘Anarchist History: Confessions of an awkward pupil’, *Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library*, 84 (2015), 1-3 (p. 1).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 3; Agustín Guillamón, *La Revolución de los Comités. Hambre y Violencia en la Barcelona Revolucionaria. De junio a diciembre de 1936* (Barcelona: Aldarull Edicions, 2012); *Los Comités de Defensa de la CNT en Barcelona, 1933-1938* (Barcelona: Aldarull, 2013).

²⁶ Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 17.

state reconstruction coalesced around specific positions that for the most part remained consistent with pre-war anarchist traditions, that these positions formed a programmatic alternative to state reconstruction and that, once awareness of defeat became more widespread, radical anarchists produced sophisticated reflections and analysis in response.

Following Godicheau and Ealham, and inspired by recent Anglophone research into the Russian revolution, this thesis focuses on the mid-level activists who remained outside of both the official positions of state administration and also what were known in such circles as the *comités superiores* of the Spanish libertarian organisations, but who nevertheless retained influence among wider sectors of the movement as union and affinity group delegates and prolific contributors to the anarchist press.²⁷ This focus has led to the unearthing of important interventions by, amongst others, Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Amador Franco, Juan Santana Calero and Julián Merino, the latter of whom is here afforded the centrality his highly significant activity and role in the revolutionary rearguard deserves. It is in homage to another historian of Russia, Robert V. Daniels, that I term such anarchists, those who maintained their hostility to the state, the ‘conscience’ of the Spanish revolution.²⁸ Since hostility to the state and to formal politics has traditionally been taken to be the one unifying thread to be found in a belief system of notorious heterogeneity, I consider its use as a criterion for establishing the conscience of Spanish anarchism to be justified.²⁹

²⁷ On mid-level anarchist activists in Spain, see Godicheau, ‘Periódicos clandestinos’, p. 204 and Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 96. Works on Russia with a focus on middle ranking worker-activists include: Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24. Soviet workers and the new communist elite* (London: Routledge, 2008); S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

²⁸ Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of The Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

²⁹ On anti-statism as a common feature of all varieties of anarchism, see George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 28; José Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868-1910)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1991), pp. 222-4, and more recent discussions in Saul Newman, ‘The Horizon of Anarchy: Anarchism and Contemporary Radical Thought’, *Theory & Event*,

Daniels has also aided in my understanding of the different tactical and ideological emphases of the radical anarchists in Spain. Both the historiography and anarchist memoirs point to a three-way division of the Spanish anarchist movement into gradualist, voluntarist and purist currents. Put simply, gradualists tended to emphasise the importance of building and strengthening an organisation capable of remoulding society, voluntarists emphasised the revolutionary possibilities that could be brought about by insurrectionary activity, and purists prioritised propagandistic and cultural work in favour of the anarchist ideal. With the exception of ‘voluntarist’, these labels were not ordinarily self-applied by libertarian activists, but they provide a descriptively accurate complement to the analogous contemporary terms which were deployed in the polemical context of faction fights, such as ‘reformist’, ‘anarcho-Bolshevik’ and ‘redskin’.³⁰ The principal limitation of this taxonomy is that it does little to explain the more fundamental question of state collaboration and its anarchist proponents and discontents. Indeed, representative figures of each current were capable of justifying a conciliatory attitude to the state at various times. Gradualists, who tended to be more united in this regard, wished to avoid the disruption to organisation occasioned by state repression, while some voluntarists participated alongside future state actors in insurrectionary essays against dictatorships, and certain purists were mindful that the propagandistic and educational work they prioritised was easier to undertake under a democracy than a dictatorship.

It has been suggested that, in light of such realignments, this ‘triangular’ division loses its analytical value when applied to the civil war period.³¹ However, the co-

13. 2 (2010), n. pag., and Carl Levy, ‘Social Histories of Anarchism’, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4. 2 (2010), 1-44 (pp. 4-7).

³⁰ While the use of ‘syndicalist’ rather than gradualist would have some merit in stressing the priority placed by this tendency on the union organisation in both day-to-day practice and its vision of the future, it is less useful as a broad category, implying a commitment to ‘pure’ syndicalism that would exclude several gradualist anarchists.

³¹ See Pere Gabriel, ‘Un sindicalismo de Guerra: sindicatos y colectivizaciones industriales y agrarias en Cataluña, 1936-1939’, *Actes II Seminari sobre la guerra civil i el franquisme a Catalunya*, Barberà del

existence of a fundamental difference of principle alongside secondary divisions of strategy and temperament was at least as evident in the anarchist movement during the civil war as in the years preceding it. Although posed more urgently in the war years, the question of anarchist relations with the state was in no sense new in 1936. The fact that anarchists shared ideas relating to rational education and human progress with liberal and progressive state-oriented republicans, and socialised in shared spaces such as the *ateneo*, has led historians to include anarchists within a broad definition of Spanish republicanism.³² In Spain as elsewhere, a common belief in ‘progress, education, science, and the need to overcome a tradition that stood in the way of both personal and collective liberation’ gave rise to alliances of convenience between revolutionary, socialist, working-class movements and liberal, bourgeois republicans.³³ The birth of the Second Republic in 1931 provides an example of when elements of the three strategic tendencies of Spanish anarchism contributed to a broadly conciliatory attitude towards the state and the moderates at its helm. On this occasion and again during the war, however, the conciliators were opposed by a tactical convergence among purists and voluntarists from the middle ranks of the Spanish libertarian movement, determined to reanimate their organisations with an anti-state purpose. These purists and voluntarists of anti-collaborationist anarchism correspond to the subdivisions of the left-wing opposition in Russia identified by Daniels (who uses the terms ‘soft’ and ‘hard’): the former more utopian, doctrinaire and democratic, the latter

Vallès 14 i 15 de març de 1997 (Barberà del Vallès: Ajuntament de Barberà del Vallès, 1997), p. 59, and Pozo González, *Poder Legal y Poder Real*, p. 271.

³² See José Álvarez Junco, ‘Los “amantes de la libertad”: la cultura republicana española a principios del siglo xx’, in *El republicanismo en España (1830-1977)*, ed. by Nigel Townson (Madrid: Alianza, 1994), p. 270, and the discussion in Álvaro Girón Sierra, ‘Una historia contada de otra manera: librepensamiento y “darwinismos” anarquistas en Barcelona, 1869-1910’, in *Cultura y política del anarquismo en España e Iberoamérica*, coord. by Clara E. Lida and Pablo Yankelevich (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2012), pp. 95-133. The question is also discussed by a contemporary French anarchist: Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1975), pp. 327-8.

³³ E. J. Hobsbawm, ‘Religion and the Rise of Socialism’, in E. J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p. 43.

‘less carried away by enthusiasm’ and ‘more prepared to resort to force’.³⁴ We might add that, in the Spanish case, the former were inclined to stress fidelity to anarchist ideas over immediate, material class interests.

These divisions and how they related to the attitudes adopted with regard to the Republican state in the years preceding and in the first months of the civil war are analysed in the first chapter. I also examine the meaning and impact of state collaboration and outline the emergence of the conscience of the Spanish revolution within the Barcelona defence committees, the JJLL and the anarchist press. The second chapter discusses the CNT’s socialisation campaign and the limits to the unity of purpose that this engendered in the ranks of the libertarian movement. The organisational expressions of fidelity to the revolution that emerged in the first four months of 1937 are analysed and the widely felt desire for a ‘second July’ in defence of the revolution is discussed. Chapter Three examines the May events in Barcelona and their immediate consequences, offering a novel interpretation of why and how both the mobilisation and demobilisation took place. The means by which the revolutionary mobilisation was effected and the organisational affinities of those who participated in it also provide a unique opportunity to examine the nature and composition of the conscience of the revolution. The renewed critique of state collaboration that followed the May days and the near success of radicals within the Barcelona FAI in advocating a withdrawal from official positions is the subject of the fourth chapter. The methods adopted by the leading cadres of the libertarian movement in combatting this opposition are also examined. Having failed to force a change in the trajectory of the CNT and the FAI, the radicals turned their attention in the late summer and autumn of 1937 to preserving the integrity of anarchism itself. Chapter Five discusses the defence of federalism within the Spanish libertarian movement and the attempts of voluntarists to

³⁴ Daniels, *The Conscience of The Revolution*, pp. 4-7.

mobilise in defence of the revolutionary spaces conquered in July 1936, concluding with a discussion of the December 1937 Congress of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), at which the international critics of state collaboration made their voices heard. The Conclusion of the thesis discusses the historical import of the conscience of the Spanish revolution, evaluates its strengths and weaknesses and posits the reasons for its ultimate failure. I draw some concluding comparisons between the 'consciences' of Russia and Spain and suggest possible future lines of research.

From Chapter Three onward, the focus of the thesis is predominantly on Cataluña. This is primarily due to the relative strength of anti-collaborationist anarchists in the region, demonstrated by the Barcelona uprising of May 1937, and the oppositional mandates that delegates of the JJLL and the FAI took to National Plenums that same year. Although the historiography of the Spanish revolution is already imbalanced in favour of Cataluña, when I began work on this thesis it soon became clear that this imbalance has not exhausted the possibility of new critical evaluations or new sources adding to our understanding of anarchism in the region. The discussion of the May events in this thesis became chapter-length when a close analysis of underused sources led me to a new and historiographically significant interpretation of this revolutionary mobilisation. Although in Chapters Four and Five I highlight the international dimensions of the critique of state collaboration and discuss national developments, the greater part of the analysis is centred on the publications, meetings and activities of oppositional anarchists in Cataluña. On the one hand this was necessary in order to demonstrate the breadth and strength of radical anarchism, and on the other it was dictated by the richness of the little-studied sources related to the JJLL and the FAI in the region. A fuller picture of the conscience of the Spanish revolution would undoubtedly emerge through a closer analysis of the press and meetings of the libertarian movement in Asturias, Valencia, Aragón, Andalucía and Madrid during this

period, and would provide welcome context for the findings of the present work. Nevertheless, by demonstrating the breadth and multi-layered nature of the anarchists' oppositional activity in Spain's most revolutionary city, this thesis represents a step towards providing this fuller picture, and outlines the parameters of the revolutionary conscience that will be of use when searching for its traces in other parts of the country.

Prior to the civil war, the libertarian movement in Spain had witnessed a boom in publications dedicated to outlining the post-revolutionary society. By imagining the world remade in the absence of a state, the anarchists posited an end to private property, gender inequality and formal politics, proposing the socialisation of land and industry and the arming of the people. Following the revolutionary interregnum, the state re-established itself through a physical, ideological and economic assault on the manifestations of this libertarian programme that had emerged in the Republican rearguard. By examining the flashpoints where state reconstitution met libertarian recalcitrance, we find a broad and theoretically developed current of anarchism that attempted to retain its fidelity to pre-war traditions while analysing and drawing lessons from the revolutionary experience as it took place. This current requires a wide-ranging and synthetic history so that its historical and intellectual significance might be fully appreciated. This thesis is a contribution to that history.

Chapter One: Spanish Anarchists and the State, 1931-1936

The tendencies of Spanish anarchism were able to co-exist, with varying degrees of harmony, within the framework provided by what has come to be known as anarcho-syndicalism, but which was, in the latter part of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries, more commonly referred to as revolutionary syndicalism. The development of revolutionary syndicalism in France was embodied by the *Confédération générale du travail* (General Confederation of Labour - CGT) and had been formalised in the famous Charter of Amiens, which that union had adopted in 1906.¹ Inspired by the successes of the CGT, the belief had grown amongst Spanish anarchists that, as the Charter stated, an apolitical trade union would be able to combine struggles of an economic nature with a wider project of revolutionary transformation.² In 1907, *Solidaridad Obrera* (Workers' Solidarity - SO), a union federation which produced a newspaper of the same name and which did not, at first, extend beyond Barcelona, was founded. SO was an amalgamation of ideologically varied unions that expanded rapidly and whose early success in bringing together Cataluña's unionised workforce led to a congress in 1910 to decide whether it should be constituted on a national basis.³ This was agreed to and the CNT was formed, with *Solidaridad Obrera* becoming the official newspaper of its Catalan region.⁴

¹ On the ideology and practice of the CGT, see F. F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The direct action of its time* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 83-187.

² On this, Spanish perspective, see Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898-1923* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 129. On the project of revolutionary syndicalism more generally see Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), pp. 109-30, and the informative introduction by Geoff Brown in Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About The Revolution. Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth*, trans. by Charlotte and Frederic Charles (London: Pluto Press, 1990), pp. vii-xvii.

³ On this congress and the question of forming a national organisation, see Xavier Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña (1899-1911). Los orígenes de la CNT* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Revista de Trabajo, 1976), pp. 462-77.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 477. See also Carles Sanz, *La CNT en pie. Fundación y consolidación anarcosindicalista 1910-1931* (Barcelona: Anomia, 2010), pp. 17-23, and Manuel Buenacasa, *El movimiento obrero español 1886-1926. Historia y crítica* (Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1977), pp. 37-40.

The CNT consisted of confederations organised by region, themselves organised into further zonal (*comarcal*) confederations and then into unions according to trade or locality. In 1918 the Catalan confederation of the CNT adopted a structure, soon to be taken on by the other regions, whereby its members were organised at an industrial level in local *Sindicatos Únicos* (Single Unions), whose representatives elected delegates to a *Federación Local* (Local Federation), which was then represented in a Regional Committee. The CNT's National Committee would be the temporary responsibility of one region, to be chosen at the organisation's National Congress, its highest decision-making body.⁵ In between National Congresses, the activity of the CNT was determined by decisions taken at Plenums. A Local Plenum was composed of delegates chosen at assemblies of individual unions, and would in turn decide the mandates and delegates to represent the locality at Regional Plenums. The Regional Plenums would likewise send mandated delegates to National Plenums.

The founding Congress of the CNT reflected the plurality of priorities and tactics favoured by its affiliates. It affirmed the need to overturn existing society and that, echoing the First International, the emancipation of the working class was to be the task of the working class itself.⁶ It proclaimed its commitment to tactics of direct action, by which was meant the absence of third party mediation in industrial disputes, but it also allowed for members of political parties to join the organisation, urged caution with regard to the general strike and committed itself to the short term goal of establishing the eight hour day.⁷ The commitment to direct action was related to a further question under debate at the Congress: the advisability of constituting a new syndicalist organisation on a national level that would be separate from the pre-existing national

⁵ In 1936 the National Committee would become a permanent body made up of delegates from all the regions. See below. For a comprehensive historical exposition and analysis of the functioning of the CNT's internal structure, see Anna Monjo, *Militants. Participació i democràcia a la CNT als anys trenta* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2003), pp. 113-312.

⁶ Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo*, p. 481.

⁷ See Juan Gómez Casas, *Historia del anarcosindicalismo español* (Madrid: Zero, 1973), pp. 83-5.

trade union, the *Unión General de Trabajadores* (General Union of Workers – UGT), which had been founded in 1888. The UGT was the trade union wing of electoral socialism, represented in Spain by the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party – PSOE). Contrary to revolutionary syndicalism’s commitment to direct action, the UGT considered the mediation of its political allies to be potentially advantageous to its members. Despite assurances to the contrary from prominent figures within the CNT, the probability that the new organisation would provide a revolutionary alternative to the UGT was admitted by disappointed Socialists and hailed by enthusiastic anarchists in the weeks that followed the former’s foundation.⁸

Nevertheless, concerns that the CNT might follow the UGT (as well as the erstwhile revolutionary syndicalists of the CGT) along the path of state collaboration would be reflected in the founding agreements of a specifically anarchist organisation, the FAI, which was formed in 1927, on a peninsular rather than national basis, affirming that: ‘The labour organization should turn to anarchism as it did in the past... and the anarchist organization of groups should be established alongside it, with the two organizations working together for the anarchist movement.’⁹ The organisational unit of the FAI was the affinity group, a collection of comrades united by ties of friendship and ideological kinship that did not normally number more than a dozen members. These were organised into town and city-wide Local Federations, and co-ordinated by Regional Committees and a Peninsular Committee, which were not intended to have any executive decision-making role. From its inception the FAI considered a semi-formal connection, a *trabazón*, to exist between itself and the CNT, which found an

⁸ Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo*, pp. 482-3.

⁹ Quoted in Juan Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of The FAI*, trans. by Abe Bluestein (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1986), p. 110. On the UGT and PSOE’s co-operation and eventual break with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), see Paul Heywood, *Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 85-109. On the growth of reformism within the CGT see Nicholas Papayanis, *Alphonse Merrheim. The Emergence of Reformism in Revolutionary Syndicalism 1871-1925* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).

organisational expression in the *comités pro presos* (prisoner support committees), composed of equal parts FAI and CNT members.¹⁰

When King Alfonso XIII fled Spain on 14 April 1931 and the Second Republic was declared, Spanish anarchism therefore had two organisational reference points, the CNT and the FAI. While the former did not require that its members be anarchists, its most prominent activists considered themselves to be such and its statutes contained the anarchist goal of libertarian communism.¹¹ Yet Spanish anarchism could not be reduced to its organisational expressions, and nor could these organisations be considered only in terms of their political objectives.¹² During the Second Republic, Spanish anarchism formed part of an oppositional cultural and moral universe that for many people influenced every aspect of their life and behaviour. Strongholds in working-class suburbs meant that anarchism was rooted in communities as well as workplaces, and outside of such concentrations, anarchist ideology and practice was nevertheless sufficiently widespread to be a state-wide concern.¹³ In spite of the challenges of the period, this universe would renew itself, giving rise to new organisations such as the Libertarian Youth and *Mujeres Libres* and sustaining the revolutionary vanguards that would prove crucial to the social upheavals of summer 1936.

Republic or Revolution, 1931-1936

Immediately prior to the declaration of the Second Republic, the CNT had been in contact with the animators of the Pact of San Sebastián, a broad-based alliance

¹⁰ Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation*, p. 110.

¹¹ A National Congress had declared libertarian communism to be the goal of the CNT in 1919. See Sanz, *La CNT en pie*, p. 48. The term became widely used during the Second Republic after the uprising in Alt Llobregat, and was the subject of many pamphlets, most notably that of the young purist doctor Isaac Puente. See the discussion in Alejandro R. Díez Torre, *Trabajan para la eternidad. Colectividades de trabajo y ayuda mutua durante la Guerra Civil en Aragón* (Madrid and Zaragoza: La Malatesta Editorial and Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2009), pp. 32-5.

¹² 'Politics' and the 'political' were understood in Spanish anarchist literature to have to do with party politics and the machinations of state actors. When I use these words with this meaning, as opposed to in the broader definition of the political as it is understood in English, I will use quotation marks.

¹³ See Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 34-53.

committed to establishing a democratic republic. The National Committee, which included the veteran activists Joan Peiró and Angel Pestaña, had agreed to support any insurrectionary action to that end while protecting the independence of the Confederation.¹⁴ Public platforms were shared between anarcho-syndicalists and republicans throughout Spain. In the CNT stronghold of Gijón, another syndicalist of the old-guard, Eleuterio Quintanilla, had proposed the initial republican alliance in that city, promising that Gijonese syndicalists would favour republicans with their vote and urging the CNT's state-wide 'circumstantial solidarity' with the republican movement.¹⁵ In Barcelona on 14 April, CNT activists, including some of those associated with voluntarist insurrectionism, ensured that the new authorities were able to occupy their posts.¹⁶ In spite of the apolitical commitment in its statutes, therefore, at the dawn of the Second Republic it was unclear where limits to collaboration between the CNT and other ideological currents could be drawn, or to what extent the CNT would be prepared to support the formation of the Republican state. Writing in *Tierra y Libertad*, the mouthpiece of the FAI, the rationalist schoolteacher José Alberola, voiced his misgivings:

To my mind absolutely no point of contact can be permitted between what the bourgeoisie finds convenient and the aspirations of revolutionary syndicalism, else the latter renounce the goals for which it was founded... it is necessary that the Spanish anarchists break the self-imposed silence that, in the interests of proletarian harmony, we have submitted to, and confront that political and bourgeoisified current that has penetrated the depths of [the CNT].¹⁷

¹⁴ See John Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en España (1930-1937)* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), p. 30.

¹⁵ Pamela Beth Radcliff, *From Mobilization to Civil War: The politics of polarization in the Spanish city of Gijón, 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 140.

¹⁶ See the memoirs of Ricardo Sanz, *El sindicalismo y la política. Los "Solidarios" y "Nosotros"* (Barcelona: Copa y Difon, 2013), p. 186.

¹⁷ *Tierra y Libertad*, 28 March 1931. José Alberola, from Aragón, was a prominent member of the FAI who frequently contributed radical articles to *Tierra y Libertad* in this period. His opposition to state collaboration would persist during the civil war. See below.

This confrontation began within months, and established the backdrop to libertarian activity throughout the Republic's existence.

During this time, it was *Tierra y Libertad* that provided a platform to those who were most committed to combatting conciliatory attitudes towards the state within the CNT. The perspectives expressed in this organ were in contrast to those of the traditional mouthpiece of purist anarchism in Spain, *La Revista Blanca*, a review of international standing under the editorship of Joan Montseny and Teresa Mañé (better known as Federico Urales and Soledad Gustavo, respectively), and their daughter, Federica Montseny. *La Revista Blanca* defended a 'progressive' acceptance of the Republic and an acknowledgement that the goal of anarchy remained some way off, a position that was close to that of the gradualist syndicalists in the CNT who, nevertheless, were dimly regarded within the pages of the review.¹⁸ As such, the need to adopt a posture in relation to the new regime cut across the gradualist, purist and voluntarist dividing lines of Spanish anarchism. What was to provide new impetus to the criticism of those inclined to conciliation was the rapid disillusionment of the voluntarists with the new order, and their desire to force events in a more revolutionary direction.¹⁹ The early and apposite scepticism expressed in *Tierra y Libertad* made this the ideal forum for the voluntarists to advance their agenda alongside the concerns of the anti-Republican purists, and made the FAI the organisation that would appear to embody this confluence of voluntarist and purist perspectives in the years that followed.

The first National Congress of the CNT to be held since 1919 took place in Madrid in June 1931. There, the 'confrontation' advocated by Alberola in *Tierra y Libertad* was in evidence, with the presence of FAI members at the Congress causing

¹⁸ See, for example, Federica Montseny's article, 'España bajo la República', *La Revista Blanca*, 1 May 1931.

¹⁹ See Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution*, trans. by Chuck Morse (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), pp. 216-7.

consternation among more moderate delegates.²⁰ The three principal issues of debate were the activity of the National Committee with regard to the republican conspiracies in the latter days of the monarchy, the articulation of a minimum programme that would be addressed to the government, and an alteration of the Confederation's internal organisation that would introduce national Federations of Industry, which incorporated the representatives of individual trades and professions into a broader structure. This latter proposal was passed in spite of the opposition mounted by radicals who saw in it the danger of bureaucratisation.²¹ Attempts to censure the National Committee for its perceived collaboration with 'political' elements were likewise unsuccessful, while the motion to address the Spanish parliament directly with a statement of perspectives was passed, albeit that the protests of several delegates were registered in the minutes.²² At various points during these debates, the defenders of the majority positions took the opportunity to warn against inopportune revolutionary ventures, given the lack of preparation on the part of the CNT and the masses.²³ An apparent openness to 'politics' and bureaucratisation thus became associated with antipathy to voluntarist insurrectionism.

At the same time as radical anarchists were running aground against the seemingly entrenched positions of the gradualist majority in the CNT, the former current was more successful in setting its own house in order. The Peninsular Congress of the FAI also took place in Madrid in June, and there its Peninsular Committee was condemned for having participated in the republican conspiracy and temporarily barred from positions of responsibility in the Federation. The FAI thus emerged from its

²⁰ *Los Congresos del anarcosindicalismo. Tomo 1. Memoria del III Congreso extraordinario de la CNT. Madrid 1931* (Barcelona: Projecció Editorial, n.d.), p. 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-73.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²³ See the interventions of Joan Peiró and José Villaverde, *ibid.*, p. 36 and p. 100, respectively.

Congress shed of any lingering affinity with the Republic.²⁴ The articles carried by *Tierra y Libertad* in the weeks that followed combined criticisms of the new regime with declarations of revolutionary optimism that directly contradicted the warnings that Peiró, amongst others, had made at the CNT Congress in Madrid. The impression was thus given that the confluence of purist and voluntarist interests that had made itself felt in opposing perceived moderation, collaboration and bureaucratisation at the CNT Congress would be sustained by the positions and strategy of the FAI.

One non-FAI member who had made an impression at the CNT Congress was Juan García Oliver, who seemed to see the problem of revolution as a question of audacious leadership. He publicly blamed Pestaña and the deceased former General Secretary of the Catalan CNT Salvador Seguí for having passed up the revolutionary opportunity of the post-war years, and compared them unfavourably to Lenin and Trotsky.²⁵ García Oliver had gained respect in anarchist circles for his activities as a leading member of the action group *Los Solidarios* during the years of *pistolerismo* - when Barcelona employers had hired gunmen to murder CNT activists, several of whom had responded in kind - and the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera.²⁶ As impatient with theoretically inclined purist anarchists as he was with cautious gradualists, García Oliver's voluntarist conception of revolution would see him labelled an 'anarcho-bolshevik' by his opponents.²⁷ Nevertheless, although *Los Solidarios*, which was renamed *Nosotros* in the summer of 1931, initially remained outside of the FAI, the group's members, which included similarly seasoned 'men of action' such as Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, publicly associated themselves with the organisation.

²⁴ An account, from the point of view of one who was censured by this Congress, is given in Manuel Sirvent Romero, *Un militante del anarquismo español (Memorias, 1889-1948)* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2011), pp. 226-8.

²⁵ *Los Congresos del anarcosindicalismo. Tomo 1*, p. 74. Seguí had been murdered by gunmen hired by the Catalan employers' association in 1923.

²⁶ César M. Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles y el poder* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), p. 39.

²⁷ See Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 40-1.

At a FAI rally in Barcelona on 27 June, García Oliver, Ascaso and Durruti affirmed the imminence of revolution, with Durruti in particular signalling the part that would be played by the ‘*Cuadros de Defensa Revolucionaria*’ (Revolutionary Defence Cadres, more commonly referred to as defence committees).²⁸ The formation of the defence committees had been agreed to at a National Plenum of the CNT in April, and seems to have responded to a concern that the Confederation would be called upon to defend the Republic in the event of coup attempts from the right.²⁹ At the FAI Peninsular Congress, it was agreed that the specifically anarchist organisation would supply activists to this new body, which suggests that the defence committees were a further organisational expression of the *trabazón* between the CNT and the FAI.³⁰ For the voluntarists, this new branch of libertarian organisation clearly had offensive as well as defensive potential, and Dionisio Eroles, a man close to the *Nosotros* group who had recently been released after eleven years in prison, wrote in *Tierra y Libertad* of the necessity that ‘all the activists of the CNT and the FAI realise the exceptional importance of these [defence] cadres, who will be the nerve centre, in the very near future, of actions of the Spanish proletariat that will amaze the world’.³¹

In accordance with the desires of the voluntarists in Barcelona, therefore, the defence committees were formed in order to prepare and carry out insurrections. However, in many regions and towns of Spain, defence committees were either not set up or existed on paper only, at least until a further organisational drive took place during the *bienio negro*, the name given to the two-year period of right-wing government that followed the Spanish general election at the end of 1933. This would

²⁸ *Tierra y Libertad*, 4 July 1931.

²⁹ See the articles in *Solidaridad Obrera* urging the unions to take a lead in organising the armed self-defence of the people, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 and 19 April 1931. On the Plenum at which the decision was taken see *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 April 1931.

³⁰ See the report from the Andalusian section of the FAI in *Tierra y Libertad*, 11 July 1931.

³¹ *Tierra y Libertad*, 27 June 1931. This article was signed ‘J. Eroles’ as opposed to ‘D. Eroles’. It is my assumption that they are one and the same person, as Dionisio Eroles contributed articles to *Tierra y Libertad* regularly at this time and I am unaware of other contemporary anarchists with this surname.

see the libertarian movement in Barcelona, Madrid and Andalucía attempt to reorganise the defence committees in these localities.³² However, in the FAI stronghold of La Felguera in Asturias, no defence committees were ever set up, their objectives instead entrusted to affinity groups, while in Galicia it was not until July 1935 that the FAI agreed to supply delegates to the defence committees.³³ Even in Barcelona, where their significance was trumpeted by the local voluntarists, the formation of the defence committees does not initially appear to have implied anything more than the crafting of a command structure onto a loose network of ‘action groups’ of the kind formed during the years of *pistolerismo* to do battle with the hired gunmen of Barcelona employers.³⁴

Relations between the Republic and the Confederation became embittered soon after the former was founded. As governmental repression impeded the normal functioning of the CNT, gradualists in the organisation were attacked, both by those who wished to defend its anarchist tenets, and the voluntarists, whose chief concern was not to pass up an opportunity for a CNT-led revolution.³⁵ In response, the gradualists published a position paper at the end of August 1931, which came to be known as the Manifesto of the Thirty, due to the number of its signatories (who would henceforth be known as *treintistas*). While affirming that Spain found itself in a revolutionary situation, the manifesto rejected the voluntarist conception of the revolution as an act of will, and did nothing to dispel the growing suspicion of the purists that the gradualist strain of anarcho-syndicalism was acting as a Trojan horse of Marxism and reformism

³² See, respectively, Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 9-25; Julián Vadillo, ‘Desarrollo y debates en los grupos anarquistas de la FAI en el Madrid Republicano’, *Germinal*, 4 (2007), 27-65 (p. 56); José Luís Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa y unidad obrera. El sindicalismo en Cádiz durante la Segunda República* (Madrid: Madre Tierra, 1994), p. 329.

³³ See, respectively, the Eladio Fanjul Rocés file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 20, and Eliseo Fernández, ‘The FAI in Galicia’, in *Anarchism in Galicia: Organisation, Resistance and Women in the Underground*, ed. and trans. by Paul Sharkey (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2011), pp. 7-8.

³⁴ The lack of effective organisation of the defence committees in the first years of the Second Republic would be demonstrated by the disastrous uprising of January 1933 and decried shortly afterward in a confidential report composed by Alexander Schapiro, then secretary of the IWMA, the international revolutionary syndicalist organisation to which the CNT was affiliated. See Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 8-9.

³⁵ See Eulàlia Vega, *El trentisme a Catalunya. Divergències ideològiques en la CNT (1930-1933)* (Barcelona: Curial: 1980), pp. 118-22.

within the CNT.³⁶ Alienated from the other principal currents of Spanish anarchism, the *treintistas* were both isolated and disinclined to fight for their positions within the CNT. Over the next two years, at Regional Plenums and meetings where gradualists could not, as at the Madrid Congress, rely on the majorities granted them by the bloc votes of larger unions and more moderately inclined Regional Committees, anarchists of proven ‘purism’ were urged into positions of responsibility in the CNT. Throughout 1932 and into the beginning of the following year, the split was formalised, and the most prominent *treintistas* founded the syndicalist Opposition Unions in mid-1933, which would remain outside of the CNT until May 1936.

Tensions amongst Spanish anarchists were heightened by the insurrections of February 1932, in Alt Llobregat, and that of January 1933, launched on the initiative of the Catalan Regional Defence Committee (effectively the *Nosotros* group). The former was an outgrowth of a labour dispute in the town of Figols which had escalated and spread throughout the region.³⁷ Characterised by the peaceful takeover of towns and the declaration of libertarian communism, the revolt energised both the purist and voluntarist currents, who were convinced that it confirmed their prognoses as to the practicability of the anarchist ideal and the appetite of the masses for revolutionary action.³⁸ The latter was a shambolic operation conceived according to García Oliver’s theory of ‘revolutionary gymnastics’, and its most significant consequence was a massacre of villagers at Casas Viejas in the province of Cádiz by members of the Civil Guard and the Republican police force, the *Guardia de Asalto*.³⁹ Although the splits and

³⁶ See, for example, the counterblast to the Manifesto of the Thirty presented by the *Agrupación Anarquista de Valencia, Tierra y Libertad*, 26 September 1931.

³⁷ See Cristina Borderias and Mercedes Vilanova, ‘Memories of Hope and Defeat: Catalan miners and fishermen under the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-9’, in *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe*, ed. by Paul Thompson and Natasha Burchardt (London: Pluto Press, 1982), pp. 43-6.

³⁸ See Paz, *Durruti*, pp. 263-4; *Tierra y Libertad*, 6 February 1932 and *La Revista Blanca*, 15 January 1932.

³⁹ See Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 213-25. According to the theory of ‘revolutionary gymnastics’, groups of revolutionaries should be mobilised for insurrectionary activity, the repression of which would lead to an escalating spiral of

repression subsequent to these risings complicated the organisational life of the CNT, it is possible to overstate their impact.⁴⁰ The widely remarked upon decline in the union's fortunes in this period must be balanced by an awareness of the continuing importance of the CNT as a reference point in the lives of both its affiliates and wider support base, particularly through the *ateneos*, libertarian educational and cultural centres.⁴¹ The Libertarian Educational Youth Groups emerged from *ateneos* in Granada and Madrid, and combined with groups from Barcelona and Valencia to form the *Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias* (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth – FIJL) in Madrid in August 1932.⁴² This organisation soon came to be seen as the third branch of the libertarian movement in Spain, although its precise relation to the other organisations, particularly the FAI, was complicated by the Catalan section having emerged from the Culture and Propaganda group within the regional FAI, from which it was reluctant to disassociate.⁴³ The Catalan section was commonly known, and is referred to in the literature as, the *Juventudes Libertarias* (JJLL) rather than the FIJL.

The CNT would be involved in two further revolts prior to the outbreak of the civil war. Unlike the insurrections of February 1932 and January 1933, however, which were products of the frustrated hopes that the Republic had aroused, those that followed were informed by the rise of fascism in Europe, and the conviction that only a

revolutionary action in which the masses would lose their fear of the state. See Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos. El anarcosindicalismo...en la calle...en el Comité de Milicias...en el gobierno...en el exilio* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), p. 115.

⁴⁰ See for example Casanova's exaggerated contention that 'the CNT had been destroyed by a combination of the "intrusion of the FAI" and the formation of syndicates of opposition': Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War*, p. 63.

⁴¹ See Javier Navarro Navarro, *A la revolución por la cultura. Prácticas culturales y sociabilidad libertarias en el País Valenciano (1931-1939)* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2004), pp. 117-21; 'Mundo obrero, cultura y asociacionismo: algunas reflexiones sobre modelos y pervivencias formales', *Hispania*, 63. 2 (2003), 467-484 (pp. 476-7), and Dolors Marín Silvestre, 'Anarquistas y Sindicalistas en L'Hospitalet. La creación de un proyecto de autodidactismo obrero' in *El cinturón rojinegro: radicalismo cenetista y obrerismo en la periferia de Barcelona 1918-1939*, ed. by José Luís Oyón and Juan José Gallardo (Barcelona: Ediciones Carena, 2003), pp. 125-46.

⁴² See Antonia Fontanillas, 'Nacimiento de la FIJL', in Felipe Alaíz, Víctor García, Antonia Fontanillas, *Vidas cortas pero llenas. 80 aniversario de la fundación de la FIJL* (Badalona: Centre d'Estudis Llibertaris Federica Montseny, 2012), pp. 7-8.

⁴³ See Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad*, pp. 32-3.

revolution could prevent Spain from succumbing to a similar fate. The first of these anti-fascist risings took place in December 1933 in the immediate aftermath of general elections, which had been preceded by an extensive abstention campaign carried out by the CNT and the FAI. This campaign repeatedly stressed the importance of fighting fascism on the street rather than through the ballot box, and urged Spain's working class to avoid the shameful fate of the German labour movement.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding such preparation, at least one regional section of the CNT warned in advance that the insurrection had no hope of success.⁴⁵ There was a jailbreak in Barcelona and the adjacent town of Hospitalet, an anarchist stronghold, came under the control of the revolutionaries for four days. Libertarian communism was declared in several Aragonese villages, and workers' suburbs in Zaragoza were likewise held by the insurrectionaries for days, while there was heavy fighting in La Rioja.⁴⁶ The rising nevertheless posed little problem for the authorities, who crushed it within a week. Of greater scale was the insurrection in Asturias of the following year, which was of a similarly anti-fascist character.⁴⁷ There, the revolt had been preceded by an accord of revolutionary unity, signed by the regional sections of the UGT and CNT, the latter acting against the policy of the national organisation. When the rising was crushed, the repressive violence of the state outstripped all previous experience under the Republic, while organisational life was made impossible on a state-wide level as union buildings were closed and newspapers shut down.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ See *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 November 1933; Paz, *Durruti*, pp. 311-2, and Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa*, pp. 275-6.

⁴⁵ See Horacio M. Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936. Ex-ministro de la República en el exilio. Recuerdos. Tomo II, Utopistas (semblanzas de militantes libertarios)* (Unpublished memoir, BPA: n.d.), p. 103.

⁴⁶ See Peirats, *The CNT*, Vol. 1, p. 57.

⁴⁷ Socialists in Asturias had taken the repression of anarchists following the December revolt as 'proof of the fascist nature of the new government': Adrian Shubert, 'The epic failure: the Asturian revolution of October 1934', in *Revolution and War in Spain*, ed. by Paul Preston (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 123. See also Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction and Revolution in The Second Republic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 120-30.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 177-8, and Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1939* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 159-64.

It has been suggested that it was the paralysis brought about by repression and disunity that provided the impetus for the reunification of the libertarian movement at the Zaragoza Congress of May 1936.⁴⁹ However, a contemporary ideological shift in the FAI, embodied by Diego Abad de Santillán's *Nervio* affinity group, also helped to make this rapprochement possible. Abad de Santillán, the pseudonym of Baudilio Sinesio García Fernández, had spent most of his life in Argentina, where his polemics in favour of a specifically anarchist workers' organisation had won favour among many purists in Spain.⁵⁰ This may help to explain the immediate impact he had on the FAI on his return to Spain in 1934, by which time he had become a convert to 'the idea of toleration among all revolutionary parties'.⁵¹ In Barcelona, *Nervio* joined in the effort to sideline the *Nosotros* group.⁵² As much had previously been attempted by José Peirats, of the affinity group *Afinidad*, although the latter soon tired of Abad De Santillán's 'disciplinary anarchism' when he endeavoured to undermine the autonomy of the affinity groups by subjecting them to organisational control.⁵³ Under the editorship of Abad De Santillán, *Tierra y Libertad* turned sharply away from insurrectionism, provoking angry criticism from a former contributor, Alfonso Nieves Nuñez, while his industry-centred vision of the future society was not far removed from that advocated by Joan Peiró, the most prominent *treintista*.⁵⁴

In the build up to the general election of February 1936, the CNT and the FAI did not mount the kind of concerted abstention campaign that had preceded the election and

⁴⁹ Eulàlia Vega, *Entre revolució i reforma. La CNT a Catalunya (1930-1936)* (Lleida: Pagès, 2004), pp. 396-8.

⁵⁰ Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, p. 61.

⁵¹ Quoted in James A. Baer, *Anarchist Immigrants in Spain and Argentina* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), p. 215.

⁵² See Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists: A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2008), pp. 158-9, and García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 132.

⁵³ See Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, pp. 69-70 and p. 77.

⁵⁴ See Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management*, pp. 204-5. Alfonso Nieves Nuñez, an Argentinian who had spent most of his life in Spain, would maintain an oppositional position over the years that followed. His letter, which complains of the 'reformist' nature of the 'so-called anarchist press', can be found in the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (CDMH), PS Barcelona, 1335/11.

attempted insurrection at the end of 1933. Whether this was due primarily to the exhaustion of activists and resources occasioned by the repression of the *bienio negro*, or thanks to what Abad de Santillán would call the ‘happy coincidence of opinion amongst those activists whose views counted for a great deal in our ranks’, remains a subject of debate.⁵⁵ The CNT and the FAI concentrated much of their propaganda at this time on the need for an amnesty for political prisoners, which formed part of the platform of the Popular Front, a broad electoral alliance which had been animated chiefly by Manuel Azaña, leader of the moderate republican *Acción Republicana* (Republican Action) and Prime Minister of the Second Republic during the first *bienio*, and Indalecio Prieto, a leader of the moderate wing of the PSOE.⁵⁶ As several of the most prominent figures in Spanish anarchism, from Peiró to Durruti to Federico Urales, called, explicitly or otherwise, for a vote for the Popular Front, a resurrection of the ‘progressive’ alliance that had ushered in the Republic with the support of gradualist, purist and voluntarist anarchists could be perceived.⁵⁷

On an official level, however, neither the CNT nor the FAI considered parliament to be a potential terrain in the fight against fascism. Following a plenum of FAI regional federations at the end of January, *Tierra y Libertad* affirmed that: ‘The anarchists consider it deplorable that workers are called to the ballot boxes in the name of socialism, and propose as a true dike against fascism the united revolutionary action of the proletariat.’⁵⁸ Two days before the elections and a full five months before the civil war began, the National Committee of the CNT issued a communiqué calling for

⁵⁵ Diego Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la guerra. Una contribución a la historia de la tragedia española* (Madrid: Toro, 1975), p. 53. For a discussion of the abstention campaign of 1936, see Roberto Villa García, “‘Obreros, no votéis’”. La CNT y el Frente Popular en las elecciones de 1936’, *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 13 (2014), 173-96.

⁵⁶ See Paul Preston, ‘The Creation of the Popular Front in Spain’, in *The Popular Front in Europe*, ed. by Helen Graham and Paul Preston (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), p. 84. The signatories of the Popular Front included all of the moderate and leftist organisations other than the CNT, including the newly formed dissident communist organisation, the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (Party of Marxist Unification – POUM).

⁵⁷ See Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, p. 167.

⁵⁸ *Tierra y Libertad*, 12 February 1936.

workers to be ‘on a war footing’, identifying Morocco as the ‘epicentre’ of the conspiracy, and urging that every attempt be made to ‘ensure that the defensive contribution of the masses may lead to the real social revolution and libertarian communism... pursued to its utmost consequences without tolerating attempts by the liberal bourgeoisie and its Marxist allies to hold back the course of events.’⁵⁹ In spite of tactical differences with regard to voting in February, the dominant feeling in the CNT was that bourgeois democracy was unlikely to survive any existential conflict with fascism. At the beginning of the year, Durruti had declared at a meeting of his union: ‘Our slogan must be: dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or libertarian communism. Bourgeois democracy is dead in Spain and it is the republicans who have killed it.’⁶⁰

The victory of the Popular Front slate allowed the CNT to call a National Congress, which began in Zaragoza on 1 May. Assemblies were held to debate the agenda for the Congress on successive Sundays throughout the country and hundreds of CNT members made their way to Zaragoza, where 649 delegates representing 550,595 members celebrated the first Confederal Congress since 1931. However, this apparently thriving democratic culture disguised the fact that the Congress did not discuss what was apparently the chief preoccupation of the organisation, namely, the imminent fascist threat, and how best to respond to it. It appears that the national co-ordinating body of the defence committees discussed its plans at a private session.⁶¹ The principal outcomes of the Zaragoza Congress were the agreements to ratify the readmission of the Opposition Unions, the approval of a document outlining the content of libertarian communism, and the sending of a unity proposal to the UGT. The vision of libertarian communism that emerged from the Congress was a compromise between the purist and

⁵⁹ Peirats, *The CNT, Vol 1*, p. 90.

⁶⁰ See Abel Paz, *Durruti en la Revolucion Española* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 1996), p. 443. The English translation of this volume cited above provides a slightly different rendering. Subsequent citations of Paz, *Durruti*, are taken from the English translation.

⁶¹ Abel Paz, *The Story of the Iron Column: Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War*, trans. by Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: Kate Sharpley Library and AK Press, 2011), p. 6.

gradualist currents, and was criticised from the floor by the former for considering the union organisation to have a role in a post-revolutionary society and by the latter for not granting the union a more prominent role.⁶² In spite of the fact that the document did not claim to provide a rigid formula for a post-revolutionary society and failed to win unreserved approval, it is worth noting certain of the principles that were affirmed here as integral to the revolutionary project, and which would re-emerge as priorities for the conscience of the revolution. These include economic equality, assembly-based decision-making procedures, the principle of autonomy, equality of the sexes and the arming of the populace.⁶³

After a similarly heated debate, the unity proposal sent to the UGT urged the Socialists to abandon their political illusions and commit to the social revolution. In a further example of compromise, however, an additional article recognised the right of the UGT to elaborate further conditions for an alliance, which were to be negotiated by appointed liaison committees from both organisations, who would then return to their members with the results for ratification.⁶⁴ This proposal was opposed by the delegate from Hospitalet, José Peirats, who would become a prominent critic of state collaboration, on purist grounds: ‘There can be no entente between liberty and authority’, he declared. ‘The criterion of class... is Marxist, and therefore artificial. Men are polarised principally according to their ideas, their passions and their mentality.’⁶⁵ Speaking in favour of the proposal, the delegate from the fishing industry of Barcelona affirmed that ideas could not be sufficient to make a revolution when they were not shared by the majority of even the CNT’s own members, and that the impetus for an alliance came from below.⁶⁶ The dangers of a unity negotiated via liaison committees

⁶² C.N.T., *El Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza* (Bilbao: Zero, 1978), pp. 200-7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-42.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.182-3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.185-6.

and which made no stipulations as to the elaboration of workers' power during and after the revolution were not highlighted. In the brief period that followed the Congress of Zaragoza before the outbreak of the civil war, the UGT displayed no desire to respond to the CNT proposal.⁶⁷ The trumpeting of the alliance in the CNT press was not, as the National Committee admitted, 'because we believe that [the UGT] will agree to it, since they have no honesty within them', but rather because of the advantageous light in which this presented the Confederation in the eyes of pro-alliance workers.⁶⁸ However, the question of an 'entente between liberty and authority' could not be side-lined, and would soon be posed of the organisation again amidst the rubble and gunpowder smoke of July 1936.

Revolution and State Collaboration, July – December, 1936

As libertarian activists had long promised would happen, the alliance of the working class in fact occurred 'on the street' in July 1936.⁶⁹ The attempted coup d'état, initially headed by José Sanjurjo and prominent generals such as Emilio Mola, Queipo de Llano and Francisco Franco, was the catalyst for the declaration of a general strike, and the creation of ad-hoc anti-fascist alliances between trade unions and workers' parties, to which sympathetic members of the security forces added crucial weight. Where the military revolt was defeated, the initial collaboration of the CNT with other organisations was established as an emergency defensive alliance against an external threat. The committees created to coordinate the anti-fascist forces, however, were by force of circumstances obliged to challenge existing power relations in their cities and towns, controlling movement through barricades and check-points and taking charge of

⁶⁷ See Horacio M. Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936. Ex-ministro de la República en el exilio. Recuerdos* (Unpublished memoir, BPA: n.d.), p. 54.

⁶⁸ See Thomas Corkett, 'Interactions between the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and the Unión General de Trabajadores in Spain and Catalonia, 1931-1936', (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Glasgow, 2011), p. 185.

⁶⁹ On the frequency with which this appeal to a unity of 'the street' was made, see Gutiérrez Molina, *Crisis burguesa*, p. 36.

supplies in order to keep local populations fed. These committees also rapidly concerned themselves with questions that went beyond the defence of the Republic to address longstanding demands of the workers' movement.⁷⁰ As the defeat of the revolt was everywhere accompanied by the dislocation of state power, the nature and durability of these anti-fascist alliances would consequently be tested by an emerging revolutionary situation in Republican Spain.

Barcelona, the traditional stronghold of the CNT and the first major city in which the military revolt was comprehensively defeated, would provide the test case for the organisation's attitude to the state, revolution and anti-fascist alliances in this new context. There, the rising had met with the determined response of the CNT defence committees, which had mobilised around 2000 members according to the plans of the Catalan Regional Defence Committee (effectively the *Nosotros* affinity group).⁷¹ They had been able to count on the support of a significant proportion of the city's security forces, the intervention of the POUM, and a mobilised working class population that thronged the plazas clamouring for arms and which filled the streets in festive spirit as the rising was defeated. What remained of the Republican state in Cataluña was discredited, through its pusillanimity in the face of the rising and initial refusals to arm the people, while its functioning had been thrown into chaos.⁷²

The fall of the Atarazanas barracks on 20 July, during the assault on which Francisco Ascaso was killed, marked the definitive end of the military revolt in Barcelona. The transformation of the city, familiar from the abundant literature,

⁷⁰ See Pozo González, *Poder Legal y Poder Real*, pp. 24-5.

⁷¹ The figure of 2000 is given by the anarchist teacher Félix Carrasquer in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain. The Experience of Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 107. The importance of the *Nosotros* group to the success of the street fighting in Barcelona is demonstrated in a highly detailed account of the group's activities on 19 and 20 July in Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 53-90.

⁷² See Ángel Ossorio y Gallardo, *Vida y Sacrificio de Companys* (Barcelona: Nova Terra, 1976), p. 186, Pelai Pagès i Blanch, *La Guerra Civil espanyola a Catalunya (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Els llibres de la Frontera, 1997), p. 43, Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p.141, and Ignacio Iglesias, *Experiencias de la Revolución. El POUM, Trotski y la intervención soviética* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2003), p. 101.

photography and cinema that have sought to capture it, was underway. The churches, with the exceptions of the cathedral and the Sagrada Familia, were set alight. Men and women in workers' overalls held rifles aloft and exclaimed "vivas!" to the CNT-FAI, while requisitioned cars and trucks sped back and forth. Buildings belonging to the wealthy, large private companies or religious orders were taken over. The well-dressed, if not all of the better off, disappeared from the streets, as the proletarian periphery of the city took over the centre. As one eyewitness declared: 'Today there is not a hat, a collar, or a tie to be seen among them; the sartorial symbols of the bourgeoisie are gone, a proletarian freedom has swarmed in along the Calle Hospital and the Calle del Carmen from the Paralelo.'⁷³ One of the most striking indications of the rupture that had taken place in the life of Barcelona was the visible protagonism of women, and the emergence of the militia woman, the *miliciana*, dressed in blue overalls and carrying a rifle, as an emblem of the revolutionary moment.⁷⁴ Even taking into account the forbidding national and international context, it is clear that in its twenty-six year history, the CNT had never before found itself at the heart of a mobilisation with so much revolutionary potential.

We can assume, therefore, that it was apparent to the members of the CNT's Liaison Committee in communication with the seat of Catalan government, the Generalitat, that the defensive measures they had undertaken to defeat the military coup d'état had developed along revolutionary lines, in accordance with the predictions of the National Committee's February communiqué. This Committee was composed of three members of the Regional Defence Committee, García Oliver, Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, who was replaced after his death by Aurelio Fernández Sánchez, a further long-

⁷³ John Langdon-Davies, *Behind the Spanish Barricades. Reports from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Reportage Press, 2007), p. 99.

⁷⁴ For women, wearing the overalls had 'an even deeper significance, as women had never before adopted such masculine attire ... [it] not only meant an exterior identification with the process of social change but also a challenge to traditional female attire and appearance', Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), p. 52.

standing member of the *Nosotros* group, along with another, Josep Asens, in representation of the Regional Committee of the CNT, and Abad de Santillán, an opponent of the tactics employed by the *Nosotros* group, in representation of the FAI. These men attended a meeting at the Palace of the Generalitat with the Catalan President, Lluís Companys, on 20 July. Under discussion was the creation of a new body, the *Comité Central de Milicias Antifascistas* (Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militia - CCMA), which would unite the anti-fascist organisations in Cataluña in order to co-ordinate the war effort and maintain order.⁷⁵ The proposal was agreed to by the Regional Committee of the CNT, in communication via telephone with the Liaison Committee, albeit that the participation of the CNT would be subject to ratification at a Regional Plenum to be held the following day. By that time the CCMA was already operational, a fact declared by decree of the Generalitat on 21 July. For the Regional Committee of the CNT to agree to participation in a body incorporating the representatives of a democratic system in crisis, subject to an institution of state, represents an apparent paradox. It appears still more paradoxical when we consider that the Liaison Committee mediating the discussion was dominated by those members who had been most associated with the voluntarist wing of the organisation during the Second Republic.

By 20 July, the defence committees responsible to the Catalan Regional Defence Committee, dominated by the *Nosotros* group, had constituted themselves as ‘neighbourhood revolutionary committees’ and their members had taken to calling themselves ‘*milicianos*’.⁷⁶ Movement around the city was controlled by barricades overseen chiefly by such *milicianos*. They formed supply committees to ensure that the

⁷⁵ See the recollections in García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 176-8, and the discussion in Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, pp. 56-9.

⁷⁶ Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, p. 91. In the literature on the anarchist movement in the civil war, these committees are frequently referred to as both revolutionary committees and defence committees. For the purposes of clarity, I refer to them as defence committees throughout this thesis.

families of those undertaking revolutionary work were fed, and set up huge public canteens. They organised the first militia columns that left in the direction of Zaragoza on 24 July, with Durruti and Antonio Ortiz, another *Nosotros* member, leading anarchist columns. The prestige and power of the defence committees had never been greater, and with the revolutionary developments in Barcelona led primarily by *milicianos*, it seems at first glance that it would have been feasible for the Regional Defence Committee to assert its authority at this stage. To have done so may have implied a complete break with the CNT, however, whose wider membership's reaction to such a move would have been impossible to predict. This is suggested by the recollections of Ricardo Sanz, a member of the *Nosotros* group: 'We knew that the organisation was opposed to dictatorship. And that's what it would have been if our position had been accepted.'⁷⁷ Unwilling to provoke such a schism, the Regional Defence Committee surrendered the initiative it held after the defeat of the military rising.

It must also be borne in mind that the defence committees, in spite of the efforts undertaken to re-organise them along more disciplined and militaristic lines, were a heterogeneous and unpredictable entity, even in the eyes of García Oliver.⁷⁸ Beyond a core of militants that the Regional Defence Committee could depend on to obey orders, the bulk of the defence committees represented a broader network, animated chiefly by affinity groups.⁷⁹ There is evidence to suggest that between this wider network and the core were 'mid-level' shop stewards and FAI activists who had helped combat *treintismo* in the previous years but who could not be relied upon to simply follow the orders of the Regional Defence Committee. As much had been demonstrated on 17 August when activists from the Maritime Transport Workers' Union, without waiting

⁷⁷ Quoted in Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 112.

⁷⁸ On the attempts to reorient the defence committees, see Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 9-25.

⁷⁹ This is the impression given by the recollections of former members of defence committees. See Abel Paz, *Chumberas y alacranes (1921-1936)* (Barcelona: Medusa, 1994), pp. 203-4, and 'Entrevista amb Joan "Remi" per Joan Casanovas Codina, Barcelona, 13/3/1986', AHCB, Fons Orals, pp. 33-8.

for the directions of the Regional Defence Committee, stormed the boats anchored in the port of Barcelona and carried off their stores of weaponry. The initiative for the raid has been attributed variously to Juan Yagüe and Julián Merino, who both had connections to the defence committees.⁸⁰ The event caused consternation among the *Nosotros* affinity group, who hastened to intervene in order to avoid a state of emergency being declared.⁸¹ Such apparent mutual mistrust may help to explain why, for men in negotiations with the Generalitat both before and after the July days, the unpredictable and broadly autonomous wider network of the defence committees may not have appeared to be a reliable basis for extending their power and influence.

The Regional Plenum called by the Barcelona CNT to debate participation in the CCMA took place on 21 July. It set a precedent for the way in which the CNT's democratic procedures would be undermined by the war. The urgency of the circumstances meant that assemblies were called hastily, with little time for delegates to be elected and their positions debated by the wider membership. The key questions to be discussed were proposed by the *comités superiores* (the name given to the Regional, National and Peninsular Committees of the different branches of the libertarian movement), the function of the assembly was to ratify or reject them. While the *comités superiores* had formerly taken important decisions in circumstances of heightened repression or emergency, the permanent emergency situation brought about by the war led, in the months that followed the rupture of July, to such decision-making procedures gradually assuming a routine quality, which would become increasingly formalised over

⁸⁰ Juan Yagüe's relationship to the defence committees can be surmised from his leadership role in the Roja y Negra Column. He would die at the front in September. Julián Merino was an influential activist and propagandist who had been arrested and jailed on various occasions both prior to and over the course of the Second Republic.

⁸¹ See Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la guerra*, p. 61, and García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 420-1.

the course of the war. According to Fidel Miró, the 21 July assembly was made up of ‘committees and notable activists’ and was not a regularly constituted Plenum.⁸²

Three positions emerged: one favouring collaboration, one opposing it on revolutionary grounds, and one which considered collaboration to be of potential short-term use to the CNT, which could strengthen its position before proceeding to a more complete revolutionary transformation.⁸³ Montseny and Abad De Santillán spoke in favour of the first position, the former considering the revolutionary option tantamount to an ‘anarchist dictatorship’, the latter warning against the probability of international intervention against any such revolutionary endeavour.⁸⁴ Whether persuaded of these arguments or content to bide their time and await developments, the delegates present approved collaboration with the CCMA, with only the vote of José Xena, delegate for Baix Llobregat, opposed, whose position had been supported by García Oliver.⁸⁵ The CCMA met that same night, with the members of the CNT’s Liaison Committee attending as the delegates of the CNT and the FAI.

It is far from clear that the controversy implied by the decision to join the CCMA, identified subsequently by anarchist militants and historians, was understood to be so significant by the majority of CNT activists in Barcelona at the time. Diego Camacho, then a member of the JJLL, recalled that:

Only a handful of activists were aware of the constitution [of the CCMA], while the immense majority were unaware, or it sounded to them like one more revolutionary committee among the many others that were operating all over the place.⁸⁶

⁸² Fidel Miró, *Vida intensa y revolucionaria* (Mexico City: Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 1989), p. 180. Miró was a leading figure in the JJLL and a close associate of Abad de Santillán.

⁸³ See the recollections of García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 184-8, and the discussion in Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, pp. 59-61.

⁸⁴ García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 185-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-8.

⁸⁶ Abel Paz, *Viaje al Pasado* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2002), p. 59.

However, while the CCMA was a product of the revolution, it was not a revolutionary organ, and remained subordinate to the pre-existing institutions of state governance. Meanwhile, because the CCMA operated on the basis of delegates proposed by the different anti-fascist organisations, there was no opportunity for a directly democratic process to influence it. For anti-fascist politicians such as Companys, who did not wish to see state power abolished, the CCMA provided the state with a seemingly revolutionary legitimacy and a base from which to reorganise and marshal their strength.⁸⁷

The de-facto collaboration of the libertarian movement with the state in Catalunya had thus begun. This was a complex process that not only included the presence of CNT representatives in the CCMA but which also found expression in libertarian involvement, indeed frequent predominance, in the bodies set up by Generalitat decree in the days and weeks that followed. These included the *Consejo de la Escuela Nueva Unificada* (Council of the New Unified School – CENU), responsible for education, established on 27 July, the *Comisión de Industrias de Guerra* (War Industries' Commission) created on 7 August, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, charged with ensuring the continued loyalty of officers who had served in the army prior to July, the *Comité Central de Abastos* (The Central Committee of Supplies), the *Consejo de Economía de Catalunya* (Council of the Economy of Catalunya), established on 11 August, and the *Patrullas de Control* (Control Patrols) founded on the same day, which was a police force directed by the Investigation Committee of the CCMA, led by Aurelio Fernández and Salvador González (this latter a member of the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* [Unified Socialist Party of Catalunya – PSUC]).⁸⁸ While the

⁸⁷ See Pozo González, *Poder legal*, pp. 62-3; Antoni Castells Duran, 'Revolution and Collectivizations in Civil War Barcelona, 1936-9' in *Red Barcelona: Social Protest and Labour Mobilization in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Angel Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 137.

⁸⁸ The PSUC had formed in July through the amalgamation of the Catalan branches of the PSOE and PCE with the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya* (Socialist Union of Catalunya) and the *Partit Català Proletari*

revolutionary situation lasted in Cataluña, in which the balance of power remained conditioned by the presence of armed workers on the street, it was far from clear that this process of collaboration would be definitive or irreversible, and in the case of some of the bodies enumerated above, it did not prove to be.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, in a pattern that was to accelerate over the autumn, the process ensured that the CNT's most prominent activists were absorbed into what were called 'official posts' in administrative organs, while the restructuring of education, public order, the economy and the war industry represented a further layer of state collaboration that involved thousands of CNT members. The scale of state collaboration was such that, when oppositionists later attempted to advocate a withdrawal from official positions, they would be confronted not only by ideological arguments in favour of anti-fascism, but by the daunting logistical and economic implications of their proposal.⁹⁰

Throughout much of what remained of Republican Spain, a comparable process to that which had taken place in Cataluña was underway, in which committees of anti-fascist unity with a variety of different names were formed in cities and towns with the participation of the CNT. The organisation dominated the *Comité de Guerra* (War Committee) in Gijón, where industry was run by the unions and the Committee also took over the city's branch of the Bank of Spain.⁹¹ A *Comité Ejecutivo Popular* (Popular Executive Committee) was established in Valencia on 20 July, which immediately came into conflict with the central government in Madrid.⁹² In Almería, a *Comité Central Antifascista* (Anti-fascist Central Committee) was constituted by 23

(Proletarian Catalan Party). The PSUC is unlikely to have numbered more than a few thousand members at its foundation, but it grew rapidly during the first year of the war. Affiliated to the Communist International, it appealed to anti-fascists amongst the middling classes with a programme committed to the defence of parliamentary democracy and private property. See Pagès i Blanch, *La Guerra Civil espanyola a Catalunya*, p. 45.

⁸⁹ The case of the *Patrullas de Control* would be instructive in this regard, and is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

⁹⁰ See the discussion in Chapter 4.

⁹¹ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, pp. 238-40.

⁹² See Richard Purkiss, *Democracy, Trade Unions and Political Violence in Spain: The Valencian Anarchist Movement, 1918-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), pp. 238-9.

July, although the CNT, outnumbered by the UGT in the region, did not join until the beginning of August, which may be suggestive of disquiet regarding the question among the Confederal affiliates.⁹³ In Málaga, the multiple decision-making bodies that had emerged under the auspices of the different workers' organisations were unified on 26 July in the *Comité de Salud Pública* (Committee of Public Health), whose Secretary was Francisco Millán, of the FAI.⁹⁴ In these areas, and many more, the anti-fascist Committee was the symbol and embodiment of the new state of affairs, providing an alternative structure of power to the municipal governments, which in most cases were reduced to a nominal role. The central governmental power of Madrid, after the chaotic first days of the rising, sought to re-establish its presence and authority on the streets through the mobilisation of security forces and government-issued passes guaranteeing safe passage.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, these measures could not disguise the marginalisation of the government, or the consequent importance of the CNT in the organisation of resistance and public order in the capital, where its activists found their greatest rivals to be the rapidly growing PCE.⁹⁶

The composition of the anti-fascist committees in each region was largely dependent on the balance of political forces prior to July 1936, albeit with the exclusion of the rightist parties. In certain cases, particularly outside of the larger cities, how the organisations had responded to the military rising was also a factor in deciding their participation in the new committees. In Lleida, the workers' organisations initially felt strong enough to exclude what were seen as the bourgeois parties – in this case the

⁹³ On the formation and composition of the committee, but not the basis for the delayed entry of the CNT, see Rafael Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, *Almería, 1936-37. Sublevación militar y alteraciones en la retaguardia republicana* (Almería: Universidad de Almería, 1996), pp. 86-7.

⁹⁴ Julio Aróstegui, *Por qué el 18 de Julio... Y después* (Barcelona: Flor del Viento, 2006), p. 335.

⁹⁵ See Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (London: The MIT Press, 1972), p. 145.

⁹⁶ See M. Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles*, pp. 171-4.

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalunya - ERC).⁹⁷ The committees were often presented at mass assemblies in town centres where they were ratified and, in areas where only one organisation dominated or where the workers' organisations had little strength, the assembly might have a more open and active character.⁹⁸ Assemblies as a forum for debate and democratic decision-making were features of several revolutionary phenomena: factories taken over by their workers, collectives established in rural areas, neighbourhood defence committees and militia columns, but did not impinge upon the activity and direction of the quasi-governmental anti-fascist committees in the major cities, in which delegates were answerable to the organisations they belonged to. The democratic deficit evident in the collaborationist organs and the official structures of the CNT itself was however counterbalanced to an extent by the assembly-based procedures that characterised the broader revolutionary experience.

Such was the case in the militia columns which, by the end of summer, were having to dig in for a lengthy, trench-based war. In August, the columns in Aragón halted their advance within sight of Zaragoza, with swathes of land in their rear having been collectivised.⁹⁹ However, an assault on the city never materialised, as military personnel who had remained loyal to the Republic advised the anarchists to cover their flanks.¹⁰⁰ Audacious schemes based on the infiltration of the city and a simultaneous uprising from within and assault from without went untested.¹⁰¹ The CNT had failed to

⁹⁷ Lleida was a key base of support for the POUM, which agitated for the creation of a wholly proletarian government. See Pelai Pagès, *Andreu Nin: Su evolución política (1911-1937)* (Madrid: Zero, 1975), p. 212.

⁹⁸ See Pozo González, *Poder legal*, pp. 315-8.

⁹⁹ On the collectivisation of areas of Aragón liberated by the militia columns, see the differing perspectives of Graham Kelsey, *Anarcho-syndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State: the CNT in Zaragoza and Aragon, 1930-1937* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1991), p. 161 and Julián Casanova, *Anarquismo y Revolución en la Sociedad Rural Aragonesa, 1936-38* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), p. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Paz, *Durruti*, p. 485.

¹⁰¹ A detailed discussion of the failure of the CNT to mount a concerted offensive against Zaragoza may be found in Eduardo Pons Prades, 'Summer 1936: Why did we fail to take Zaragoza', trans. by Paul Sharkey, Christie Books website (2011)

elaborate a strategy appropriate to the organisational form of the militias and was, in part, prevented from doing so by its commitment to participation in the anti-fascist front.¹⁰² The situation in Aragón was not unique. The militia columns raised in Gijón were convinced to delay before advancing on Oviedo. Those marching on Granada from Alicante, including the anarchist Maroto Column, dug in at Baza, in the north of the Andalusian province. The strikes declared in the cities under rebel control were worn down by the systematic use of terror. The mutinous army did not have to face its enemy on two fronts, and the fighting developed along the lines of attrition warfare, characterised by sieges and trenches. In such a war, the military strengths of the anarchist movement - urban street fighting, mobility and impetuosity - were rendered superfluous, while the practice of direct democracy and autonomous organisation became a hindrance to effective military action.

From late July, the rebel commanders had received the active assistance of the German and Italian air forces, enabling the transfer of men and weaponry from Spanish Morocco to Andalucía.¹⁰³ Confronted by trained military reinforcements, civilian resistance to the rising in Cádiz was overwhelmed, and while systematic repression of workers' and democratic organisations took place there and in the cities of Sevilla and Granada, General Yagüe's army swept north through Extremadura. At Badajoz, which had offered serious resistance, the repression was of such a scale that it was to become one of the most infamous episodes of the civil war, as hundreds of its inhabitants were massacred in the bullring day after day for weeks after the city fell in mid-August.¹⁰⁴ The isolation of the Republic was confirmed by the Non-Intervention Agreement signed

<<http://www.christiebooks.com/ChristieBooksWP/2011/07/summer-1936-why-did-we-fail-to-take-zaragoza-by-eduardo-pons-prades-translated-by-paul-sharkey/>> [accessed 12 June 2013].

¹⁰² A similar point is made in George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain At War. The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 147. See also Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 142-3.

¹⁰³ Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ See Julián Casanova, 'Rebelión y revolución' in *Víctimas de la guerra civil*, coord. by Santos Juliá (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2004), pp. 76-7, and Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2012), pp. 316-24.

by the major European powers in August on the diplomatic initiative of Britain and France. An effective arms embargo was thereby placed on the Spanish Republic that brought the question of weaponry, and the desire to reassure foreign powers, to the forefront of the problems facing the workers' organisations. Such considerations undoubtedly impacted on the internal debates of the CNT taking place during these months as to the attitude it should adopt towards the question of government and military reorganisation.

On 4 August the CNT held a National Plenum in Madrid. This event was illustrative of the extent to which the normal functioning of the Confederation had been compromised by the war, as only three regions, the Centre, Cataluña and Levante, were able to send delegations. The Plenum debated the question of CNT collaboration in a hypothetical National Anti-fascist Committee, which had apparently been mentioned to the National Committee of the CNT by government ministers.¹⁰⁵ The Cataluña and Levante delegations spoke in favour, while the Central region's delegation expressed reservations, with no final decision being taken due to the lack of representation of several regions.

The reticence of the Central delegation towards the vague proposal may have been influenced by calls from the Madrid section of the CNT for the central government to be replaced by a Junta de Defensa (Defence Council) without moderate republican representation. This argument, in favour of government by an exclusively working class committee, was the unifying characteristic of the left wing of Spanish anti-fascism at this time, both from within the ranks of the CNT, and also the POUM, for whom this was official policy.¹⁰⁶ This argument was strengthened by the disastrous military situation in which the Republic found itself. There was a widespread perception that

¹⁰⁵ See Pozo González, *Poder legal*, p. 196.

¹⁰⁶ See Andreu Nin, *La revolución española* (Madrid: Diario Público, 2011), p. 248.

‘bourgeois politicians’ were incapable of prosecuting the war with sufficient vigour.¹⁰⁷ On 13 September, San Sebastián, the only city in the Basque Country for which July had represented a revolutionary rupture comparable to the rest of Spain, was surrendered to the rebels without a shot being fired. As the city was evacuated, Basque nationalist police remained behind in order to disarm anarchist militia and prevent the retreating forces from burning the city.¹⁰⁸ While such losses added urgency to the arguments of the collaborationists, they also illustrated the extent to which collaboration prevented the militia from adopting the guerrilla tactics associated with revolutionary warfare.

The relationship of the war to the revolution therefore hinged on the question of state collaboration. From very early on in the conflict, Horacio Martínez Prieto, National Secretary of the CNT from September to November 1936, had considered that the only course open to the organisation was ‘to be a solid force within anti-fascism, identified with it and protected by it’.¹⁰⁹ Martínez Prieto was a veteran of the anarchist movement, whose purist scruples had prevented him from joining the CNT until 1932. By the beginning of the war, however, he had occupied influential posts, editing the national review *CNT* in 1932, where he was referred to as ‘Sergeant Prieto’ by his colleagues, and serving his first term as National Secretary from 1935 until May 1936.¹¹⁰ As the democratic functioning of the CNT had been severely compromised by the war, the National Secretary of the organisation was well placed to define the terms and outcomes of the various debates underway in the Confederation during the first

¹⁰⁷ See *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 September 1936. By the autumn, in the words of Helen Graham: ‘Worker confidence in the republican leadership was reduced to virtually nil’; Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁹ Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo II*, p. 99.

¹¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 56, and Miguel Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia histórica del anarquismo español* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2001), p. 388.

months of the conflict.¹¹¹ While Martínez Prieto was tenacious in his advocacy of collaboration, however, the momentum towards participation in government emanated primarily from developments in Barcelona that were driven by the regional rather than national organisation of the CNT. There, the decision to participate in the government of the Generalitat had been taken in unclear circumstances at the end of August.¹¹² The wider membership of the CNT was not made aware of the decisions of the Catalan *comités superiores* until the end of the following month, when the presence of the CNT in the Generalitat was negotiated. The CCMA was officially dissolved on 1 October.¹¹³

On 4 September a new national government was formed with Largo Caballero as Prime Minister and in which the PCE also participated for the first time. The previous day a National Plenum of the CNT had agreed in principle to intervention in government but rejected immediate participation. The Catalan delegation proposed, as had the Madrid delegates a month before, the creation of a new central organ of power composed of representatives of the CNT and the UGT, which would be headed by Largo Caballero. In accordance with this restatement of the 'left' option, *Solidaridad Obrera* declared its preference for a National Revolutionary Council (Junta) 'of all the workers' and peasants' organisations', affirming that 'the current moment is one hundred per cent proletarian'.¹¹⁴ However, at the same time as the Catalan Regional Committee was urging the creation of a Junta composed of the unions, it entered a process of bringing autonomous and localised initiative back under organisational control. In spite of the calls from some elements of the CNT and the POUM for

¹¹¹ The National Secretary at the outbreak of the war was David Antona, although this was an interim position. The National Plenum of 4 August referred to above confirmed Martínez Prieto's re-election, and he returned to the post in September.

¹¹² According to César M. Lorenzo, the decision was taken at a secret Regional Plenum in which the CNT, FAI and FIJL were represented and the Peninsular Committee of the FAI also had a vote. See M. Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles*, p. 99.

¹¹³ A Regional Plenum of the Catalan CNT had agreed to the dissolution of the CCMA on 17 August, a decision approved by a plenum of Barcelona anarchist groups on 21 August. See Pozo González, *Poder legal*, p. 199.

¹¹⁴ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6 September 1936.

proletarian government, which was undoubtedly sincerely meant, the organisations' representatives in the CCMA did not oppose the decision taken by that body on 2 September, to oblige the anti-fascist committee in Lleida to accept the participation of the ERC.¹¹⁵ The case of Lleida was a small example of a wider picture of state reconstruction on the basis of centralisation and class collaboration. This process would be contradictory and take place in stages because its apparent logic, of creating a strong state with a mobilised population capable of waging a modern war, depended on the defeat of a revolution which had, in the absence of such a state, prevented the collapse of the Republic and sustained the war effort up to that point.

On 15 September, two days after the fall of San Sebastián, the CNT held another National Plenum in Madrid. The proposal to form a Junta de Defensa to coordinate the regionally organised anti-fascist committees was here officially adopted. By contrast to the original proposal of an exclusively proletarian council, however, this body was to be presided over by Largo Caballero and formed by five delegates from the CNT and five from the UGT, with four moderate republicans also represented and Azaña continuing in his post as President of the Republic.¹¹⁶ The proposal was thereby stripped of its 'left' content, and Martínez Prieto considered that the principle of governmental participation had now been conceded, as the reconceived Junta differed only superficially from the existing administration.¹¹⁷ The momentum was now with those who favoured collaboration, and although the Catalan Regional Committee would continue to advocate the constitution of a Junta after it had been rejected by Largo Caballero, its case was severely undermined by the participation of the CNT in the Generalitat from 26 September. An equally important outcome of the Plenum was the decision, proposed

¹¹⁵ Joan Sagués, "'Lleida la Roja'. El poder obrer a la capital de la Terra Ferma', in *Breu Història de la Guerra Civil a Catalunya*, ed. by Josep M. Solé Sabaté and Joan Villarroya (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2005), pp. 181-2.

¹¹⁶ Pozo González, *Poder legal*, pp. 216-7.

¹¹⁷ See Horacio M. Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936. Ex-ministro de la República en el exilio. Recuerdos. Tomo III, ¡Ananké! Mi curriculum vitae: ilusión, aventura, frustración* (Unpublished memoir, BPA: n.d.), p. 169.

by Martínez Prieto, to change the composition of the National Committee of the CNT, which would henceforth be a permanent body made up of delegates from the regional federations.¹¹⁸ Previously, the formation of the National Committee had been the temporary responsibility of a Regional Committee chosen at the National Congress, its duties intended to be limited to co-ordination. Its refoundation as a representative, executive body therefore represented a significant shift away from the CNT's founding statutes.

Such a retreat from Confederal democracy was a necessary component of both the constraints imposed by the war and the contortions required by state collaboration, which was as much an ideological process as it was one of formal political participation. This was shown clearly in the recasting of the civil war as a war of national independence. On the one hand a reaction to the aid the rebels received from Italy and Germany, and the presence in Spain of the Army of Africa under the supreme command of General Franco, this was also indicative of the Republican state's need for a common mobilising agent other than that of class. Prior to the war, the FAI had made its position clear: 'The struggle against fascism, an international phenomenon, must be carried out internationally by the workers' and revolutionary organisations, to the exclusion of any nationalist idea or sentiment'.¹¹⁹ At the end of August 1936, however, in a radio broadcast published in *Solidaridad Obrera*, Federica Montseny described the war as one of national independence against 'fascist civilisation', characterised in racist terms as 'not... a Christian civilisation but a Moorish civilisation'.¹²⁰ Illustrative of the nationalist component in the reconstitution of the Republican state was the fruitless mission of the *Comité de Acción Marroquí* (Moroccan Action Committee), which arrived in Spain in September, seeking a declaration of Moroccan autonomy from the

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in *Tierra y Libertad*, 7 February 1936.

¹²⁰ Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, p. 165.

government, in exchange for which they would attempt to organise an uprising in the rebels' African rearguard and to disrupt recruitment to the Army of Africa.¹²¹ 'Anti-fascist' nationalism was an ideological corollary of state reconstruction in the Republic, and Montseny's speech was one of many examples of Spanish anarchists promoting this official ideology, an activity that cannot be separated from the wider process of state collaboration.¹²²

The recomposition of the Republican state was also accompanied by a reassertion of patriarchal values that further undermined the achievements of the revolution. As noted above, women in workers' overalls brandishing rifles was one of the striking images of July in the major cities. On 20 July, *Solidaridad Obrera* noted that women had fought alongside men at the barricades in Barcelona.¹²³ The involvement of women at the front was initially exalted by the workers' organisations and the image of the *miliciana* was used in recruitment posters and propaganda, which were aimed at women as well as men.¹²⁴ The process whereby this exaltation was turned into its opposite ran parallel to the reconstitution of the Spanish state.¹²⁵ One early indication of this was a note carried in *Solidaridad Obrera* on 30 September stating that a new column formed in Poblet in Tarragona would only admit *milicianas* who were related to or a partner of male recruits.¹²⁶ This was followed days later by denunciations in the official newspaper of the Badalona anti-fascist committee (*Diari oficial del Comité Antifeixista i de Salut*

¹²¹ See Paz, *Durruti*, pp. 517-24. *Solidaridad Obrera* called for the complete independence of Morocco: *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 August 1936.

¹²² Resistance to this nationalism will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

¹²³ Amorós, *La Revolución traicionada*, p. 100.

¹²⁴ Lisa Lines, *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 55.

¹²⁵ See Giovanni C. Cattini, 'La Dona entre la Guerra i la Revolució. L'ocupació de l'espai públic i la superació de les restriccions de gènere tradicionals', in *Breu Historia de la Guerra Civil*, p. 329. This process followed the chronological formulation proposed by Tabea Alexa Linhard: 'Within discourses of domestication, three mechanisms that subdue and often erase women's political agency can be identified: the exaltation, the silencing, and the demonization of revolutionary women', Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p. 2.

¹²⁶ Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, p. 266.

Pública de Badalona) of women deemed to be ‘showing off’, criticising ‘photos of women armed with a gun who have never fired a shot in their lives’.¹²⁷

While the libertarian women’s organisation, *Mujeres Libres*, which had formed just prior to the war, did not advocate women’s participation at the front, it formed a self-organised presence in the rearguard via which the patriarchal implications of state reconstruction would be combatted. That the grouping was able to perceive the danger to the revolution posed by the intertwined re-emergence of gendered and racial discourse is demonstrated by an article in its eponymous review in response to a recruitment poster in Madrid which read ‘*Madrileños*, do not allow your women to be despoiled by the Moors!’:

Madrileño, comrade, brother: do not join the struggle out of fear of the Moorish ‘razzias’, the bane of Christian women... There is no reason to revive the instinctive, primitive motives that years of spiritual cultivation have calmed, you do not need the spurs of opportunists who, to win a victory – almost always for their party – resort to the lowest of incitements.

You are struggling for yourself; out of your deepest conviction and not because of the ridiculous threats, of greater or lesser accuracy and terror, of humiliation to your wife who, what is more, shares your ideal and knows how to defend it and herself.¹²⁸

State reconstruction in the Republican zone must therefore be seen as a broader process than that implied by the reorganisation of administrative bodies. By the time the CNT officially entered the government of Largo Caballero, a fact announced at a rally in Valencia on 19 October, sectors of the organisation were already involved in this process, both in terms of formal relations with the state, and in public support for its

¹²⁷ Quoted in Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, p. 52.

¹²⁸ *Mujeres Libres*, December 1936. On the relationship of race to gender in the formation of modern states, see David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 7 and pp. 40-1.

constitution as a patriarchal and racial/national entity.¹²⁹ That the news implied simultaneously a moment in an ongoing process and a crossing of the Rubicon that would intensify the CNT's state collaboration, with all of its implications for the internal life of the organisation, was reflected in the varied response it generated from within the ranks of Spanish anarchism. For one sector, it was a 'bombshell' greeted with disbelief, while for others it was accepted as a pragmatic response to the demands of the situation.¹³⁰ According to some sympathisers, the CNT's acceptance of a secondary role in the central government, and the ideological concession this implied, was proof of the sincerity of the organisation's anti-fascism.¹³¹ *Solidaridad Obrera*, meanwhile, greeted the presence of anarchist ministers in the Republican government with ingenuous enthusiasm: 'The entrance of the CNT into central Government', it declared, 'is one of the most transcendental occurrences in the political history of our country. The State and Government will oppress the people still less with the intervention in them of elements of the CNT'.¹³²

Any possibility that the ministers and councillors representing the organisations that supported the revolution could change the oppressive nature of the state was compromised, however, by the fact that they were at all times outnumbered by an emerging bloc determined to, in its words, 'normalise' the Republican rearguard,

¹²⁹ A National Plenum had finally submitted to the urgings of Martínez Prieto on 18 October. See Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles*, p. 185. Martínez Prieto was particularly dismissive of the 'metaphysics' of accepting positions in regional governments, becoming judges and police officers, while continuing to renounce representation at the level of central government. See Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo III*, p. 162.

¹³⁰ For the former response, see Josep Peirats Valls, *De mi paso por la vida* (Barcelona: Flor de Viento, 2009) p. 314, and Abel Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 66-7. For the latter, see the recollections of a Gijonese anarchist, Ramón Álvarez Palomo file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 50-2.

¹³¹ See the editorial of *Frente Libertario*, a Madrid-based newspaper which had been recently established by the Defence Committee of the Central Region of Spain for free distribution at the front, quoted in Dolors Marín, *Ministros Anarquistas. La CNT en el Gobierno de la II República (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Random House, 2005), p. 142.

¹³² *Solidaridad Obrera*, 4 November 1936. The newspaper was operating with a temporary, transitional editorial board at this time, as the Regional Committee of the CNT had removed the editor, the purist anarchist Liberto Callejas.

thereby enabling the reconstitution of the Republican state.¹³³ This bloc was composed, in Cataluña, of the ERC, the PSUC, the *Unió de Rabassaires* (an organisation of Catalan peasants that was traditionally sympathetic to the political left but hostile to collectivisation) and *Acció Catalana Republicana* (Republican Catalan Action). In the Generalitat, it was represented by seven councillors (three from the ERC, two from the PSUC and one each from the *Unió de Rabassaires* and ACR), as compared to three from the CNT and one POUM councillor. In the newly organised central government, the four CNT ministers were accompanied by fourteen other, Socialist, Communist and republican ministers.¹³⁴ While it should be borne in mind that many rank-and-file Socialists and UGT members were active participants in the revolution, their representatives in government, while belonging to different tendencies, were united in conceiving the revolution, if they supported it at all, as a secondary consideration to the war and the construction of a strong state.¹³⁵

The relative impotence of the four anarchist ministers with respect to this anti-revolutionary bloc was immediately made clear. As soon as they entered the government they were called to an emergency meeting to debate the removal of the seat of the Republican government from Madrid to Valencia. This debate took two days to resolve because of the opposition to the move mounted by the anarchists.¹³⁶ Faced with the unanimous opposition of their ministerial colleagues and desirous of averting a crisis in the new government, however, they eventually acquiesced. The abandonment of the capital caused a scandal, and libertarian embarrassment was heightened when

¹³³ On the slogan of 'normalisation' see Pozo González, *La Catalunya antifeixista*, p. 78.

¹³⁴ The ministries given to the CNT were Health, Justice, Industry and Commerce, whose ministers would be, respectively, Montseny, García Oliver, Peiró and Juan López, the latter a convinced syndicalist who had joined the CNT aged 11. See Marín, *Ministros Anarquistas*, pp. 138–41.

¹³⁵ Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 129–35

¹³⁶ Juan García Oliver, *Mi gestión al frente del ministerio de justicia, conferencia pronunciada en el Teatro Apolo de Valencia el 30 de Mayo de 1937* (Valencia: Ediciones de la Comisión de Propaganda y Prensa del Comité Nacional de la CNT, 1937), pp. 6–7.

ministers leaving the city were detained at anarchist-controlled checkpoints.¹³⁷ The affair cost Martínez Prieto his post as National Secretary of the CNT, and he was replaced by the then Regional Secretary of Cataluña, Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, who was similarly committed to collaboration.

Libertarian ire in Madrid was to an extent channelled into the defiant fervour required for the defence of the city, encapsulated by the mobilising slogan ‘Long live Madrid without a government!’.¹³⁸ It was further sated by the ad-hoc organisation created by Largo Caballero, the Junta de Defensa de Madrid (Madrid Defence Council – JDM), charged with taking on governmental authority in the capital and mounting its defence in the absence of the Spanish parliament. Superficially resembling in composition and appearance the anti-fascist committees then being wound down under the terms of the municipal re-organisation ordered by the Largo Caballero government, the CNT in Madrid greeted the creation of the JDM as a vindication of the perspective it had maintained in the previous months, of regional anti-fascist committees being coordinated by a National Council of Defence.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, once the immediate danger of the city’s fall had passed, the organisation’s delegates to the new body found themselves pressurised by their colleagues with regard to an issue that was to become familiar throughout the Republican rearguard: the problem posed to public order by the continued presence of armed CNT members on the streets. Complaints about the organisation from members of the Junta had to do with the apparent refusal of the CNT’s affiliates to disarm, or abide by the agreements of the JDM. Lorenzo Iñigo

¹³⁷ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War. Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 166.

¹³⁸ *Frente Libertario*, 10 November 1936, quoted in Julio Aróstegui and Jesús A. Martínez, *La Junta de Defensa de Madrid, Noviembre 1936 – Abril 1937* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1984), p. 82. Several anarchists would later recall in interviews with Ronald Fraser that the atmosphere in Madrid at this time was ‘revolutionary’. See the testimonies contained in the Eduardo De Guzmán, ‘Pedro’ and Lorenzo Iñigo Granizo files, Colección Ronald Fraser, AHCB. This contrasts with the references in the literature to Madrid as a non-revolutionary counter-point to Barcelona. See, for example, Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 215.

¹³⁹ Aróstegui and Martínez, *La Junta de Defensa*, p. 127.

Granizo, delegate of the FIJL, acknowledged that CNT members did indeed refuse to accept the authority of the Junta with regard to the question of arms, because the organisation dreaded the possibility that the Communist-controlled public order authorities would be able to draw up a register of the names and addresses of armed CNT affiliates. He even challenged his interlocutors to disarm him at a meeting of the JDM, as he did not have a license for his weapon from the Junta.¹⁴⁰ An essential problem of the CNT's collaboration with the state was thereby revealed: that the will to collaborate in an anti-fascist bloc did not easily translate into an acceptance of governmental authority at ground level, particularly when, as in the case of disarmament, this was both a life and death issue and an affront to the libertarian conception of the revolution.

As shown by the example of Madrid, 'normalisation' of the rearguard, beginning with a confrontation over public order and internal security, where libertarian influence tended to be important, was deemed necessary even in areas of Republican Spain where revolutionary transformation had been more limited than in Cataluña and Aragón. So it was that in Almería, the Civil Governor was moved to declare in an order of early November that 'all authority and competence with regard to Government and public administration remains linked to accordance with the laws of the Republic, to the town halls, mayors and their legitimately designated agents'.¹⁴¹ Expropriations were to end while arrests and registers would henceforth only be undertaken by governmental and military authorities. Likewise in Málaga, the foremost form taken by state reconstruction in the autumn was the reorganisation of public order, whereby the functions of the *Comité de Salud Pública* were transferred to newly established bodies. The '*patrullas mixtas*', which had operated as a rearguard militia, were dissolved and

¹⁴⁰ Lorenzo Iñigo Granizo file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 45.

¹⁴¹ Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, *Almería, 1936-37*, pp. 136-7.

the official police force, responsible to the Civil Governor, was put in control of ‘everything pertaining to the tranquillity and vigilance of the city’.¹⁴²

As partners in this process of state reconstruction, the CNT and the FAI could do little to oppose the restoration of state-controlled public order in an official capacity. The same was true of militarisation of the militia, and the organisations undertook a particular mission to convince their members at the front to accept the introduction of martial discipline and rank in the libertarian trenches, following Largo Caballero’s Decree of Militarisation issued on 24 October.¹⁴³ In so doing, however, the CNT and the FAI were undermining the bases of their power, and removing the conditions that had made their collaboration a necessary precondition for the recovery of the Republican state’s legitimacy. By the end of the year, as opponents of the revolution continued to regain ground lost in July, many anarchists began to take stock, and to advance alternative strategies to that of state collaboration. This would bring them into conflict with those engaged in the process of state reconstruction, including, inevitably, the *comités superiores* of the libertarian movement.

The Outline of a Revolutionary Conscience

As we have seen above, the presence of arms in the rearguard was integral to the question of who held power in revolutionary Spain, the state or the organised working class, and as such it became a test case for the emergence of Spain’s ‘revolutionary conscience’. In Cataluña, the creation of the *Patrullas de Control* as the legitimate guarantors of the revolutionary order in the region, in addition to the scarcity of arms at the front, had led the *comités superiores* to back a campaign for the rearguard to be disarmed. Diego Abad de Santillán put the case for such disarmament to a plenum of

¹⁴² See Antonio Nadal, *Guerra Civil en Málaga* (Málaga: Editorial Arguval, 1984), p. 170.

¹⁴³ Miguel González Inestal file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 72. González Inestal was nominated for this task by Martínez Prieto, who later claimed to have committed the CNT to militarisation ‘on the sly’. See Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo II*, pp. 182-3.

anarchist groups in Barcelona on 21 August, which agreed to his proposal. At a meeting of the Barcelona *comités superiores* held the following day, however, a representative of the city's defence committees was present who stated that 'in various assemblies held in the neighbourhoods of Barcelona it has been agreed that, prior to handing over weapons for the front, the armed bodies responsible to the government should be disarmed first'.¹⁴⁴ Diego Camacho would later recall a manifesto of Barcelona defence committees that declared: 'The defence groups will not lay down their arms while the problem of political power is unresolved and there is an armed force that obeys the Madrid government and isn't under workers' control.'¹⁴⁵

This assertion of the right of revolutionaries to bear arms was an appeal to revolutionary legitimacy as opposed to Republican legality that had as its basis the ongoing revolutionary situation in Spain.¹⁴⁶ Even at this early stage, however, the adoption by anarchists of positions that were outside and against the state would be treated by the *comités superiores* as a breach of internal discipline. At a further meeting of the *comités superiores* on 5 September, in response to the continued autonomy of action of the defence committees, the then Regional Secretary of the Catalan CNT, Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, and Marcos Alcón Selma, a member of the *Nosotros* group, insisted that the committees were responsible to the CNT and the FAI and that members should raise any concerns with their respective unions.¹⁴⁷ Union democracy had been severely curtailed by the conditions of war, however, and the political culture of workplaces had been diluted by the obligatory unionisation of the Catalan workforce and the departure of seasoned activists for the front or for official positions.¹⁴⁸ In such circumstances, it was inevitable that the defence committees would continue to provide

¹⁴⁴ Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, p. 150.

¹⁴⁵ Paz, *Durruti*, p. 517.

¹⁴⁶ The distinction between revolutionary legitimacy and Republican legality is made in Pozo González, *La Catalunya antifeixista*, pp. 54–60.

¹⁴⁷ Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, pp. 191–2.

¹⁴⁸ Union membership had been made compulsory in Cataluña by a decree of August 1936.

both a meeting point for disaffected voluntarists and purists in Barcelona, and a network through which the armed defence of the revolution could be effected. The fact that the defence committees were, a month after 19 July, represented by delegates in conflict with the collaborative policies of the *comités superiores*, further reinforces the interpretation offered above as to the existence of a core and a wider network of defence committees that was mediated by radicals whose obedience could not be relied upon. Once the pre-war Regional Defence Committee had dissolved in order to take up positions either at the front or in the CCMA, new defence committee representatives were chosen from amongst these radicals who swiftly came into conflict with their predecessors.

In September, an affinity group was formed among JJLL members in the Barcelona suburb of Gràcia who also belonged to their local defence committees. Named *Los Quijotes del Ideal*, the group was set up to reaffirm the essential principles of anarchism in opposition to what was seen as the degeneration of the CNT and the FAI, to which latter organisation it did not affiliate.¹⁴⁹ It can therefore be perceived that the combative approach adopted by the activist delegates at the heart of the defence committees was echoed at their youthful, purist periphery. That veteran purists were also among the dissenters became clear in December, when the municipal reorganisation begun in autumn made its delayed appearance in Aragón. The Regional Defence Council of Aragón had been formed at a plenum of the CNT in Bujaraloz on 6 October, and was dominated by libertarians under the presidency of Joaquín Ascaso, cousin of Francisco.¹⁵⁰ The reorganised Council, the make-up of which was announced on 21 December with the blessing of the central government, contained seven CNT

¹⁴⁹ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 58-62.

¹⁵⁰ At the founding plenum, the CNT had initially agreed to offer only two posts on the Council to the UGT and one to the republicans, as compared to the seven that would be taken up by the CNT. The minutes of this plenum are reproduced in Juan Zafón Bayo, *El Consejo Revolucionario de Aragón* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1979), pp. 123-33.

affiliates, and two members each of the Left Republicans, the UGT and the Communist Party. A fifteenth member, Benito Pavón, was a member of the Partido Sindicalista and had been a long-standing member of the CNT.¹⁵¹ This reorganisation prompted the resignation of José Alberola, a veteran of the struggle against the republican alliance of 1931. In a speech in Lleida in March 1937, he gave an indication of his reasoning:

... if the vanguard retreat, those who are less advanced will justify their own retreat with that of the most advanced and no one will remain in their place. The anarchist will accept the world of politics to share in it with the bourgeoisie and authoritarians; the socialist will become a republican and the republican will turn still further to the reaction, which is exactly what is happening... A half completed revolution represents a set-back.¹⁵²

Opposition to state collaboration would grow in coherence over the first months of 1937, and the continued contacts between oppositional voluntarists and purists through the defence committees would be crucial to the revolutionary mobilisation in May of that year. As had occurred during the first years of the Second Republic, the revolutionary press played a significant role in establishing a shared platform for both voluntarists and purists to express their misgivings about state collaboration. This became clear above all following the acceptance of ministries in the government of Largo Caballero. The old-guard of the *Solidaridad Obrera* editorial board had been cleared out before this news was announced, but the revolution had allowed new publications to be established, or old ones to be revived, and several voiced their scepticism at this turn of events.

The newspaper of the FAI in Valencia, *Nosotros*, in an article entitled ‘The anarchists and the “circumstances”’, declared that, if anarchist principles were not

¹⁵¹ The Partido Sindicalista (Syndicalist Party) had been formed by Pestaña on his withdrawal from the CNT in 1932.

¹⁵² José Alberola, *Interpretación anarquista de la revolución* (Lérida: Ediciones Juventudes Libertarias, 1937), pp. 13-5.

maintained, ‘we will end up not knowing who is an anarchist and who is a republican’.¹⁵³ *Línea de Fuego*, the mouthpiece of the Iron Column, an anarchist division on the front at Teruel, went further: ‘what was always attacked is now to be embraced and the very foundations of our beliefs torn up. From now on there is to be no more talk of freedom, but of obedience to “our” government instead.’¹⁵⁴ *Acracia*, the publication of the CNT-FAI in Lleida, which had, under the stewardship of José Peirats, also made clear its opposition to state collaboration, considered the sudden jump from the social to the political terrain to be a ‘senseless contradiction’ even from a collaborationist perspective, requiring that ‘we split ourselves up in order to form a separate body in organisations unsuited to a revolutionary movement’. The workers of the CNT, it went on, did not require the distractions of the ‘political’ sphere to carry forward the revolution.¹⁵⁵

By December 1936, several of those sacked from *Solidaridad Obrera* were collaborating in *Ideas*, the newly established weekly mouthpiece of the libertarian movement in Baix Llobregat, an area known for its revolutionism and the only Catalan locality whose representative (José Xena) had voted against the CNT participating in the CCMA.¹⁵⁶ The editors of *Ideas* made it clear that they thought the CNT was making a strategic error in subjugating its principles to the war against fascism, considering the situation to be uniquely propitious for the organisation to put forward its perspective. Nor were punches pulled in regard to the CNT’s anti-fascist allies:

the politicians, all the Spanish politicians of the so-called left, are as responsible as the fascists for the battle that bloodies the Iberian soil, because they allowed the fascist movement to organise itself from the

¹⁵³ *Nosotros*, 7 November 1936. The paper continued to hold a line critical of collaboration and of official politics until it was taken over by the Peninsular Committee of the FAI in the summer of 1937.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers’ Self-Management*, p. 212.

¹⁵⁵ *Acracia*, 28 October 1936.

¹⁵⁶ Xena was on the editorial board of *Ideas*, along with Jaime Balius, Liberto Callejas and Vicente Galindo Cortés, who wrote under the pen-name ‘Fontaura’. The latter three had all been on the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* at the beginning of the war.

ministries, barracks and colonies of Spain... To those, today as yesterday, we must say: ... The time of Governments has passed; the time of politics has passed... the social hour has sounded. You are victims of your own errors; you think of nothing other than Power and Money.¹⁵⁷

Leaving little doubt as to its position, the front page headline of this first edition read: 'Neither Law nor Official Army. Socialisation and the People Armed!'.¹⁵⁸ The issues this headline raised: obedience to the law, militarisation, socialisation and the disarmament of the rearguard, demonstrate that the contributors to *Ideas* had identified the dividing lines that were to prove fundamental to the forming of the revolutionary conscience. On the other side of the divide stood, not only the anti-revolutionary bloc, but the *comités superiores* of the CNT.

Conclusions

It has been argued that the division of the Spanish anarchists into gradualists, voluntarists and purists was rendered meaningless by the onset of the civil war. Although porous, these categories in fact retained their validity. The libertarian activists that backed state collaboration in 1936 formed an alliance that was reminiscent of the movement at the moment of the Republic's declaration in April 1931, and it was justified in such terms in a speech by the prominent Asturian anarchist and future mayor of Gijón, Avelino Mallada, on 11 September 1936: 'During the democracy, dictatorship, and whenever it was necessary, the anarchists struggled against tyranny. In the years of Primo de Rivera... we anarchists stood at the side of the democrats to put an end to that shameful episode'.¹⁵⁹ The organisational priorities consistently maintained by a gradualist such as Peiró were reinforced during the first months of the civil war by the

¹⁵⁷ *Ideas*, 29 December 1936.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Ramón Álvarez, *Avelino G. Mallada. Alcalde Anarquista* (Barcelona: Historia Libertaria de Asturias, 1987), p. 276.

National Secretary of the CNT, Martínez Prieto, while the purist Montseny's 'progressive' defence of a national, democratic civilisation in August 1936 likewise echoed the sentiments she had expressed at the birth of the Republic. Although the most prominent voluntarists were more enigmatic, in some respects their role in July echoed their activity in Barcelona on 14 April 1931, when CNT activists ensured that Lluís Companys was able to occupy the office of the Civil Governor, or in exile prior to the Second Republic, when they maintained close relations with Catalan separatists.¹⁶⁰ Having castigated his forebears for missing the opportunity to take on the mantle of 'Lenin and Trotsky' in Spain, García Oliver, at the helm of the Barcelona defence committees, acquiesced in the decision of an unconstitutionally assembled Regional Plenum to participate in the CCMA and, rather than attempt to gain support for his revolutionary position among the wider membership, became one of the most notable figures of state collaboration. He thus came to embody the shifting meaning of the pejorative use of 'Bolshevik' in libertarian circles, from one who advocates the impetuous activity of small groups to one who imposes organisational discipline.

Prior to the civil war, García Oliver had exhorted the movement to take questions of organisation and discipline more seriously in the interests of revolutionary preparation.¹⁶¹ As a consequence, he was labelled a 'Bolsheviser' by José Peirats, while Camillo Berneri, an influential Italian anarchist living in Barcelona, warned the Spanish movement against falling prey to 'a species of "libertarian Bolshevism"'.¹⁶² The spectre of the Russian revolutionary experience haunted the Spanish anarchist movement, and from the first days of the civil war Spanish anarchists expressed a determination to avoid falling into similar traps. The first edition of *Tierra y Libertad* to appear after 19 July declared that: 'The experience of Russia should inform us to the utmost degree.

¹⁶⁰ See Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo II*, pp. 88-9, on García Oliver's positive attitude to anti-dictatorial alliances at that time, and García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, pp. 82-9.

¹⁶¹ See Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 40-51.

¹⁶² See, respectively, Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, p. 83; *Más Lejos*, 16 April 1936.

There our comrades were relegated to a second rank after struggling energetically against Tsarist barbarism.’¹⁶³ Likewise, the fear of repeating the Bolshevik experience undoubtedly played on the minds of those activists who had voted against what would later be characterised as Xena and García Oliver’s proposal for an anarchist ‘dictatorship’ at the Plenum of 21 July in Barcelona.¹⁶⁴ In late October 1936, Federica Montseny declared that:

The mission of the anarchists, interpreting the desires of the Spanish people, has been so energetic and so productive that it is not humanly possible for what occurred in Russia to be repeated in Spain. In Russia, the anarchists... did not introduce themselves into all aspects of life, and found themselves removed from the management of country... That is why in Cataluña our task has been to introduce ourselves into all aspects, to be involved in everything, and to be present everywhere. In this way, even in the world of politics, we have made a Revolution in Spain. There has been no transgression of principle, only a little acceptance of what History has to teach us.¹⁶⁵

By November, however, Camillo Berneri was using the term ‘bolshevisation’ to describe the erosion of the power of the grass-roots activists of the CNT relative to the *comités superiores*.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, it was precisely the determination of the Spanish libertarian movement to be involved in the direction of all aspects of administrative life that left it facing many of the problems that had characterised the bolshevisation of Russian Social Democracy. Like the Bolsheviks, the Spanish anarchists

were forced to transform themselves from rebels into rulers and to reshape or construct new local government and administrative bodies.

¹⁶³ *Tierra y Libertad*, 23 July 1936.

¹⁶⁴ See Juan García Oliver, ‘Los organismos revolucionarios: El Comité Central de las Milicias Antifascistas de Cataluña’, in *De julio a julio. Un año de lucha. Textos de los trabajos contenidos en el extraordinario de Fragua Social, de Valencia, del 19 de julio de 1937* (Barcelona: Ediciones Tierra y Libertad, 1937), pp. 195-6.

¹⁶⁵ *Tierra y Libertad*, 29 October 1936.

¹⁶⁶ Camillo Berneri, *Entre la Revolución y las trincheras* ([Paris?]: Ediciones Tierra y Libertad, 1946), p. 11.

Moreover, they had to do so without having given any concrete thought to how they would govern, at the same time that they were obliged to furnish personnel for service in new institutions of national government and to spread and defend the revolution around the country. These burdens led inexorably to the fundamental transformation of the... organisation's composition, structure, method of operation, and relationship to its constituencies.¹⁶⁷

As in the case of Russia, the advances of the Spanish revolution in the summer of 1936 had been predicated on the decomposition of the state and the creation of alternative sources of legitimacy and power by armed workers. When those alternatives began to be closed down by the reconstituted state, this process could be understood as a counter-revolution, even though in both instances the revolutionary organisations were involved in this 'disguised resurrection of the state' prophesied by Bakunin.¹⁶⁸ What would complicate matters further in the Spanish case was that the CNT's apparent allies in the project of state collaboration were ambiguous in their relations with the *comités superiores*, and wholly hostile to the organisation's grassroots activists. As a result, the latter were pushed into a two-fold defence of anarchism, on the one hand attempting to maintain fidelity to their anti-state traditions, and on the other resisting the attempts of rival organisations to side-line the libertarian movement. The extent to which the revolutionary conscience was able to defend its positions in this context, and the new organisational expressions this opposition gave rise to, is the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁶⁷ Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*, p. 55.

¹⁶⁸ Mintz, 'Las influencias de Bakunin y Kropotkin'.

Chapter Two: ‘Socialisation and the People Armed!’ Conscience and Programme,
January-April 1937

By the end of 1936, a division within the CNT on the basis of attitudes to the state could be perceived. On the one hand, many members advocated a defence of the revolution in the rear through a socialised economy and armed populace, and at the front through a war waged by a voluntary, popular militia. This was summed up in the slogan advanced by the publication *Ideas*: ‘Socialisation and the people armed!’.¹ On the other hand, the organisation’s *comités superiores* were now committed to participation in national and regional governments of anti-fascist unity, the principal objective of which was to re-establish the Republican state in order to wage a conventional war. Either side of this divide, the decision-making processes employed by the partisans of each tendency were at variance. The radical tendency was characterised by assemblies of activists in the neighbourhoods, workers in the factories, and combatants at the front. The *comités superiores*, by contrast, made decisions at closed meetings, often in haste and in response to urgent situations. Over the winter and early spring of 1937, the parameters of this division would become more clearly defined.

One factor that initially served to obscure the tensions within the libertarian movement was an awareness of the threat to libertarian influence posed by the increasing coherence and confidence of those organisations that made the fight against fascism conditional upon the suppression of the social revolution, in particular the PCE and its Catalan sister party, the PSUC. The line of the Comintern, to which these parties belonged, was of presenting Spain to Britain and France as a fellow democratic state under siege from fascism and requiring their aid. In order to do this, it was imperative to downplay, deny or curtail the revolutionary aspect of the Spanish civil war, while

¹ See previous chapter.

attempting to maintain anti-fascist unity.² In practice, however, these aims proved to be mutually exclusive. Early observations from Comintern agents such as André Marty stressed the desirability of splitting the CNT between those of its members who favoured unity and those who threatened it.³

The libertarian camp had generally been slow to react to the position the PCE and the PSUC had taken on in the summer of 1936. Attempts had been made to ostracise the latter party from revolutionary phenomena in certain parts of Cataluña because it was regarded as an arriviste organisation without established credentials, not because of its political positioning.⁴ Consequently, the offensive carried out by the PCE and the PSUC against the dissident communist POUM was characterised in *Solidaridad Obrera* as relating to ‘personal or party political questions, questions of pride’ rather than representing an attack on the revolution’s most vulnerable adherents.⁵ Even the POUM, however, did not initially consider the Communists to be external to its conception of ‘proletarian’ anti-fascism. For this reason Andreu Nin, the de facto leader of the party in this period, considered there to be a working-class majority in the Generalitat.⁶

Nevertheless, by the end of 1936, a ‘counterrevolutionary’ threat had become apparent to all sectors of the CNT and not only those already sceptical about anti-fascist collaboration.⁷ This counterrevolution was defined in the official press of the Catalan CNT in terms of political intrigue, primarily with regard to the ‘provocations’ and

² See the telegrams exchanged between the PCE and the Comintern and Soviet authorities in the first days of the conflict, reproduced in *Spain Betrayed. The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, ed. by Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov (London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 7–15.

³ Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas. La Internacional Comunista en España, 1919-1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), p. 327. Marty was a member of the French Communist Party and the Secretariat of the Comintern who had arrived in Spain soon after the outbreak of the civil war. He would later become Political Commissar of the International Brigades.

⁴ See Juan José Gallardo Romero and José Manuel Márquez Rodríguez, *Revolución y guerra en Gramenet del Besòs (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Grupo de Estudios Históricos Gramenet del Besòs, 1997), p. 81.

⁵ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 December 1936.

⁶ See Nin, *La revolución española*, p. 262. It was not until a speech in April that Nin publicly declared that the PSUC was ‘not a workers’ party’: *ibid.*, p. 313.

⁷ See, for example, the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 December 1936, and the editorial on the second page of the Catalan JLL mouthpiece *Ruta*, 1 January 1937.

‘rumour mongering’ of the Communists in their attempts to sideline the Confederation.⁸ The radicals had a broader understanding of the process, a fact that had cost the veteran purist Liberto Callejas his job as editor of *Solidaridad Obrera*, following the publication of an editorial that opposed the Decree of Militarisation in terms that struck at the heart of the project of state reconstruction: ‘There is a mentality that... of a piece with the position it held before 19 July, tends almost involuntarily towards the reconstruction of that which existed then but which has since been destroyed by... the revolutionary process.’⁹ The article, which insisted that the process of militarisation must not be allowed to undermine the revolutionary character of the war or resurrect a pre-revolutionary military spirit, prompted the PSUC and the Catalan branch of the UGT to send a letter of complaint to both the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI, precipitating the dismissal of Callejas.¹⁰

Callejas’s understanding of the counterrevolution as a phenomenon of state reconstruction rather than organisational rivalry reflected the division of the CNT into street-level and high political perspectives. This divergence would be exposed most clearly during the May events in Barcelona, when the *comités superiores* considered the revolutionary mobilisation of the libertarian movement to have as its end the mere rectification of yet another Communist-inspired ‘provocation’.¹¹ If the widespread identification of an external enemy, the ‘counterrevolution’, in the months prior to these events served to obscure the differences within the libertarian movement, this chapter will demonstrate that it did not prevent the emergence and crystallisation of a radical programme defined in opposition to the re-imposition of state power *per se*. As much was made clear at the start of the year by the rationalist teacher Floreal Ocaña in the pages of *Ideas*, the new journalistic home of Liberto Callejas:

⁸ See *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29, 30, 31 December 1936.

⁹ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 31 October 1936.

¹⁰ See Pozo González, *La Catalunya antifeixista*, p. 71.

¹¹ The May events are discussed in the following chapter.

The 'fifth column', formed by all the political parties, has begun its attack on the people's revolution. With typical guile it has increased the size of the old organs of state repression in the hope that, as before, they will follow the state's orders... If the political world, which bears the blame for the rise of fascism, succeeds in making the people obey laws intended to put the brakes on social and economic progress, and swallow the double pill of an official army and armed institutions recognised as the only forces and organisational forms permitted to struggle at the front and... 'conserve revolutionary order in the rear', then soon, very soon, we will see a campaign for those who aren't enlisted in one or other mercenary body to immediately hand over weapons and munitions. And after this campaign will come... registers of homes intended to complete the disarmament of the proletariat.¹²

This bleak perspective, which would prove to be remarkably prescient, was shared by other revolutionaries in Spain. Mary Low, a Trotskyist poet from England aiding the POUM in Barcelona, described the ebb of the revolution and the linked reassertion of militarism, nationalism and traditional gender roles:

It was in the air... The regiments going down the streets marched in perfect formation, one two, one two, the arms swinging chest high and the hundreds of feet striking down on the pavement with a single, thunderous blow. The Catalan flag was carried automatically with the red banners and the black, there were less women mingled among the men going to the front, there were no longer dogs and cats following on the end of a string, or perched on kit-bags. It was all as it should be, and we stood more chance of winning the war perhaps, but meanwhile the chance of winning the revolution was growing gradually fainter.¹³

In spite of this relative decline, however, the revolution retained a great deal of resources and potential. Across Republican Spain, over one and a half million workers and peasants began the year participating in the revolutionary experiment of

¹² *Ideas*, 21 January 1937.

¹³ Mary Low and Juan Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook: The First Six Months of the Revolution and the Civil War* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1979), p. 214.

collectivisation.¹⁴ It was, after all, as late as December 1936 that George Orwell arrived in Barcelona and described it as a place where ‘the working class was in the saddle’.¹⁵ Furthermore, following the heroic defence of Madrid, sufficient optimism remained as to the course of the war for the branches of the libertarian movement to advance policies that went beyond the merely defensive or reactive.

Detectable in this period was an increasing restlessness amongst radicals who did not accept the ‘circumstantial’ arguments of the *comités superiores* and were unprepared to be swept along by the tide of events. This led ‘the little Jacobin’ Severino Campos, an activist in the Catalan FAI and regular contributor to *Ideas*, to predict that ‘the day is soon coming when we will break free from the statist and centralist asphyxiation’.¹⁶ A change of course was also foreseen by the editorial board of *Acracia* in an overview of the movement published at the outset of 1937:

Anarchism, in spite of ministerial collaboration, has not betrayed itself, which is not to say that the ministers and councillors are behaving like anarchists, but rather that not all anarchism is ministerial and nor does it make a dogma out of the facts as they stand. There are many of us who have remained faithful to the most rigorous anti-statism... We anticipate, therefore, a brilliant Confederal and anarchist resurgence... that will return to the agreements taken and rectify abuses... The revolution will not be strangled with the complicity of its most enthusiastic champions. Let us react for the good of everyone. For a humanity without classes and a society of free producers.¹⁷

The stage was thus set for an alliance of voluntarists and purists that would seek to alter the collaborationist course of the libertarian organisations, as had occurred in the first

¹⁴ See the convincing estimates and periodization in Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers’ Self-Management*, p. 139.

¹⁵ George Orwell, *Orwell in Spain. The Full Text of Homage to Catalonia with Associated Articles, Reviews and Letters from The Complete Works of George Orwell* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 32.

¹⁶ Severino Campos, prologue to J. Santana Calero, *Afirmación en la marcha* (Barcelona: JJLL de Sanidad, n.d. [1937?]), p. 3.

¹⁷ *Acracia*, 23 January 1937.

bienio of the Second Republic, while simultaneously attempting to deepen and extend the revolutionary process. As we will see in this chapter, however, this initiative would be complicated by the disastrous loss of Málaga, the increasing violence of state reconstruction, and the widening gap between the grassroots activists and the *comités superiores*, leading radicals to consider a return to the barricades the only remaining option for the salvation of the Spanish revolution.

The anarchist programme and state reconstruction

As intimated in the above citation from Ocaña, the successful reconstitution of the Republican state depended on the governing authorities establishing a monopoly of violence at the front and at the rear. Opposed to this, the slogan of ‘the people armed’ lost ground to campaigns urging the sending of weapons to the front and the establishment of a *mando único* (single command) to oversee the war effort. What were understood to be the implications of a *mando único* varied from the increased cohesion and internal coordination of the militia system with its high proportion of voluntary, democratic units controlled by political or union organisations, to the creation of a new Republican army based on traditional military hierarchies and discipline. In Málaga, for example, the Regional Committee of the CNT called for a *mando único* to be established on the basis of a Provincial Council of Unified Militia.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the insistent propagation of the *mando único* as a campaigning slogan by Communist and republican parties was, as Juan Andrade, an activist of the POUM, noted in the party newspaper *La Batalla*, intended to suggest that ‘there are some on the left of “antifascism” who oppose general mobilisation and unity of command...they [Communists and republicans] are making an error, if it is not a conscious manoeuvre

¹⁸ This was in November 1936. See Nadal, *Guerra Civil en Málaga*, pp. 282-3.

on their part'.¹⁹ We might surmise that '*mando único*' was being used euphemistically by the proponents of militarisation to hasten the return of those aspects of soldiery that this 'left of antifascism' did oppose: martial discipline, military rank and the loss of political and revolutionary characteristics.

The possibility that a voice as influential as that of Durruti could be added to those opposing militarisation had been extinguished by a bullet on the Madrid front in November 1936. Until that point, the Durruti Column had resisted militarisation.²⁰ Although Durruti had not openly used his influence to defy the CNT, and had reluctantly taken a squad of militia with him from the Aragón front to join the defence of Madrid at the behest of the organisation, a speech he had made before his departure, delivered on the radio and transmitted across loudspeakers in Barcelona, had indicated the widespread unease felt at the front with regard to the compromises made in the rear.²¹ After his death, his legacy was to become a battleground, symbolised by the slogan 'We renounce everything except victory', a phrase falsely attributed to him by anti-fascist allies that would soon be employed by the *comités superiores* of the libertarian organisations.²² Former members of his Column, meanwhile, recalled Durruti having stated that militarisation would be rejected regardless of decisions made in the rearguard.²³ Suspecting that their commander had been murdered, either by Communists or even by his eventual replacement, the former military officer José Manzana, the reluctance of the Durruti Column in Madrid to reincorporate into the front became a cause of severe embarrassment to the *comités superiores* of the CNT.²⁴

¹⁹ Juan Andrade, *La revolución española día a día* (Barcelona: Nueva Era, 1979), p. 138. Andrade had been a founder member of the PCE who was expelled in 1928, and had subsequently joined the international opposition to Stalin headed by Trotsky.

²⁰ Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona*, p. 128.

²¹ Paz, *Durruti*, pp. 633-4.

²² Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona*, p. 139.

²³ See the intervention of the delegate from Cardona, 'Acta del pleno de locales y comarcales celebrado el día 4 de febrero de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 531/1.

²⁴ Guillamón, *La Revolución de los comités*, p. 432. Durruti had initially been replaced by Luciano Ruano, whose brutal methods caused consternation in the ranks (see the following chapter). Reference to the rumours regarding Manzana is made in the correspondence of Diego Camacho, 'Correspondencia

The position of those resisting militarisation was much weakened by the fall of Málaga in February. *Hombres Libres*, the newspaper connected to the Maroto Column in the province of Granada, had continued to affirm in January that the revolution and the war were inseparable.²⁵ However, once Málaga had fallen, its defenders starved of ammunition and support by the central government, the Maroto Column agreed to militarisation at a general assembly.²⁶ Miguel García, a Catalan militia volunteer and CNT member who had joined the front at Madrid, recalled that anarchists ‘let themselves be persuaded into accepting the inevitable for the sake of the promised arms’.²⁷ González Inestal, the man who had been charged with imposing militarisation on anarchist columns by Martínez Prieto, told more recalcitrant militia that they would be unable to count on organisational support in requesting arms and ammunition if the decision of the CNT to accept militarisation was not respected.²⁸

On 5 February, a plenum of anarchist and Confederal columns took place in Valencia.²⁹ It had been called by the Iron Column, in operation on the front at Teruel, in consultation with the Maroto Column, which was unable to send delegates because of the advance of the mutinous army on Málaga. The reasons given for the calling of the plenum were, firstly, that the ‘enormous quantity’ of decisions made in the rearguard had taken place without consulting the militia columns, and secondly, that those in the

entre Diego Camacho (“Abel Paz”) y Juan García Oliver’, *Balance. Cuaderno de historia*, 38 (2014), p. 29, and is also discussed extensively in Los Giménólogos, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche. Notas sobre los Recuerdos de la guerra de España de Antoine Gimenez*, trans. by Francisco Madrid Santos, Carlos García Velasco and Los Giménólogos (Logroño: Pepitas de calabaza ed., 2009), pp. 398-413. The cause of Durruti’s death remains the source of speculation. Contemporary rumours of foul play were angrily denounced by the National and Peninsular Committees of the CNT and the FAI, respectively, in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 24 November 1936.

²⁵ Amorós, *Maroto*, p. 102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114. On the fall of Málaga, see Nadal, *Guerra Civil en Málaga*, pp. 359-79, and Beevor, *The Battle for Spain*, pp. 223-5.

²⁷ See Miguel García, *Miguel García’s Story* (London: Miguel García Memorial Committee, 1982), pp. 46-7.

²⁸ Miguel González Inestal file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, Fons Orals, Casa de l’Ardiaca, p. 74.

²⁹ ‘CNT-FAI Acta del Pleno de Columnas Confederales y Anarquistas celebrado en Valencia el día 5 de febrero de 1937’ <http://www.fondation-besnard.org/article.php3?id_article=428> [accessed 19 September 2013].

rear had seemingly forgotten ‘the revolutionary meaning of the moment’.³⁰ As if to confirm the timeliness of this assembly, at a Regional Plenum of the Catalan CNT the previous day, delegates from Baix Llobregat and Cardona affirmed that militarisation ‘annuls the revolutionary organisation’, while the suggestion of the delegate from Badalona that representatives from the militia columns be granted representation at National Plenums of the CNT was rejected by the Regional Committee.³¹

While several attendees stressed the ‘historic’ or ‘transcendental’ nature of the gathering of militia, the representative of the National Committee of the CNT made plain his irritation at the manner in which the plenum had been called and denied its authority. He reported, furthermore, that Largo Caballero had personally informed him that ‘the arms of the state will be given to the forces of the state... if [the militia] do not want to enter into [the state] then their organisations can supply them with arms’.³² It was clear therefore, that the price paid for military supplies would be an acceptance of state authority. The alternative, as was swiftly becoming clear, was abandonment by both the General Command and the libertarian organisations. The continued viability of columns operating in accordance with anarchist principles at the front depended on the persistence of the revolutionary interregnum in the rear. In the case of the Iron Column, its attempt to rely on the resources of this revolution came under sustained attack from the forces of the state in the first months of 1937. A small socialised factory in Burriana that supplied the column with munitions was subject to an attempted occupation by Assault Guards that was only averted on the intervention of armed militia and the negotiation of the CNT’s National Committee.³³ Then, on 8 March the occupation of a workers’ centre in Vinalesa by Assault Guards prompted clashes that led to the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ ‘Acta del pleno de locales y comarcales celebrado el día 4 de febrero’.

³² ‘CNT-FAI Acta del Pleno de Columnas Confederales y Anarquistas’.

³³ See Paz, *The Story of the Iron Column*, p. 171.

occupation of the district by government forces and the arrest and imprisonment of two hundred libertarians, including ninety-two members of the Iron Column.³⁴

On 21 March, the Iron Column finally agreed to militarisation at an assembly.³⁵ The previous month, the similarly recalcitrant combatants in the del Rosal column had been loaded onto trucks and taken from the front line to Cuenca, where a representative of the National Committee informed them that they would be expelled from the organisation if they failed to militarise.³⁶ Following militarisation, the meaning of ‘the people armed’ could only have revolutionary significance in the rearguard, where many activists, male and female, continued to bear arms. In the first half of 1937, these activists would be joined by a steady stream of combatants leaving the front. By far the most significant group to abandon the lines *en masse* was that from the Gelsa section of the Durruti Column, of which eight hundred members returned to Barcelona with arms in hand in February. While militarisation had settled the question of the monopoly of violence at the front in favour of the state, in the rear, and particularly in Cataluña, it remained open to contestation. There the police forces, the Assault Guards and the National Republican Guards, jostled for hegemony with the *Patrullas de Control*.

Although initially intended to comprise affiliates from all of the anti-fascist organisations, the *Patrullas* were in effect controlled by the CNT, and in some cases were answerable to the local defence committee.³⁷ Those same committees pressured anarchists to overcome their reluctance to enlist in a body which had the appearance of a police force, challenging militants who complained of abuses to join in order to safeguard the ‘revolutionary morality’ according to which the *Patrullas* were to

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 221-2. Appeals for the release of the prisoners were persistent in *Nosotros* in the following weeks and echoed in the pages of *Acracia*.

³⁵ *Nosotros*, 22 March 1937.

³⁶ Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 338.

³⁷ According to one former member, this was the case in the Barcelona suburb of Sants: Joan Casanovas, ‘La Guerra Civil a Barcelona: les patrulles de control de Sants vistes per un del seus membres’, *Historia y Fuente Oral*, 11 (1994), 53-66 (p. 59). The *Patrullas* in the Catalan town of Gramenet del Besòs were also subject to the control of the local, Confederal, defence committee. See Gallordo Romero and Márquez Rodríguez, *Revolución y guerra en Gramenet del Besòs*, p. 72.

operate.³⁸ Early in 1937, however, the *Patrullas* would become a target of the propaganda and law-making of the republican and Communist parties, particularly in the wake of the much publicised events in La Fatarella in January. La Fatarella was an agricultural town in Catalunya, where an attempt to form a collective by a minority of its inhabitants, affiliated to the CNT, led to the crystallisation of an anti-collectivisation bloc composed of the PSUC, the ERC, the UGT and the *Unió de Rabassaires*. Growing tension in the town led to a bloody showdown between some of its anti-revolutionary inhabitants and the *Patrullas de Control* sent from Barcelona, resulting in tens of deaths, mostly of townspeople.³⁹ The uprising of La Fatarella was represented by the libertarian organisations as the work of the ‘fifth column’ but was defended by the anti-revolutionary bloc as an expression of legitimate grievances.⁴⁰ The UGT subsequently withdrew its members from the *Patrullas de Control* and in February the PSUC organised a protest, in which the official police bodies participated, calling for their dissolution.⁴¹ In spite of decrees issued in March and April, the Generalitat did not succeed in dissolving the *Patrullas de Control*, many of whose members in this period appear to have responded directly to the orders of their local defence committee.⁴²

Jaime Balius wrote in *La Noche* of the necessity of maintaining the *Patrullas de Control* as a guarantee of the revolution that would not be subject to or incorporated into the traditional forces of public order:

It must not be the *Patrullas de Control* that mix in with the uniformed bodies, but rather the members of the institutions of the old regime who, after a rigorous selection process, should then form part of the *Patrullas*

³⁸ Casanovas, ‘La Guerra Civil a Barcelona’, pp. 56-7.

³⁹ See Pelai Pagès i Blanch, ‘La Fatarella: Una insurrecció pagesa a la reraguarda catalana durant la guerra civil’, *Estudis D’Historia Agrària*, 17 (2004), 659-74.

⁴⁰ The CNT’s version of events was given in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 January 1937. Two days later *Acracia* also described the events as a ‘fascist’ uprising, and stated that the presence of fascists in ‘left’ organisations was due to the ‘unscrupulous’ way in which certain organisations had attempted to increase their memberships: *Acracia*, 28 January 1937.

⁴¹ Chris Ealham, ‘Una revolución a medias: los orígenes de los *hechos de mayo* y la crisis del anarquismo’, *Viento Sur*, 93 (2007), 93-101 (p. 97).

⁴² See Casanovas, ‘La Guerra Civil a Barcelona’, pp. 64-5.

de Control, and it must be our comrades of the workers' organisations that control absolutely everything pertaining to public order.⁴³

At issue was one of the questions considered fundamental to a classical understanding of the state as 'a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence'.⁴⁴ In the Catalan rearguard in this period, as Balius's article makes clear, a power struggle was underway between those who claimed their legitimacy from legality and those whose claim to violence was based on the revolution of July 1936. Who dominated whom had yet to be decided, but Balius was not alone in linking this question to his concern that the revolution had not gone far enough. In this respect, the economic question was as significant as that of public order, and the relevance of one to the other would be made explicit in this period. A recognition that the libertarian organisations had allowed the direction of the economy to escape their control following the first burst of revolutionary activity in the summer had, by the end of 1936, become general within the libertarian movement. This resulted in the socialisation campaign that, in the first half of 1937, became crucial to the question of whether the revolution, or the project of state reconstruction, would triumph. The campaign would also reveal fault-lines within the libertarian movement, with the *comités superiores* understanding socialisation to imply union control of the economy, while radical sectors defined it as a complete transformation in the relations of production leading to 'a community of free producers'.⁴⁵

On 30 December 1936, an editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* declared the intention of the CNT to 'prepare the intervention of the unions in the highest direction of production and of the economy in general', retrospectively suggesting that its initial

⁴³ *La Noche*, 26 February 1937.

⁴⁴ Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 78.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the declaration of the National Committee of Spanish Transport Workers' Unions cited in Antoni Castells Duran, *El proceso estatizador en la experiencia colectivista catalana (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Nossa y Jara Editores, 1996), pp. 29-30.

acceptance of a system of partial collectivisations in which union control was not, in the main, assured, had been intended as a 'transitional solution'.⁴⁶ Dissatisfaction regarding the collectivisations as they had functioned hitherto stemmed from several factors. The existence of variables in prices within the same industry suggested that collectives in both the town and country were operating in competition with each other and not according to the needs of society at large.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in some cases militants felt that the effect of the committees set up to administer collectivised factories was that one boss had been replaced with five.⁴⁸ For radical anarchists, the collectivisations fell short of their revolutionary aspirations. Severino Campos lamented in the first issue of *Ideas* that:

While the revolution has begun its rapid march, its constructive phase has not yielded the kind of results on the economic terrain that could satisfy the broad conceptions of anarchism... nevertheless we must not hold ourselves back nor take... collectivism as a model of the social future... the collectivisations cannot continue in the manner in which they have been interpreted and practised until now. It is necessary to think of something that will guarantee bread and work for all, while at the same time suppress the exorbitant wages of those who contribute the least work.⁴⁹

On 6 December, the first Regional Plenum of the FAI to be held in Cataluña since July had called for the socialisation of production and distribution, 'avoiding the partial collectivisation of enterprises, which represents a complete negation of the spirit of socialisation'.⁵⁰ In early January, a plenum of Catalan peasants affiliated to the CNT was held, at which the continued malign influence of the middle man was denounced by

⁴⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 30 December 1936.

⁴⁷ See Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 291, and Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management*, pp. 146-7.

⁴⁸ Jacinto Borrás file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 9. See also a complaint from the affinity group *Viejos Acratas* from Hospitalet at the Regional Plenum of anarchist affinity groups discussed below: 'the control committees do the same as the bourgeoisie': 'Acta del Pleno Regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña, celebrado el día 6 de diciembre de 1936', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 531/1.

⁴⁹ *Ideas*, 29 December 1936.

⁵⁰ 'Acta del Pleno Regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña, celebrado el día 6 de diciembre'.

delegates, that of Pi de Llobregat declaring that ‘until such a time as there may be an across-the-board socialisation of wealth it will necessarily be very difficult to attain the end in view’.⁵¹

For the *comités superiores*, there were further potential advantages to the campaign. Its initiation enabled a return to the question of federations of industry, a reorganisation of the CNT’s structure that had been debated at the Madrid Congress of 1931.⁵² Using the argument that the CNT as it stood would be unable to implement socialisation, long-time advocates of the federations of industry, such as Joan Peiró, attempted to persuade those sectors of the CNT that had obstructed their implementation for five years that the unions should be reorganised, with the concomitant increase in bureaucracy and centralisation this implied.⁵³ The weekly publication of the FAI, *Tierra y Libertad*, dedicated double page spreads of consecutive issues to explaining the need for both socialisation and federations of industry and how they would function.⁵⁴ On 7 January, Fidel Miró, Secretary of the JJLL in Cataluña, published an article in *Ruta*, the mouthpiece of that organisation, which also stressed the revolutionary import of socialisation and the need for it to be preceded by the organisation of federations of industry.⁵⁵

Socialisation also appealed to the more radical sectors of the CNT, and in this sense, the campaign had the potential to unify the organisation. From the perspective of the *comités superiores*, an increase in union control over the economy might have mitigated the CNT’s decreasing influence at the level of state administration, while

⁵¹ Quoted in José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Volume 2*, trans. by Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham (Hastings: ChristieBooks, 2005), p. 28.

⁵² See previous chapter.

⁵³ See, for example, an article from the end of January, in which Peiró argued that ‘creating the organs and capacity for directing and administrating the new economy without the need for any tutelage from the state should take precedence’: *La Vanguardia*, 31 January 1937. See also Monjo and Vega, *Els treballadors i la Guerra civil*, p. 130.

⁵⁴ See *Tierra y Libertad*, 26 December 1936 and 9 January 1937.

⁵⁵ *Ruta*, 7 January 1937.

socialisation may also have been viewed as an opportunity to bring the union's own affiliates into line. Problematic in this regard was that the radical sectors of the libertarian organisations did not consider the socialisation campaign as a question of internal discipline. Nor did they view it in the staid and unromantic terms of Peiró, who declared that:

Socialisation and nationalisation is, in essence, the same thing. Socialisation loses part of its virtues if it is the state that carries it out. It conserves all of them... when its enactor is the anti-state, specifically, the union. For this reason it is necessary that the required reaction is produced among Confederal affiliates, and the superstructure of the industrial unions and the creation of the National Federations is proceeded to rapidly...⁵⁶

By tapping into the mood of the movement's radical sectors, the campaign risked measures being taken before the new union structures could be implemented, and an initiative which had been expected to shore up the internal cohesion of the CNT threatened to produce a quite different outcome.

Radicals in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat had already undertaken, under the auspices of the socialised supplies industry, the expropriation of two cooperatives on Christmas Day 1936, which had resulted in the resignation of the ERC and the UGT representatives from the municipal council.⁵⁷ In January, the local CNT took steps to socialise the entire economy of the town.⁵⁸ There, socialisation was to be controlled, not by national federations, but by a regional General Council of the Economy, in line with

⁵⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 January 1937.

⁵⁷ See *La Vanguardia*, 27 December 1936.

⁵⁸ This was agreed to by the CNT union of L'Hospitalet and announced in *Ideas*, 21 January 1937. Collectivisation of individual enterprises had been widespread in L'Hospitalet and their coordination in a General Council of the Economy was to be enacted 'within days'. The elected delegates of each enterprise would delegate representatives to a council of the corresponding branch of industry. The General Council of the Economy would be composed of delegates sent by each socialised industry.

proposals sketched out by José Xena.⁵⁹ The radicals read this development in a maximalist light:

We give this idea to the comrades of other localities so that, if they are not afraid of being labelled extremists, they put it into practice and facilitate the creation of the General Regional Economic Council, the basis for bringing to a happy conclusion the free commune within a Federation of the Free Peoples of Iberia.⁶⁰

For the CNT in Lleida, socialisation likewise implied that ‘everything pertaining to the life of the town should be controlled and administered by the collective as a whole’.⁶¹ Furthermore, radicals expanded on their conception of socialisation to incorporate calls for the strict observance of ‘union federalism’ and a critique of governmental collaboration.⁶²

In Aragón, a Congress took place in Caspe in February, where four hundred and fifty-six delegates representing two hundred and seventy-five collectives agreed to the creation of a Regional Federation of Agrarian Collectives in order to improve co-ordination among themselves.⁶³ While this rationalisation of the gains of the revolution was unanimously agreed to, the Congress also revealed tensions between the delegates in attendance and the *comités superiores*. When the delegate of the Regional Committee of the CNT suggested that Adolfo Arnal Gracia, a CNT member and Councillor of Agriculture in the Regional Defence Council of Aragón, act as an advisor in the drawing up of the functions of the new Federation, the delegate of Alcorisa declared that ‘there can be no place whatsoever for political meddling at this Congress’, while that of Binéfar alleged that the Council of Agriculture behaved in a counter-

⁵⁹ *Ideas*, 14 January 1937.

⁶⁰ *Ideas*, 21 January 1937.

⁶¹ *Acracia*, 26 January 1937.

⁶² *Ideas*, 14 January 1937.

⁶³ See the minutes of the Congress reproduced as an appendix in Díez Torre, *Trabajan para la eternidad*, pp. 344-78.

revolutionary manner.⁶⁴ The assembled delegates were subsequently lectured to by a representative from the National Committee:

...when it was only ourselves who were making the revolution we were able to mount an immovable defence of the ideas that we carry in the deepest recesses of our hearts; if the current revolution was ours alone, that of the CNT, the one we want, then we would consider refusing to compromise on any issue... Remember that not everywhere is like Aragón. Here, fortunately, you form an undeniable majority, but in the provinces of Cuenca, Murcia, Albacete and some others the Confederal organisation has barely any representatives; that is why it is necessary that in those places where we are the greater force... we compromise somewhat in our aspirations. All I am trying to remind you of is that it was you yourselves, in your unions, who conferred on your Regional Committees the mandate and the agreement to constitute municipal councils and, without realising it, you are wrecking your own agreements.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the uncompromising mood of the delegates to the Congress was reflected in the election of José Mavilla, the man Arnal had replaced as Councillor of Agriculture in the Regional Defence Council, as Secretary of the newly established Regional Federation of Collectives.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 358. Although in his mid-twenties at this point, Arnal Gracia was already something of a veteran in the CNT, and had served on the National Committee during the Second Republic. He left his position in the Regional Defence Council later in the year and joined the front, where he died at Alfambra in early 1938. See Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 359-60.

⁶⁶ Mavilla was a radical who had once claimed to 'prefer the sweet sound produced by the crash against the pavement of a saint's head fallen from a church to Beethoven's most harmonious sonata': quoted in José Luis Ledesma, *Los días de llamas de la revolución. Violencia y política en la retaguardia republicana de Zaragoza durante la Guerra Civil* (Zaragoza: Institución 'Fernando el Católico', 2003), p. 61.

It has been suggested that the *comités superiores* did not, in fact, envisage the war-time implantation of socialisation, but were desirous of preparing the union for a leading role in post-civil war economic reconstruction while, in the meantime, conceding ultimate control of industry to the state.⁶⁷ If this was the case, the campaign for socialisation must be understood to have ultimately undermined as much as promoted libertarian unity, as radical sectors, mobilised by this objective, would come into conflict, not only with reluctant colleagues and open opponents of the revolutionary process, but also the leadership of their own organisations.⁶⁸ While radicals saw socialisation as emanating from the base of the workers' organisations, resulting in a marginalisation of the 'political' sphere, the *comités superiores* of the CNT saw the problem as fundamentally concerned with internal union discipline.⁶⁹ Viewed from either perspective, the possibility that the trade unions could recover a protagonism denied them by the reconstituted state depended on the collaboration of the UGT. Working class unity on the basis of fidelity to the revolution thus became a priority for many radical anarchists in this period. As we shall see in the following subsection, however, this question also had the potential to destabilise the alliance of voluntarist and purist radicals brought together by a shared maximalist interpretation of socialisation.

'Let us unite!': Unity beyond 'generic anti-fascism'?

As we have seen, anti-fascist unity was the foundational principle of state reconstruction in Republican Spain. Over the summer of 1936, active participants in this process made frequent reference to the revolution. By 1937, however, it was far from clear whether

⁶⁷ See Monjo and Vega, *Els treballadors*, pp. 129-31.

⁶⁸ According to one CNT veteran, attempts to socialise the glass industry in the Catalan city of Mataró were obstructed by the 'selfishness' of workers organised in co-operatives, and 'Peiró was one of those who took their side', Joan Saña i Magriña file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 48.

⁶⁹ *Ideas* trumpeted the fact that calls for socialisation had emerged from congresses and not 'individuals, committees, councils and governments that do not respond to the general interest of anti-fascist Spain': *Ideas*, 11 March 1937.

anti-fascist unity necessarily contained any revolutionary component at all. Among radicals, for whom the question of unity was meaningful only insofar as it was linked to fidelity to the revolutionary process, it was admitted that: 'The sacred commonplace of unity has begun to make us suspicious'.⁷⁰ Juan Andrade of the POUM likewise declared in *La Batalla* on 9 December 1936 that: 'Generic anti-fascism conceals political confusion'.⁷¹ In clarifying the terms of revolutionary unity, radicals would establish the unsustainability of 'generic anti-fascism' in the absence of consensus over issues such as public order and socialisation, and attempt to win over grass-roots members of rival organisations so that these questions could be settled in the radicals' favour.

Unity between the two Spanish labour unions was trumpeted on the pages of *Ideas* in spite of the fact that the opposition of the UGT was a serious stumbling block to socialisation in Cataluña. For the editorial board, it was an article of faith that the unions were the guarantee of the proletarian character of the revolution.⁷² The time of 'politics' having passed, the question of how social life was to be organised had become a function of the economy, where the primacy of the unions would be assured through socialisation and the unity of the CNT and the UGT. CNT propagandists evidently believed that the UGT base was more radical than its leadership, and complaints in *Solidaridad Obrera* about the lack of democratic procedure at the Congress of Catalan Land Workers reflected unease that those in charge of the UGT would be able to sway its affiliates from their revolutionary aspirations.⁷³ The paper returned to the theme in April: 'The workers must prevent, for the good of the revolution and the triumph of the people in arms over the invading armies, anyone from interfering [in their affairs]... in

⁷⁰ *Acracia*, 28 January 1937.

⁷¹ Andrade, *La revolución española*, pp. 37-8.

⁷² *Ideas*, 14 January 1937.

⁷³ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 January 1937.

the manner of the comrades who currently lead, in the autonomous region, the union organisation of the UGT'.⁷⁴

This interpretation implicitly, and somewhat ingenuously, denied that the growth of the UGT in Catalunya since the beginning of the war had anything to do with its opposition to revolutionary measures. However, since the introduction of compulsory union membership in Catalunya in August 1936, the UGT had established a foothold in industries where the union had, prior to July, no serious implantation. Obligatory unionisation was considered a 'barbarity' and a 'crime' by Jacinto Borrás, who had been on the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* at the outset of the war, a sentiment that was widely shared in the Catalan libertarian movement.⁷⁵ By forcing non-revolutionary workers to join a union, the policy not only served to increase the membership of the UGT, but also provided those sectors of the workforce most opposed to the revolutionary aspirations of the CNT membership with an organisational base from which to obstruct them. Far from heralding the proletarian moment, therefore, the rise of the UGT in Catalunya was based on a reassertion of 'petit-bourgeois' privileges against the levelling aspirations of the local CNT unions. Baix Llobregat, a traditional stronghold of radical Spanish anarchism, even hosted a PSUC mayor by November 1936, in the town of Molins de Llobregat, where conflicts had centred on the forced collectivisation of small businesses and the union take-over of cellars and woods.⁷⁶ In the Catalan countryside, the UGT operated according to a similar logic, displaying a banner at the aforementioned Congress of Catalan Land Workers which read: 'Less experiments in collectivisation, more produce', the insincerity and intended effect of

⁷⁴ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6 April 1937.

⁷⁵ Jacinto Borrás file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 47. At the Plenum of Catalan land workers referred to above, the 'vast majority of the peasants spoke up against the decree on compulsory unionisation': Peirats, *The CNT*, Vol. 2, p. 27. See also 'Entrevista amb Joan "Remi"', p. 81.

⁷⁶ See Remi Cases et al., 'La col·lectivització a Molins de Llobregat,' in J. Lluís Adín et al., *Col·lectivitzacions al Baix Llobregat (1936-1939)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1989), pp. 193-4 and 215-9.

which were denounced in *Solidaridad Obrera*.⁷⁷ Catalan peasants affiliated to the CNT complained that former landlords had joined the UGT, while the outright opposition of the latter to further collectivisation in the countryside had the effect of driving a wedge between the CNT and the *Unió de Rabassaires*.⁷⁸ The Socialist union also opposed collectivisation in parts of Aragón, where the regions in which the UGT had outnumbered the anarcho-syndicalist organisation prior to the civil war had fallen to the rebels.⁷⁹

Reactions to the activity of the UGT among many Spanish anarchists were notable for their confusion and naivety. In a speech of March 1937, José Alberola, the radical former member of the Regional Defence Council of Aragón, wondered why the UGT should oppose collectivisation, when this form of organisation corresponded to the ‘gradualism’ of the Socialists, in contrast to the conceptions of the anarchists, for whom the collectives were a compromise.⁸⁰ In an article regarding the affiliation to the UGT in Lleida of the Gremis i Entitats de Petits Comerciants i Industrials (Associations and Bodies of Small Traders and Industrialists - GEPCI), *Acracia* declared that: ‘The workers of the UGT must demand the immediate expulsion of that organisation which... wants to hold back the movement initiated on 19 July’.⁸¹ *Solidaridad Obrera* likewise commented on its front page that ‘it would be timely if these “representatives of the proletariat” that speak so much of the interests of the petite-bourgeoisie, would think a little more about the interests of the workers’.⁸² Such a ‘timely’ change of course, however, would have been improbable given that, as an article in *Mujeres Libres* put it, ‘the petite-bourgeoisie, forced to join a union... chose the lesser evil’

⁷⁷ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 January 1937.

⁷⁸ See Peirats, *The CNT*, Vol. 2, p. 27.

⁷⁹ See Julián Casanova, ‘Socialismo y Colectividades en Aragón’, in *Socialismo y Guerra Civil*, coord. by Santos Juliá (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 1987), pp. 283-93. The reasons for this opposition are suggested to be the influence of the PCE in the Aragonese UGT, the persistence of pre-war rivalry and resentment of CNT activity in the collectives.

⁸⁰ Alberola, *Interpretación anarquista*, pp. 10-1.

⁸¹ *Acracia*, 5 April 1937. The GEPCI was a pressure group formed primarily by small businesspeople.

⁸² *Solidaridad Obrera*, 8 April 1937.

between the revolutionary CNT and ‘reformist’ UGT, and that the PSUC controlled the Catalan UGT to such an extent that the latter had become estranged from its national leadership.⁸³ An indication that as much was understood by the mid-level union delegates of the CNT is given by the minutes of a plenum of Barcelona unions held on 23 January 1937. There it was widely accepted that an ideological gulf existed between the CNT and the UGT and that only radical measures, ranging from mass assemblies of workers to the expulsion of politicians from the Socialist union, could bring about an understanding between the organisations. The existing liaison committee between the CNT and the UGT was strongly criticised, and the health workers’ delegate even contemplated the possibility of an armed showdown between the unions on the streets.⁸⁴

Even in areas where Communist influence within the UGT was not so marked, the prospects for joint union initiatives were not great. On 12 February, after the fall of Málaga, the UGT National Executive issued a manifesto stating that ‘everything done in the rearguard to establish social methods and administration regarding the future of our economy, must today be completely suspended’.⁸⁵ By contrast, military disaster produced a radicalising effect among anarchists. For Lucía Sánchez Saornil, one of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*, the fall of Málaga represented the failure of bourgeois democracy on a domestic and global level: ‘And yet still they talk in Spain of democracy, and in its name they attempt to betray and subjugate us. No; the image of Málaga sacrificed digs into our hearts with nails of fire. Democracy, no; social

⁸³ *Mujeres Libres*, February 1937. Walter Schevenels, General Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), to which the UGT belonged, remarked in a report to the IFTU that the Catalan section of the UGT is ‘practically identical with’ the PSUC, ‘Summarised report on the mission to Spain of the 21 to 29 January 1937’, Archives of the Trade Union Congress, University of Warwick, 292/946/15b/7. See also Helen Graham, *Socialism and War. The Spanish Socialist Party in Power and Crisis, 1936-1939* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991), pp. 210-1, and Pere Gabriel, *Historia de la UGT, Vol. 4. Un sindicalismo de guerra, 1936-1939* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2011), pp. 196-7.

⁸⁴ See Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, pp. 202-6.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Gabriel, *Historia de la UGT*, p. 63.

revolution!’.⁸⁶ An editorial in *Ideas* was similarly uncompromising: ‘Málaga is the victim of the policy of depriving the non-political anti-fascist fronts of the elements necessary for their defence. We must react in time; we must strengthen the revolutionary spirit that all political parties, without exception, deaden and divert.’⁸⁷ In Asturias, where the experience of October 1934 had made cooperation between Socialists and anarchists easier to achieve, conflict arose over the re-introduction of small businesses in Gijón, the freedom of which both Socialists and Communists wished to protect.⁸⁸ Opposition to the restoration of elements of capitalism led to the jailing of some two dozen members of the CNT supplies union. The CNT members of the Council of Asturias had them released almost immediately after visiting the home of the Civil Governor, where the anarchist baker and union activist, Ramón Álvarez Palomo, alleged that:

You want to return to the enemy, whether he is fascist or not... what you call his interests, but we do not want to give the working class the idea that they are fighting for the bourgeoisie... for now all aspirations have to be kept intact.⁸⁹

The contention that the war-time sacrifices demanded of the working class could only be guaranteed by acknowledging the validity of revolutionary aspirations was made frequently at this time. In an editorial linking the war to the question of socialisation, *Tierra y Libertad* declared that: ‘A popular army can only be victorious if it fights for a revolutionary ideal, which is the expression of the hopes of the proletarian masses to be free from capitalist exploitation.’⁹⁰ Attempts to unify the workers’ organisations on this basis were fraught with difficulty, however.

⁸⁶ Lucía Sánchez Saornil, *Horas de Revolución* (Barcelona: Publicaciones Mujeres Libres, n.d. [1937?]), p. 37.

⁸⁷ *Ideas*, 11 February 1937.

⁸⁸ Gabriel, *Historia de la UGT*, p. 165.

⁸⁹ Ramón Álvarez Palomo file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, (AHCB), p. 41.

⁹⁰ *Tierra y Libertad*, 27 February 1937.

This was made explicit in the case of the youth organisations when initial attempts to form an Alianza Juvenil Antifascista (Anti-fascist Youth Alliance - AJA) stalled over the question of whether the POUM's youth wing, the Juventud Comunista Ibérica (Iberian Communist Youth – JCI), could be included.⁹¹ Fiercely opposed to this, the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (Unified Socialist Youth – JSU) was nevertheless insistent on admitting Catholic youth organisations into an anti-fascist umbrella organisation.⁹² This was unacceptable to the libertarian youth, and an alternative unity platform of explicitly revolutionary anti-fascism was thus practically foisted upon the FIJL and JCI.⁹³ This gained momentum in the early part of 1937 and threatened to have serious implications, not least because it acted as a pole of attraction to a disaffected left wing of the JSU.⁹⁴ This led to the rare if not quite unprecedented phenomenon of anarchists appealing to the Socialist youth on the basis of the shared commitment which both libertarians and 'authentic' Marxists had to revolution, a commitment rejected by the JSU leadership. The speech of a leading member of the JSU, Santiago Carrillo, was criticised in *Solidaridad Obrera* as 'reformist hot air'. The article went on to address the organisation's members:

If the JSU are not socialists, communists or Marxists, what are they? The only thing to be seen with clarity in all of this is the desire to return... to the good times of the 'Republic of workers of all classes'. And this, socialist comrades, cannot be tolerated, must not be tolerated.⁹⁵

Relations between the FIJL and the JCI during the civil war were, on the other hand, generally cordial. Alfredo Martínez, a senior figure within the JJLL and assistant

⁹¹ The JCI was to some degree more radical than its parent organisation, and had opposed the entry of the POUM into the Generalitat. See the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 63. For an example of how the AJA failed to function at ground level see Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 71-2.

⁹² Helen Graham, 'The Socialist Youth in the JSU: the experience of organisational unity, 1936-8' in *Spain in Conflict 1931-1939, Democracy and Its Enemies*, ed. by Martin Blinkhorn (London: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 86.

⁹³ See 'Las JJLL toman una firme decisión', FIJL F-DH 3 (2), Pavelló de la República (PDLR).

⁹⁴ See Graham, 'The Socialist Youth', pp. 92-9.

⁹⁵ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 January 1937.

to the organisation's secretary, Fidel Miró, spoke at a POUM rally in December, while even anarchist purists such as Diego Camacho of the *Los Quijotes del Ideal* affinity group respected the integrity of individual POUM militants.⁹⁶ Martínez and Miró were considered suspect by the purist 'redskins' within the JJLL for their apparent 'reformism' and adhesion to the 'circumstantialist' line of the parent organisations.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the solidarity displayed with the POUM as the campaign against the dissident communists gained momentum, combined with a refusal to relegate the revolution to the requirements of war, suggest that this characterisation lacks nuance. As early as November 1936, *Ruta*, then under Miró's editorship, declared that 'if that unity serves only to defend the democracy in ruins or to bolster the Republic, it does not interest us in the least'.⁹⁸ In February 1937, a National Plenum of the FIJL made the unity of anti-fascist youth conditional upon support for the revolution then underway. The JSU's bluff had been called, and the organisation refused to participate in the mass rally held by the JCI and JJLL that took place on 14 February in Barcelona on the initiative of the latter organisation. On 19 February, a pact establishing the tenets of the Frente de la Juventud Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Youth Front – FJR) in Cataluña was signed by representatives of the JJLL, the JCI, the youth sections of *Mujeres Libres* and the Partido Sindicalista, along with various student organisations.

The first article of the pact recognised the revolution then underway in Spain and declared the mission of the FJR to be that of making both revolution and war. The pact also called for greater unity between the unions, the proportional representation of revolutionary forces in positions of leadership, a purge of the bureaucracy, and an army

⁹⁶ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 72. On improved relations between members of the CNT and the POUM see also Adolfo Bueso, *Recuerdos de un cenetista II. De la Segunda República al final de la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), p. 185. The appearance of Martínez at the POUM rally is noted in the account published in the weekly organ of the JCI, *Juventud Comunista*, 17 December 1936.

⁹⁷ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 71. For a similar characterisation of Miró, see Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 309. Peirats also dismissed the Catalan Regional Committee of the JJLL, to which both Miró and Martínez belonged, as 'collaborationist' prior to May 1937, in José Peirats, *Figuras del movimiento libertario español* (Barcelona: Ediciones Picazo, 1977), p. 289.

⁹⁸ *Ruta*, 7 November 1936.

that faithfully reflected the ‘revolutionary aspirations of the combatants’. It also affirmed its support for the socialisation of industry and land, while allowing for smallholders who did not employ labour to remain outside of collectives.⁹⁹ While it stopped some way short of advocating a withdrawal of revolutionaries from government, the FJR thus aligned itself with those sectors of the Spanish revolutionary movement that saw the greater co-operation, influence and initiative of the unions as a potentially key factor in rolling back the advancing counter-revolution. As such, the bases of the FJR were a challenge to the JSU and, by extension, to anti-fascist unity as it was then constituted in the governing bodies of Republican Spain. By 1 March, the Catalan JJLL were reporting to the Peninsular Committee of the FIJL that the FJR had 40,000 members, and on 18 March it was reported that the founding of the FJR in the Levante region was imminent.¹⁰⁰

In the manifesto that accompanied the pact emphasis was placed on the importance of prioritising action over doctrinal disputes.¹⁰¹ This was undoubtedly resented by those purist anarchists who believed that the JJLL should focus on propagandistic and educational work, leaving aside the ‘politics’ of alliances. In *Ideas*, Amador Franco, pseudonym of Diego Franco Cazorla, a leading member of the Catalan JJLL, the Federación Estudiantil de Conciencias Libres (Student Federation of Free Thinkers - FECL) and of the *Irreducibles* affinity group alongside José Peirats, sounded a note of scepticism:

I have always considered the tendency towards alliances and the obligation to ‘fraternise’... a fatalist imposition... I consider unity, as far as the youth is concerned, to be something that does not require pacts or signatures... The Libertarian Youth is the hope for our idea and its

⁹⁹ See ‘Bases de la Frente de la Juventud Revolucionaria’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 514/8.

¹⁰⁰ See, respectively, ‘Informe de las JJLL al Comité Peninsular de la FIJL’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 514/8, and *Juventud Comunista*, 18 March 1937.

¹⁰¹ ‘Bases de la Frente de la Juventud Revolucionaria’.

practice if we know how to keep ourselves outside of useless pacts and continue our empowering labour.¹⁰²

In April 1937 a Regional Congress of the Catalan JJLL representing over 35,000 affiliates at the front and in the rear revealed a strong purist current urging that the organisation should proceed ‘as before 19 July’, focusing on propaganda and education.¹⁰³ Fidel Miró had to survive a vote of confidence as Regional Secretary while objections were raised with regard to participation in the FJR. In spite of such misgivings, the position of the Regional Committee was ratified. Even the FECL, a student body affiliated to the FIJL with strong purist associations (the aforementioned Amador Franco, along with Vicente Rodríguez García of the *Acracia* editorial board and the anti-collaborationist Ada Martí were all prominent members) was a signatory of the initial pact.

Meanwhile, radicals in the Catalan CNT greeted the FJR with enthusiasm even as its press also provided a platform for its discontents: ‘With an understanding of the moment that the “elders” have not displayed’, declared *Ideas* in a double-page spread, ‘the Revolutionary Youth has come together to signal what path to take’.¹⁰⁴ A joint rally of the Catalan FAI and the JJLL was held in Barcelona in April, at which regular contributors to *Ideas*, Severino Campos and José Xena shared a platform with Juan Santana Calero and Fidel Miró of the JJLL. The speeches denounced the counter-revolution and openly identified the PSUC with it.¹⁰⁵ Unsurprisingly, the POUM, which had taken up more radical positions following its exclusion from the Generalitat and practical illegalisation in Madrid, also looked on with interest at the development of events in the youth wings.¹⁰⁶ In April Juan Andrade advocated the formation of a

¹⁰² *Ideas*, 15 February 1937.

¹⁰³ ‘Congreso Regional de las JJLL celebrado el día 17 de abril de 1937’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 239/03.

¹⁰⁴ *Ideas*, 15 February 1937.

¹⁰⁵ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1937.

¹⁰⁶ On the radicalisation of the POUM in this period, see Reiner Tosstorff, *El POUM en la revolució Espanyola* (Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2009), p. 97.

Workers' Revolutionary Front that would 'stop the counter-revolution in its tracks and pose the problem of power by means of its own organs: committees of workers, peasants and combatants'.¹⁰⁷ The possibility that libertarians could take the lead in establishing such a revolutionary front was the only hope for a party that lacked the numeric power to seize the initiative itself, and which had proved incapable of developing a means of influencing either the top or bottom levels of the CNT membership during the civil war.¹⁰⁸ The Catalan Regional Committee of the CNT reported in February that:

The POUM has been wooing our organisation since its departure from the government, to the extent that it has proposed the entrance of whole sections into our organisation, something that we have not allowed on the understanding that anyone who wishes may come individually, but not as a collective.¹⁰⁹

In spite of the reluctance of the *comités superiores* to associate with the POUM, the FIJL and the JCI were able to acknowledge a common, revolutionary, ground that was not shared by the Communist Party and its affiliate organisations. This was partly because, as Wilebaldo Solano, a leader of the JCI, would recall, they 'were not councillors in the Generalitat... and they had lesser responsibilities'.¹¹⁰ Moreover, to the street-based activists of the JCI and the JJLL, the rationale of the Comintern position, adopted by the JSU, which was based on high politics and international diplomacy, seemed remote and irrelevant.¹¹¹ In this sense, by adopting such an openly anti-revolutionary position the JSU overplayed its hand, not only because it was unacceptable to the large anarchist youth organisation, but also because it alienated

¹⁰⁷ Andrade, *La revolución española*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ This failure to find a means by which the POUM could effectively communicate with the CNT base was lamented by Ignacio Iglesias, a student and POUM militant in Sama de Langreo, Asturias. See the Ignacio Iglesias file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 67-8.

¹⁰⁹ 'Pleno Regional de locales y comarcales celebrado el día 4 de febrero de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 531/1.

¹¹⁰ Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 85.

¹¹¹ On the relative ignorance of the JJLL in regard to such matters, see Paz, *Viaje al Pasado*, especially p. 123.

sections of its own membership, thereby contributing to the crisis of anti-fascist unity of spring 1937. The FIJL denounced the leadership of the JSU that had held up to ‘public ridicule’ the ‘social theories of Marx and Lenin’ and appealed directly to the base, the ‘truly Marxist and therefore revolutionary’ young Socialists who had suffered the *bienio negro* and fought in Asturias: ‘you cannot accept this shameful affront to your doctrines and organisation... Ignore the siren calls of the defenders of bourgeois democracy, the seed of brutal fascism!’.¹¹² The flysheet *Esfuerzo*, affiliated to the FIJL under the stewardship of Juan Santana Calero, who had arrived in Barcelona at the time of the fall of his native Málaga, made plain this appeal:

Young socialists! Those of you who are Marxists and therefore revolutionaries! React in time against the confusionist and counterrevolutionary policy of your leaders. Consider your responsibility before the international proletariat and before History. Young socialists! We want to march with you on the path of victory. For the triumph of the war and the revolution: LET US UNITE!¹¹³

The acknowledgement that Marxists could also be true revolutionaries represented a shift in rhetorical emphasis for radical anarchism, and an adaptation to the political realities of the moment. It also informed the thinking of radicals in the Catalan CNT who felt that an alliance of the trade unions could be effected from the bottom up.

Regardless of the pitfalls of this assumption, discussed above, negotiations between the two unions were in fact being carried out by their respective leaderships without the involvement of their wider memberships. The implications of this were made clear in an ‘urgent circular’ to the Peninsular Committee of the FIJL, signed by

¹¹² *Boletín de Información de la CNT-FAI*, 22 April 1937.

¹¹³ *Esfuerzo*. *Periódico mural de las Juventudes Libertarias de Cataluña*, third week of April, 1937. A similar appeal appeared in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 April 1937. *Esfuerzo* was, until the summer of 1937, printed in the form of a poster and plastered on the walls of Barcelona. This novel medium would be resuscitated by anarchists in the concentration camps of southern France at the beginning of their exile. See Chris Ealham, ‘Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalists in Toulouse: The Red-and-Black Counter-City in Exile’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 91. 1-2 (2014), 95-114 (p. 101).

Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez for the National Committee of the CNT on 8 March. Here it was implausibly stated that the reason for a delay in calling a National Plenum of the regional organisations was that there had not been any ‘fundamental problem to submit to discussion’, the chief political problem facing the CNT being that of unity with the UGT. In that regard, the circular informed affiliates that a pact was imminent, as the Executive of the UGT had finally seen sense, but that ‘it is imperative that nothing occur that could cloud this favourable situation... It is necessary that you send communiques and orient the organisation, in the sense that any clash or violence with the unions or affiliates of the UGT be avoided’.¹¹⁴ Viewed by radical *cenetistas* as a necessary step toward safeguarding the revolution, the pact between the unions was seen by the National Committee of the CNT as something to be engineered behind closed doors and then presented to a Plenum as a *fait accompli*, used in the meantime as a device for imposing internal discipline. ‘Let no-one forget’, it continued, ‘that there could well be elements, even in our midst, interested in preventing the aspiration of all: THE REVOLUTIONARY ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE TWO UNIONS ... let no-one play the game of the mean-spirited and irresponsible’.¹¹⁵ If the revolution could indeed be safeguarded by such high-political and bureaucratic practices, these were not the traditional methods of the CNT, whose members were increasingly entertaining more ‘irresponsible’ options. That the libertarian youth would be at the forefront of this process was indicated at a rally of the JJLL the following month, when Miró affirmed that ‘the anarchists would return to the barricades of 19 July rather than give up the workers’ revolution’.¹¹⁶

Towards a Second July

¹¹⁴ ‘Circular urgente del Comité Nacional de la CNT al Comité Peninsular de la FIJL’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 514/5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1937.

The possibility of a ‘return to the barricades’ gained currency in the spring of 1937 as a consequence of reflections on the lost opportunity and errors of the previous July, which even Abad de Santillán acknowledged had ‘revived’ the state apparatus.¹¹⁷ Such reflections became commonplace in the revolutionary movement in this period. Santana Calero, in a pamphlet intended as a rallying cry to the libertarian youth, considered it ‘a duty to demonstrate the errors made since July’, principally the acceptance of ‘bourgeois legality’.¹¹⁸ Balius, in an article cited by Nin in *La Batalla*, affirmed that: ‘We are the guilty ones; with the revolution in our hands we allowed the grandeur of the moment to frighten us.’¹¹⁹ Miró, in the speech cited above, likewise lamented that: ‘On 19 July we lacked sufficient vision to wipe out the vestiges of the failed political system’.¹²⁰ Perhaps the boldest of such declarations was made by Lucía Sánchez Saornil, who also emphasised the need to turn the tide of the counter-revolution through action:

... by keeping the government, the workers respected its old bourgeois structure and the weight of the bureaucratic apparatus that had hitherto surrounded it. They did not notice that they were leaving the greatest enemy of the revolution standing... The state began the strangulation of the revolution. Nevertheless, all is not lost if the unions know how to act with determination... and [if they] defend their right to the management of the economy we will be able to save ourselves.¹²¹

A radical critique was thus crystallising around a common identification of a missed revolutionary opportunity and a belief in the continuing possibility of rectifying this through insurrectionary activity. That this might impact on a war effort to which anarchists were being enjoined to sacrifice their principles was evidently not lost on Sánchez Saornil, who defiantly addressed such concerns in her article: ‘And to those

¹¹⁷ ‘Acta del Pleno Regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña, celebrado el día 6 de diciembre’.

¹¹⁸ Santana Calero, *Afirmación en la marcha*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ *La Noche*, 2 March 1937.

¹²⁰ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 April 1937.

¹²¹ *Mujeres Libres*, April 1937.

who shout at us that the war must come before everything, we reply: For the war everything, except liberty. Viva la Revolución!'.¹²²

Sánchez Saornil was one of several contributors to the *Mujeres Libres* publication pushing a radical line, and offering an immanent critique of the shortcomings of the libertarian movement. Less well-known writers also offered lucid perspectives on the consequences of a stalled revolution, ranging from the sexism of comrades to the need for complete socialisation. One anonymous contributor lamented that:

The notion of an army of iron, of a strong nation, of rigidity, of inflexibility, of a firm hand, all this has been internalised. It has burrowed deep, and our revolution has begun to stagnate, to stiffen, to turn to stone... The institutions born spontaneously of the people are being hacked at and chopped down by the cutting blade of discipline. Men that we saw scattered by the strong winds of 19 July now huddle behind that word, ready to stand up and grab the reins, to take up the whip... Discipline is all very well, but take care. Discipline and blind obedience are also the preconditions of slavery.¹²³

Women were at the forefront of the ongoing 'war of bread' in Barcelona, during which the Councillor of Supplies in the Generalitat, Joan Comorera, and the supplies committees of the CNT blamed each other for a situation in which queues of working class women waited for bread that was not always available, while those who could afford it resorted to the black market.¹²⁴ While its publication called for socialisation to end 'speculation with the hunger of the people', the *Mujeres Libres* grouping also acknowledged its support for the more immediately effective direct action that women

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ *Mujeres Libres*, February 1937.

¹²⁴ Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, pp. 23-6.

had undertaken in Barcelona, invading markets and stalls to ‘take justice into their own hands’.¹²⁵

While the distance of Barcelona from the front-lines and the depth of anarchist implantation in the city made it the likeliest setting for a ‘second July’, there were also signs of discontent and restlessness further afield. The FAI affiliates behind the Valencia-based review *Nosotros* reported in March that there were more than two hundred anarchist prisoners in the city, including ninety-two members of the Iron Column, and affirmed that: ‘in this Republic of workers ruled by the bourgeoisie, there is only conservatism and a desire to choke the revolution underway in Spain... comrades, we will not cease to defend freedom and attack everything suggestive of dictatorship, whether white, brown or red’.¹²⁶ On the Andalusian front-line, Alfonso Nieves Núñez distributed a letter at the end of April from the imprisoned anarchist commander Francisco Maroto denouncing the lack of solidarity he had received from the *comités superiores*. The arrest of Maroto had followed a confrontation with Gabriel Morón, the Civil Governor of Almería, and caused consternation among libertarians throughout Republican Spain.¹²⁷ Nieves Núñez, on behalf of the affinity group *Los Intransigentes*, added the following postscript: ‘A new fascism stabs us in the back. We must react against it. A single clamour: FREEDOM FOR MAROTO, FREEDOM FOR ALL REVOLUTIONARY PRISONERS. If we need to begin again to achieve this, as on 19 July, LET US BEGIN!’.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1937. These events are discussed in detail in Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, pp. 449-57.

¹²⁶ *Nosotros*, 23 March 1937.

¹²⁷ The unlikely case concocted against Maroto was accompanied by a campaign on the part of the Communists demanding that he be given the death penalty, which he duly was, although the sentence was annulled in 1938. He was murdered by the Francoists following the fall of the Republic. On the Maroto case see Amorós, *Maroto*, pp. 125-66, and a contrasting account in Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, *Almería, 1936-1937*, pp. 159-69.

¹²⁸ See ‘Comité Nacional Circular Nº 7’, 3 May 1937, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 46 B.

In March a new grouping emerged which was intended to provide cohesion to this upsurge of revolutionary discontent. The *Agrupación Amigos de Durruti* (the Friends of Durruti Grouping – AAD) was formed in Barcelona, animated chiefly by journalists around the weekly *Ideas* and former members of the Gelsa section of the Durruti Column, and its early meetings were well attended. The AAD issued some 5000 membership cards and gained pockets of support outside Cataluña, such as in Belver de Cinca and Pina de Ebro in Aragón.¹²⁹ The membership cards read: ‘We are enemies of the bureaucracy, privileges and military rank. We are revolutionary fighters. We aim at the immediate realisation of the social projects that the CNT-FAI defended in the glorious years of Confederal Cataluña.’¹³⁰ The POUM was encouraged by this development. News of the AAD’s formation and its initial appeal were published in *La Batalla*.¹³¹ Juan Andrade was also favourably impressed: ‘The AAD has formulated its programme in posters pasted on all the streets of Barcelona... There are two points... that are also fundamental for us: All Power to the working class and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants’.¹³² However, the apparent similarity of AAD and POUM aims at this juncture does not imply that the former was inspired by the latter, and the POUM was not mentioned at the April rally of the AAD in Barcelona.¹³³

A central plank of the AAD programme was the formation of a revolutionary Junta, composed of ‘workers of the city and country and combatants’, which would replace the government of the Republic. This programme appeared on posters plastered on walls around Barcelona.¹³⁴ Apart from the proposal of a revolutionary Junta, the programme reflected libertarian concerns regarding public order and militarisation,

¹²⁹ See Casanova, *Sociedad Aragonesa*, p. 245.

¹³⁰ Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 211.

¹³¹ Nin, *La revolución española*, pp. 302-4.

¹³² Andrade, *La revolución española*, p. 248.

¹³³ Rosalio Negrete and Hugo Oehler, ‘Negrete and Oehler report back from Barcelona’, *Revolutionary History*, 1. 2 (1988), <<http://www.revolutionaryhistory.co.uk/index.php/155-articles/articles-of-rh0102/4243-negrete-and-oehler-report-from-barcelona>> [accessed 26 January 2016].

¹³⁴ Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, pp. 220-1.

while advocating socialisation of the economy and union control of supplies.¹³⁵ It offered a voluntarist approach to concerns that, as this chapter has attempted to show, were widely held in Confederal ranks. It is likely that the proposal of a Junta in the programme represented a reformulation of the Junta de Defensa Nacional, which had been favourably viewed by much of the CNT since its discussion at a national plenum in September 1936.¹³⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera* had strongly supported the formation of a National Defence Council when Jaime Balius, chief theoretician of the AAD, was a member of its editorial board.

The American Marxist observers Hugo Oehler and Russell Blackwell, who attended rallies held by the new formation, described the AAD as a ‘left reaction’ to the collaboration of the CNT in government. Their report, while coloured by ideological bias, nevertheless displayed an understanding of the essential divide within oppositional anarchism between purists and voluntarists. They contrasted the approach of the AAD to that of an anarchist affinity group (probably *Los Quijotes del Ideal*, discussed in the previous chapter): ‘Whereas the small Anarchist Group of the Ideal that has distributed some leaflets has swung back to “pure” Anarchism, the Friends of Durruti are of a far higher and more serious type.’¹³⁷ In fact, the enthusiasm with which Marxists greeted the AAD may have contributed to limiting the attraction of the grouping within the CNT and the FAI, as purist anarchists were troubled by the seemingly ‘Bolshevik’ tone of the group’s pronouncements.¹³⁸ Peirats averred that ‘the reason that the AAD had little influence could be due to the slight importance of its membership, the intervention

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ See previous chapter.

¹³⁷ Oehler and Blackwell (the latter using the name Rosalio Negrete) wrote these reports for the very small Revolutionary Workers’ League in the United States, an essentially Trotskyist organisation that nevertheless opposed the ‘entryist’ policy then advocated by Trotsky.

¹³⁸ See the recollections of a member of the *Los Quijotes del Ideal* affinity group, Diego Camacho: Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 120-1.

of the POUM in its centre and the Marxist flavour of certain of its slogans'.¹³⁹ While this statement is inaccurate as regards the intervention of the POUM and overzealous in its dismissal of the grouping's importance, it is illustrative of the purist reservations that would hamstring the AAD's attempts to serve as a pole of regroupment within the libertarian movement.

In spite of its evident sensitivity to radical demands, therefore, the fulcrum for a new insurrectionary convergence among libertarians in Barcelona would not be provided by the programme of the AAD, but would emerge instead from within the more familiar settings of the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups. An insight into the nature of the perspectives advanced in the Barcelona FAI at this time is given by the second session of a Plenum of affinity groups of 12 April 1937, at which delegates of the defence committees and the JJLL were in attendance.¹⁴⁰ At this Plenum, a majority of delegates favoured the withdrawal of anarchists from the Generalitat, and in what appears to have been a tense atmosphere, alternative executive bodies were proposed. The representative of the Local Federation of the JJLL suggested that, if further collaboration proved impossible, the anarchists constitute a revolutionary Convention.¹⁴¹ The affinity group *Constancia* proposed that the withdrawal of the CNT and the FAI from government be accompanied by the nomination of a Central Committee on the part of the defence committees.¹⁴² The anarchist defence group from the Barcelona suburb of Gràcia known as *Grupo 12* advanced a programmatic proposal similar in aims and tone to that of the AAD, involving withdrawal from government, complete socialisation and the creation of a revolutionary anti-fascist committee to co-

¹³⁹ José Peirats, *Los anarquistas en la crisis política española* (Editorial Alfa: Buenos Aires, 1964), p. 249.

¹⁴⁰ The proceedings are presented and analysed in minute detail in Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 196-221.

¹⁴¹ *Idem.*, pp. 200-1.

¹⁴² *Idem.*, p. 201.

ordinate the armed struggle against fascism.¹⁴³ The Plenum, which Jacinto Toryho, then editor of *Solidaridad Obrera*, declared to be unauthorised when it became clear that the collaborationist positions had been defeated, is suggestive of a coalescence of voluntarist positions among members of the JJLL, the defence committees and the anarchist affinity groups of Barcelona.

The centrality of the defence committees to the radical positions advanced at this Plenum may also provide a clue as to the content of the AAD programme. According to Eduardo Pons Prades, then a young CNT member in the socialised carpentry industry, the defence committees and the AAD 'were almost one and the same'.¹⁴⁴ Certainly, the presence of at least two members of the AAD at this plenum, Santana Calero and Pablo Ruiz, demonstrates that there was some overlap between the *Agrupación* and the perspectives advanced there. However, while the agreements taken at the Plenum, which were not published in *Solidaridad Obrera* or *Tierra y Libertad*, were to an extent reflected in the programme of the AAD, of greater significance was the position paper that resulted as a direct consequence of these discussions, which was presented on 24 April in the name of the Local Federation of the FAI, the defence committees and the JJLL. This paper would posit a practical basis for action which, because it emerged from within the heart of the libertarian movement with no hint of external Marxist influence, represented a voluntarism that was palatable to purist anarchists, and was indicative of the continuing capacity of anti-statist anarchism to give an organisational expression to radical discontent.

By some distance the most radical programmatic statement to have emerged from oppositional anarchism up to that point, the paper was nevertheless the logical outgrowth of an oppositional critique that had centred on the error of state collaboration

¹⁴³ *Idem.*, pp. 208-9.

¹⁴⁴ Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 75.

and a revolutionary practice at loggerheads with the process of state reconstitution. It proposed the withdrawal of anarchists from official posts and a return to the ‘revolutionary and anti-state terrain’, comprehensive socialisation and, most intriguingly, the ‘constitution of a local revolutionary committee for the coordination of the armed struggle against fascism and the counterrevolution, in all its forms’.¹⁴⁵ Although we are unaware of whether this local revolutionary committee was ever constituted, at the very least we might posit that this paper conferred a mandate on those who would be central to the revolutionary mobilisation of May 1937. We might even speculate that the delay between the Plenum and the publication of the paper may be explained by further conversations among Barcelona anarchists as to the viability and composition of such a committee. The novelty of this local revolutionary committee resides in its emerging constitutionally from a regular Plenum and yet having a mission that bypassed the authority of the *comités superiores*. This was an innovation of mid-level delegates and activists hamstrung by the libertarian hierarchy that seemingly squared the circle of struggling against the state and on behalf of the revolution while remaining part of an organisation with a foot in both camps. It is therefore worth paying attention to those who authored the paper.

At the plenum, the composition of the paper had been entrusted to a working group composed of Iglesias, Caudet of the affinity group *Constancia*, and the delegates of the affinity groups *Móvil*, *Luz y Cultura* and *Cultura y Acción*. If the Iglesias referred to here was Abelardo Iglesias, of the A affinity group, strongly associated with the defence of state collaboration, it would appear improbable that he had much to do with the confection of the position paper.¹⁴⁶ Little is known about the affinity group *Móvil* although its likely radicalism is attested to by its later opposition to the legalisation of

¹⁴⁵ Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, pp. 489-91.

¹⁴⁶ A common name, the Iglesias delegated to the working group charged with composing the position paper could also feasibly refer to another Iglesias who would urge anarchist insurrection as late as October 1937 (discussed in Chapter Five).

the FAI.¹⁴⁷ The closeness of the *Constancia* group to the defence committees is implied by the nature of its proposal to the Plenum, discussed above.¹⁴⁸ Of the members of *Luz y Cultura* we know that one, Joaquina Dorado Pita, was also a member of the defence committee of the city centre and of the JJLL in the suburb of El Poble-sec, and would participate in the fighting in May.¹⁴⁹ She was also secretary to Manuel Hernández in the socialised carpentry industry of Barcelona, replacing him when he departed for the front. Eduardo Pons Prades, a worker in the same industry, recalled that Hernández was a member of the AAD.¹⁵⁰ Baldomero Mesas, another member of *Luz y Cultura*, was also a member of the JJLL.¹⁵¹ A picture is thus emerging of a working group, brought together by shared membership of the FAI, with close links to the JJLL, the defence committees and the AAD, three of the most important components of the mobilisation in May. It is to the most notable figure in the affinity group *Cultura y Acción*, Julián Merino, that we will now turn.

Merino was a veteran member of the FAI and an important union organiser in the CNT who had fought against *treintismo* and been imprisoned both before and during the Republic in the years prior to the civil war. He was probably a mid-level figure within the defence committees prior to July 1936, which would explain García Oliver's annoyance at his having jointly led a raiding party onto boats in search of weapons on the eve of the military revolt.¹⁵² He had also been present as a delegate of a militia column at the Plenum in Bujaraloz that had agreed to the formation of the Regional

¹⁴⁷ This is discussed in Chapter Five. The names of three members of the *Móvil* group have been recovered from membership cards: Antonio Alex, a textile worker based in Gràcia, José Casanovas and Pascual Prades: CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1793/1.

¹⁴⁸ The full name of the affinity group was *Constancia y Desinterés*, the delegate of which was Francisco Caudet. See FAI membership card: CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1793/1.

¹⁴⁹ See Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 191, and Vega, *Pioneras revolucionarias*, p. 226.

¹⁵⁰ Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 76. Dorado Pita would also be the lifelong partner of Liberto Sarrau, a member of the *Los Quijotes del Ideal* affinity group.

¹⁵¹ See FAI membership card: CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1793/1, and 'Mesas, Baldomero' <<http://militants-anarchistes.info/spip.php?article10656>> [accessed 28 January 2016].

¹⁵² See previous chapter.

Defence Council of Aragón.¹⁵³ Now secretary of the Local Federation of affinity groups, his presence in the meetings of the *comités superiores* had disrupted their normal functioning and brought an insistent, radical voice to proceedings. In February he had defended the refusal of the Gelsa section to militarise and was roundly abused, called an ‘oddball... undermining the general sentiment of the JJLL and the FAI’.¹⁵⁴ He had also made the link, in March, between the question of socialisation, supplies and public order, relating how a warehouse full of potatoes had recently been discovered, the majority now rotten, which were only successfully made available to ‘the women of the town’ under the protection of the *Patrullas de Control* in an armed standoff with Assault Guards.¹⁵⁵ Merino’s awareness of this event further underlines his probable connection to the committees of defence and supply.¹⁵⁶

Merino’s involvement in the writing of the position paper may explain why the initial suggestion of the defence group *Grupo 12* to constitute a ‘revolutionary anti-fascist committee to co-ordinate the armed struggle against fascism’ became radicalised to also incorporate the struggle against the counter-revolution in the rear. At the January plenum of unions in Barcelona referred to above, the delegate for the Maritime Transport Workers’ Union, almost certainly Merino, had lamented that the CNT was only able to conceive of the ‘anti-fascist front’, ignoring the ‘anti-Confederal front’ that

¹⁵³ See Joaquín Ascaso, *Memorias (1936 – 1938) hacia un nuevo Aragón* (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2006), p. 24. His presence at the front at this time suggests that his return to the rear may have been due to his opposition to militarisation.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Reunión celebrada el día 12 de febrero de 1937 a las diez de la noche estando presentes el compañero Manzano [sic], de la columna Durruti, C.R de la FAI, Federación Local, JJLL y Comité Regional de Cataluña’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) CNT 85 C.

¹⁵⁵ Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, pp. 378-9

¹⁵⁶ As a prominent member of the Barcelona Transport Workers’ Union, such a connection is not to be wondered at, but is also suggested by the name used to sign the combative declaration of the ‘Liaison Commission’ of the Barcelona supplies committee that had denounced Joan Comorera and defended the record of the committees at the end of December 1936: P. Bonet. Merino had been prosecuted during the Second Republic for authorship of articles written under the pen-name José Bonet. See *La Vanguardia*, 25 November 1933. I am grateful to Agustín Guillamón who, when I drew his attention to the possibility of this being a pseudonym of Merino’s, suggested that the initial ‘P’ in the supplies committee statement could perhaps be explained by ‘Pepe’ being a common pet form of the name José.

was then in operation.¹⁵⁷ As a key union delegate, defence committee member, secretary of a radicalised local section of the FAI, long-standing opponent of *'treintismo'* with links to both the bread queues and the revolutionary deserters opposed to militarisation – indeed possibly being among that number himself - Merino thus emerges as both the living embodiment of the different sectors of radical anarchism and one of those best placed to convert the desire for a 'return to the barricades' into a concrete strategy. As we will see in the chapters that follow, in the May days and in the subsequent struggles, his ability to speak to both voluntarist and purist concerns, as well to show practical solidarity to the hungry and to anarchist prisoners, would make him one of the outstanding figures of oppositional anarchism. If his varied connections make him seem an almost composite character, it should be borne in mind that I am not trying to establish Merino as a convenient 'superman' capable of single-handedly bringing about the May days mobilisation: that revolutionary intervention was, like Merino himself, the product of a varied and complex movement whose anti-statist principles, amongst those sectors remaining outside of state collaboration, had been renewed in the period under discussion.

The radicalisation of these sectors was in response to, and served to intensify in turn, the violent encroachments of the Republican state into, on the one hand, territories considered anarchist strongholds, and on the other, sites of ongoing contestation, such as factories debating socialisation. Two such events in Cataluña served to heighten tension in the region in the period immediately prior to the May days. On 25 April police responding to a request for assistance from UGT affiliates at the Trefilería Barcelonesa factory, where a majority of the workforce backed socialisation, arrived on

¹⁵⁷ Guillamón, *La Guerra del pan*, p. 206.

horseback, surrounding the factory while an assembly of workers was taking place.¹⁵⁸ Then, on 27 April Antonio Martín, a veteran CNT member and a key figure of the organisation in the border town of Puigcerdà, was killed. A former member of the CCMA, Joan Pons Garlandí of the ERC, then a delegate to the Interior Security Council of the Generalitat (the JSI), the body responsible for public order in Catalunya, described in his memoirs, written just after the war, of how trusted Catalan ‘patriots’ had been sent to nearby Bellver to take advantage of the first opportunity to end the power of Martín, known as ‘*el cojo de Málaga*’, ‘the cripple from Malaga’. This opportunity arrived with the attempt of Martín and others from Puigcerdà and the town of La Seu d’Urgell to occupy Bellver, which met an ambush, during which ‘a patriot, known as The Shirtless, renowned throughout the region for his marksmanship, situated in a strategic spot, fatally wounded [Martín]’.¹⁵⁹

Contemporaneous to the events in the border region was an exchange of letters between Largo Caballero and the CNT, demonstrating that the death of Martín, whose name subsequently became something of a ‘black legend’, was of a piece with the wider project of state reconstruction and the dismantling of the revolutionary procedures established in July.¹⁶⁰ The correspondence began when the Prime Minister stated that he had been informed by an unnamed source that suspicious elements, a list of whose names was included in the letter, had been crossing the border with ‘passports issued by the FAI’.¹⁶¹ A subsequent exchange between Joan Peiró, Dionisio Eroles and the CNT’s

¹⁵⁸ See Carme Vega, Anna Monjo and Mercedes Vilanova, ‘Socialización y hechos de mayo: una nueva aportación a partir del proceso a Mauricio Stevens (2 de junio de 1937)’, *Historia y Fuente Oral*, 3 (1990), 93-103 (p. 95).

¹⁵⁹ Joan Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2008), pp. 150-2. For a hostile account of the activities of Antonio Martín, see Joan Pous i Porta and Josep M. Solé i Sabaté, *Anarquía i república a la Cerdanya* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1991).

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of the causes of Martín’s reputation, see Antonio Gascón and Agustín Guillamón, ‘Antonio Martín Escudero (1895-1937) “The Durruti of the Cerdanya”’, trans. by Paul Sharkey, Christie Books website (2015) < <http://www.christiebooks.com/ChristieBooksWP/2015/03/antonio-martin-escudero-1895-1937-the-durruti-of-the-cerdana-by-antonio-gascon-and-agustin-guillamon-translated-by-paul-sharkey/> > [accessed 28 January 2016].

¹⁶¹ Letter from Largo Caballero to Joan Peiró, 24 April 1937, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 523/3.

Committee for Statistics and Control saw this latter body deny absolutely the notion that the FAI issued passports and defended those named in Largo Caballero's letter, 'comrades who have been active in the revolutionary movement for years and [who] have come here hounded by reactionaries the world over'. The exchange is revealing of the proportionate increase in combativity, self-confidence and internationalism of the libertarian movement according to the activists' degrees of distance from the state. Peiró, a Minister, transmitted the concerns of his colleague and superior to Eroles, a former 'man of action' who now occupied an ambiguous position as both a member of the Catalan JSI and the head of the *Patrullas de Control* (recognised as simultaneously of the state and a threat to the same). When the message was finally conveyed to a libertarian committee with a specific, autonomous, remit it was dismissed as 'offensive' and used as an opportunity to affirm the right to asylum that revolutionary refugees should enjoy in Spain. The opportunity was also taken to voice a recurring complaint among oppositional anarchists: that official concern for the anti-fascist probity of revolutionaries was strange given that 'thousands upon thousands of suspicious elements walk freely in the ministries and public offices of Valencia, Madrid etc'.¹⁶² This letter was dated three days after the altercation in Bellver.

The murder of Martín followed that of Roldán Cortada, an activist of the PSUC and a former member of the CNT who had signed the *treintista* manifesto. It has been suggested that Cortada was murdered by the CNT, as the organisation had recently been informed of his role in preparing an attack on 'the FAI'.¹⁶³ The murder of the PSUC member prompted a police investigation centred on the anarchist stronghold of

¹⁶² Letter from the Vice-Secretary of the Defence Section of the CNT to Dionisio Eroles, 30 April 1937, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 523/3.

¹⁶³ Godicheau, *No Callaron*, p. 37. According to sources in the POUM, Cortada was in fact an opponent of the PSUC's sectarian policies: see Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism Versus Soviet Communism* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), pp. 186-7.

L'Hospitalet.¹⁶⁴ It also led to a redoubling of calls from the PSUC to disarm the rearguard.¹⁶⁵ In spite of its appeals for calm throughout this period, *Solidaridad Obrera* nevertheless made an urgent appeal with regard to the subject of arms on 2 May that contradicted the tendency of official CNT directives since the previous autumn:

The guarantee of the revolution is the proletariat in arms. To attempt to disarm the people is to position oneself on the other side of the barricades. Whether Councillor or Commissar, an order of disarmament cannot be dictated against the workers, who are struggling against fascism with more generosity and heroism than all the politicians of the rearguard... Workers: Let no-one disarm you under any pretext! This is our slogan: Let no-one disarm you!¹⁶⁶

This appeal, anomalous in the trajectory of *Solidaridad Obrera* under the editorship of Jacinto Toryho, suggests that it was beginning to dawn on even the *comités superiores* of the CNT that the arms its members disposed of were fundamental to the power of the organisation as a whole, and that its plans to recover lost influence through control over the economy would count for little if factories were left at the mercy of the police. As much was intimated in an editorial in *Tierra y Libertad*, which affirmed the 'impossibility of leaving in the hands of the state the destiny of our revolution, the revolution begun, driven and defended by the workers in arms'.¹⁶⁷ Given the role that the *comités superiores* would go on to play during the May days, we might wonder whether such combative language was merely a bluff intended to ease state pressure on their affiliates. The May days would also prove, however, that the radical anarchists were not bluffing when they posed the possibility that 'the gesture of the 19

¹⁶⁴ See *Solidaridad Obrera*, 1 May 1937 and Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 431.

¹⁶⁵ Gallego, *La crisis del antifascismo*, p. 391.

¹⁶⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 May 1937. On the same day, a young member of the Catalan JJLL was killed in Barcelona by gunfire emanating from the local HQ of the Catalan nationalist party, *Estat Català*. See Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 136-7.

¹⁶⁷ *Tierra y Libertad*, 1 May 1937.

July' would 'have to be repeated'.¹⁶⁸ There was no ambiguity or subtlety in the challenge the Local Federation of the JJLL in Barcelona made to the police chief Eusebio Rodríguez Salas: 'we will continue to be armed... and whosoever attempts to disarm us without respecting our documentation, will have to do so over our dead body. And we will see who emerges victorious.'¹⁶⁹

Conclusions

From the winter of 1936 to the spring of 1937, the persisting revolutionary gains in the territory of the Spanish Republic were threatened by the expanding parameters of the state. The relationship of Spanish anarchism to this process was complicated by the participation of its chief representatives in the anti-fascist alliance and the absorption of thousands of less well-known activists into administrative bodies and the front line. During this period, the *comités superiores* of the CNT and the FAI, in spite of their continued intention to intervene in government, were aware that the activity of their political opponents threatened to end the influence won for the organisations in July. In the first half of 1937, they attempted to bolster this influence through the campaign for socialisation. This attempt was only partially successful, however, on the one hand because it depended on the support of the UGT, and on the other because the process of socialisation was conceived of in different terms by the CNT hierarchy and its most active proponents on the ground. If the campaign failed to effectively unite the movement, the slogans of the *comités superiores* and the radical activists did not, however, reflect the extent to which the organisation was divided in this period. In fact, immediately prior to the May days, the radicalisation of the slogans of the CNT noted

¹⁶⁸ *Esfuerzo. Periódico mural de las Juventudes Libertarias de Cataluña*, second week of April, 1937.

¹⁶⁹ See the leaflet, JOVENTUTS LLIBERTÀRIES. FEDERACIÓ LOCAL DE BARCELONA, 'Una provocación más' (Barcelona, 1937) PDLR, Fons DH, DH 6 (4) 1- Joventuts Llibertàries (FIJL – FAI).

above perhaps encouraged the illusory hope that the *comités superiores* would not disown a new revolutionary mobilisation.¹⁷⁰

While the libertarian movement was divided in its attitude to the anti-fascist state, the attempt to evolve a revolutionary alternative to it was also illustrative of the ambiguities and divisions in the movement's more radical wing. The creation of the FJR on the initiative of the JJLL in Barcelona revealed the potential for libertarians to take the lead in creating a revolutionary alliance to oppose and split statist anti-fascism, while the AAD advanced a programme by means of which the revolutionary conscience might impose itself rather than be swept aside or absorbed by the state. While both of these endeavours achieved a certain degree of success, they did not unite the radical anarchists of Spain. Purists opposed the former initiative because it was 'political', in the sense of involving political parties, and the latter because they considered it to have a Marxist or Bolshevik – that is to say, authoritarian – approach to the problem of government.

In spite of the persistence of such divisions, the first four months of 1937 had seen the consolidation of oppositional anarchism as an identifiable current within the libertarian movement. The *Mujeres Libres* grouping, the *Juventudes Libres*, anarchist trade union delegates in Barcelona, the defence committees and the AAD were united behind the demand for socialisation and the need for workers to retain their weapons. In Barcelona, this confluence of priorities would result in the May mobilisation that would prove to be the definitive, if not the last, battle in the radical anarchists' struggle to resist state reconstitution. This mobilisation would be supported by the new groupings formed in this period, the FJR and the AAD, but its organisational basis would emerge from the local FAI, which had shown its capacity, as at the beginning of the Republic, to unite voluntarist and purist anarchists behind a radical agenda on the eve of the May

¹⁷⁰ This is discussed further in the following chapter.

days. The first months of 1937 had seen the revolutionary conscience of the Spanish revolution develop a programme based on a critical understanding of the revolutionary experience hitherto, and had seen new alliances and new organisational forms take shape. This period had also demonstrated, however, the persistent vitality of the networks of libertarian *ateneos*, defence committees and affinity groups, and their undimmed impulse to think and act outside and against the state.

The programme that emerged in opposition to state construction in Spain had been encapsulated in the slogan of *Ideas*: ‘socialisation and the people armed!’. When police on horseback broke up an assembly of workers well-disposed to socialisation in April 1937, the mutually constitutive relation between state force and hierarchical relations in production could be perceived. In the months prior to the May days, the role of Republican police in defending private or state property from anarchist projects had become more clear, while the process by which anarchist volunteers could be transformed into an anti-fascist police force through the *Patrullas de control* had seemingly gone into reverse. With the *Patrullas* back under the jurisdiction of the defence committees and those same committees tasked with participation in the coordination of a ‘revolutionary committee’ to fight both fascism and the ‘counter-revolution’, it was entirely logical that any further attempt by police to obliterate workers’ power in Barcelona would provide the spark required for the armed enactment of the oppositional programme. The frontiers of the anarchist city would once again be marked by barricades, the successful defence or conquest of which would bring to a definite end the revolutionary interregnum begun in July 1936.

Chapter Three: May 1937. From a Second July to the ‘Spanish Kronstadt’

The confrontation, known as the May days, which took place in Barcelona at the beginning of May 1937 was prompted by a police raid on the city’s telephone exchange, the *Telefónica*. Since the summer, the *Telefónica* had been run jointly by a CNT-UGT committee and a delegate representative of the Generalitat. The *Telefónica*, site of the first great strike in Barcelona during the Second Republic, and which had only been taken in July at the cost of several lives, was of great importance to the CNT.¹ Run by a United States-based, and notoriously anti-union, company since the days of Primo de Rivera, the coming of the Second Republic had not brought its nationalisation, as had been promised by republicans and Socialists.² The system of workers’ control put into operation there under the auspices of the CNT was therefore a living symbol of how the revolution had delivered where the Republic had failed. It was also a source of real power, as the workers at the exchange could monitor and even interfere with phone calls.³ In a context in which the violence associated with state reconstitution had recently intensified, it was therefore little surprise when armed squads of Assault Guards were sent to the Plaça Catalunya on 3 May to take control of the *Telefónica* building.⁴ In fact, it was reported at a regional meeting of the CNT that day that this was the fourth time in recent weeks when such an attempt had been made by the security forces.⁵

¹ See Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, p. 267.

² See José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, *Valeriano Orobón Fernández. Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en Europa* (Valladolid: Libre Pensamiento, 2002), p. 107.

³ Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 66-7.

⁴ For useful eyewitness accounts of the May days from different perspectives, see: Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, especially pp. 103-27 and Manuel Cruells, *Mayo Sangriento. Barcelona 1937* (Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, 1970).

⁵ ‘Reunió extraordinaria que celebró el Comité Regional, con los demás comités responsables el día 3 de Mayo de 1937, en la ciudad de Barcelona’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 85 C. Pons Prades recalled that the windows of the *Telefónica* building had been reinforced by the occupants in the days prior to the attack: Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 68.

A provocative act in itself, the assault on the *Telefónica* was clearly of a piece with the wider project of state reconstruction. The mobilisation that took place in response to it should therefore be seen in this context, and this chapter will accordingly discuss the events of May 1937 in Barcelona as a mobilisation of the anti-statist conscience of the Spanish revolution.⁶ The focus of the first part of this discussion will be on the nature, size and composition of the libertarian mobilisation. Piecing together the reports, memoirs and recollections of participants, an overview will be provided of how and why the mobilisation took place in the way it did, and what opportunities it appeared to offer radicals to implement their programme. The mobilisation has much to tell us about the character, extent and limits of the Spanish revolutionary conscience. Equally illuminating in this context is the way in which the demobilisation of the movement was enacted. This chapter will discuss the abandonment of the barricades in May as a reassertion of organisational hierarchies within the CNT, and examine the immediate effect this had on the outlook of the libertarian participants. It will then proceed to analyse the disputes internal to the Spanish libertarian movement that were triggered by the events and the ensuing repression of revolutionaries in the Spanish Republic.

The interpretation presented here accords with that of Guillamón, who describes the May days as an ‘inevitable struggle between the Republican state apparatus... and the defence of the “conquests of July” mounted by the CNT activists’.⁷ It also follows Graham’s assessment that ‘the war effort saw both CNT and FAI leaders increasingly incorporated into the governing machinery of the liberal state, leaving isolated and

⁶ Due to considerations of space, this chapter will consider the events in May almost entirely insofar as they impacted upon the libertarian movement in Barcelona. For a wider perspective on the events, see Bolloren, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 429-61; Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 267-97; Manuel Aguilera, *Compañeros y Camaradas. Las luchas entre antifascistas en la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Editorial Actas, 2012), pp. 80-171. For accounts of comparable, concurrent disturbances that took place on a smaller scale in and outside of Cataluña, see Peirats, *The CNT, Vol. 2*, pp. 132-6 and Casanova, *Anarchism*, pp. 147-8.

⁷ Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona*, p. 149.

uncomprehending sectors of their own cadres and social base whose daily experience led them to continue to resist its encroachment'.⁸ The systematic nature of the mobilisation presented here also backs up the arguments of Guillamón and Graham, and contrasts with that suggested by Casanova, who places emphasis on the assumed role of provocateurs and those he refers to as 'revolutionary tourists'.⁹ Although an understanding of the May events as a confrontation between the agents of state reconstruction and its revolutionary opponents is not novel, the interpretation offered here, through its focus on the mechanisms of the libertarian mobilisation, represents a significant historiographical advance with regard to why and how these events took place and in answer to the question of who was mobilising, and why, posed but insufficiently answered by Graham.¹⁰ It also offers a new explanation for how the demobilisation took place, in spite of the will to fight displayed by the revolutionary conscience.

The Mobilisation of the 'Anti-State'

The assault on the *Telefónica* building on 3 May was resisted by the CNT workers inside. An uneasy standoff then took place, both inside and outside the building, in the Plaça de Catalunya. A meeting of the Regional Committee of the CNT was held to discuss developments, where it was noted that if the Generalitat did not rectify the situation, 'our people' were prepared to take to the streets. In this regard, the intervention of the representative of the Local Federation of the FAI, who suggested that those present keep in mind the 'project for the organisation of the defence groups', is suggestive. However, Manuel Escorza, head of the CNT's Investigation Services, declared: 'We are granting this occurrence an importance which it does not merit. It is a

⁸ Helen Graham, "'Against the State": A Genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)', *European History Quarterly*, 29. 4 (1999) 485-542 (p. 524).

⁹ Casanova, *Anarchism*, p.149.

¹⁰ Graham, 'The Barcelona May Days', p. 485.

mundane affair, a premature action that has not been thought out in the least... What remains to be seen is whether we really control our membership.’¹¹ The meeting concluded with the agreement that the organisation demand the dismissal of the police chief Rodríguez Salas.¹² When this demand was refused, the basis for a de-escalation of the situation disappeared.¹³ However, why and how the city had become ‘a sea of barricades’ by the following day requires further explanation.¹⁴

The mobilisation has been described as ‘spontaneous’ by both eye-witnesses and participants.¹⁵ Certainly, the rapid response of the revolutionaries on the streets of Barcelona was not the result of directives from the anarchist press or the *comités superiores* of the CNT. In the prevailing atmosphere of high tension, it was observed that ‘The political atmosphere was charged with electricity and everyone was waiting the inevitable spark.’¹⁶ To the Americans, Charles and Lois Orr, it seemed that ‘the workers... went out into the street *en masse*... all quite spontaneously, not only without any leadership, but actually against their leaders, and against all newspapers’.¹⁷

¹¹ ‘Reunión extraordinaria que celebró el Comité Regional’. This comment suggests that Guillamón’s hypothesis as to the key role played by Manuel Escorza in the mobilisation is unlikely. See Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona*, pp. 153-4. Nevertheless, the alternative hypothesis I present here has been made possible, at least in part, by Guillamón’s research, particularly on the months leading up to May, in the works cited in the previous chapter.

¹² ‘Reunión extraordinaria que celebró el Comité Regional’.

¹³ Manuel Cruells was of the opinion that the ‘bloody week of May’ would have been avoided were it not for the incomprehensible intransigence of President Companys at that moment, Cruells, *Mayo sangriento*, pp. 55-6.

¹⁴ The phrase comes from Helmut Kirsche, ‘A las barricadas. Memorias y reflexiones de un antifascista’ in *Barcelona, mayo 1937. Testimonios desde las barricadas*, ed. by C. García, H. Piotrowski, S. Rosés (Barcelona: Alikornio ediciones, 2006), p. 174.

¹⁵ See the letter of Jaime Balius to Burnett Bolloten, 24 June 1946, reproduced in Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 155. Eye-witness observations on the supposed ‘spontaneity’ of the events can be found in Albert Weisbord, ‘Barricades in Barcelona’, available at the internet archives of Albert and Vera Weisbord: <<http://search.marxists.org/archive/weisbord/Barricades.htm>> [accessed 1 August 2014], and Adolfo Carlini (Domenico Sedran), ‘Un bolchevique-leninista de España os cuenta toda la verdad sobre las Jornadas de Mayo’ in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, p. 91.

¹⁶ Clara and Paul Thalmann, ‘La sublevación en Cataluña’ in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, p. 112. The Thalmanns were a Swiss couple whose participation in the May events and contact with elements of the AAD, as well as the tiny Trotskyist milieu in Barcelona, make their account of events extremely interesting.

¹⁷ Postcard written by Charles Orr to his mother on 8 May 1937, reproduced in *Letters From Barcelona: An American Woman in Revolution and Civil War*, ed. by Gerd-Rainer Horn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 161. The Orrs were left-socialists working for the POUM in Barcelona. A part of the international heterodox left milieu in Barcelona, presumably it is such people that Casanova has in mind when he disparagingly refers to ‘revolutionary tourists’. However, the impressionistic accounts we

However, while the combination of tension and provocation contributed to a rapid escalation that surprised onlookers, the May mobilisation cannot be said to have been spontaneous in the way that this term is normally understood. A traditional understanding of spontaneity as a synonym for ‘unplanned’ or ‘politically unconscious’ would make its usage unsuitable in this context.¹⁸

A simple explanation for the events, amply attested to by eye-witnesses, participants and subsequent histories, is that the neighbourhood defence committees of the libertarian movement mobilised their forces. How this was brought about is discussed below. What is less clear is why the defence committees felt sufficiently emboldened to act, at this moment, *apparently* beyond the margins of organisational discipline. A clue as to why this happened is provided by the intervention of the delegate of the Local Federation of the FAI at the meeting discussed above. It seems plausible that the ‘project’ to which the delegate referred was the formation of the ‘central committee’ discussed in the previous chapter, which the combined representatives of the local FAI, JJLL and defence committees had considered necessary in order to carry forward the fight against both fascism and the counter-revolution. Merino, the regular delegate for the Local Federation of the FAI at regional meetings of the libertarian movement in Cataluña was not present on 3 May, and it is possible that his absence was due to activity preparing the ground for the mobilisation. This is speculation, but there can be no doubt as to his active involvement in the events, which makes his link to the projected central committee highly suggestive. What can be

have from such witnesses, while valuable, show these people to be quite removed from the internal life of the libertarian movement, and certainly incapable of playing an important part in a mobilisation on the scale of the May days. Lois Orr amusingly described her circle as ‘the most intellectual of the intellectuals – each of whom belongs to some one or two member fraction – who all have a particular line which they are trying to influence the POUM exec committee to adopt as the only way to save the revolution... there is a general ignorance as to what is going on, most of the learned comrades can’t read Spanish and have great difficulty keeping up on affairs’: *ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁸ The meaning of ‘spontaneity’ in its relevance to working class mobilisation has recently been discussed in Alex Levant, ‘Rethinking Spontaneity Beyond Classical Marxism: Re-reading Luxemburg through Benjamin, Gramsci and Thompson’, *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 40. 3 (2012), 367-87.

concluded, at least as a working hypothesis with which to understand the timing of the May events, is that the Local Federation of the FAI considered a renewed project of aggressive, revolutionary self-defence to have been mandated by a regularly constituted Plenum, and that this was likely brought up at the meeting of 3 May to indicate to those present the option of an armed mobilisation. The reference to the defence committees at this meeting, although vague and inconclusive in itself, is one among several links between the mobilisation of May and the radical measures proposed by a combination of the defence committees, affinity groups and JJLL through the Barcelona FAI. These links are important because they indicate how the action could be said to have emerged through the traditional decision-making processes of the anarchist movement, and were not conceived of by the participants as contravening organisational discipline.

The neighbourhood defence committees of the CNT were probably initially alerted to the raid on the *Telefónica* directly via telephone by workers in the building in contact with the headquarters of the various committees.¹⁹ Sara Berenguer, a member of the neighbourhood defence committee of Les Corts, recalled in her autobiography:

As the alarm went up in response to that shameless attack on the *Telefónica*, the Confederal neighbourhood committees intervened energetically... The activists of the neighbourhoods called us on the telephone every minute to find out about our situation and to let us know of their own initiatives.²⁰

Wilebaldo Solano, then of the POUM youth organisation, the JCI, stressed that ‘when we talk of spontaneity we must bear in mind that... in this concrete case it was the

¹⁹ This explanation was offered by the leading POUM activist Jordi Arquer, in the Jordi Arquer File, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 140.

²⁰ Sara Berenguer, *Entre el sol y la tormenta* (Barcelona: Seuba Ediciones, 1988), p. 88.

neighbourhood committees that took up arms... That it is to say that it was... not really the base, but the intermediate cadres that took the initiative'.²¹

As in July 1936, the only libertarian mobilisation of comparable scale to have taken place in Barcelona, the core delegates who represented these neighbourhood defence committees informed the wider network of activists, who were instructed to present themselves with their weapons at their local defence committee headquarters. Diego Camacho, an activist of the JJLL in the neighbourhood of Clot, recalls being informed of events by telephone at his place of work by Juan (sometimes referred to as Antonio) Turtós Vallès, a member of the JJLL of Clot and a delegate member of the neighbourhood defence committee.²² The shop-steward at Camacho's workplace, having confirmed the information with the local trade union committee, assembled the workers who then voted to go on strike and report to their neighbourhood defence committees and union sections.²³ Members of the *Patrullas de Control* in the neighbourhood of Sants were told that the *Patrullas* no longer counted for anything, and that their unit of around fifty members was now responsible only to the local defence committee.²⁴ Albert Weisbord, an independent dissident communist from the United States who was in Barcelona at the time, remarked on the prominent role of the *Patrullas*, who probably numbered around 890: 'The Patrolmen, armed with submachine guns, go from barricade to barricade, investigating every house and rooftop to ferret out any surprise the enemy might try to spring.'²⁵ The CNT's National Committee would later claim that the *Patrullas de Control* had not participated in the

²¹ See the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 53-4.

²² Paz, *Viaje al Pasado*, p. 141. Juan Turtós Vallès was a member of the defence group *Orto* who had participated in the fighting in July. See Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 606, and 'Juan Turtós Vallès – Anarquista del Grupo Orto' <<http://puertoreal.cnt.es/en/bibliografias-anarquistas/3415-juan-turtos-valles-anarquista-del-grupo-orto.html>> [accessed 20 August 2014].

²³ Paz, *Viaje al Pasado*, p. 143.

²⁴ See 'Entrevista amb Joan "Remi"', pp. 97 and 126.

²⁵ Weisbord, 'Barricades in Barcelona'. On the figure of 890, see José Luis Ledesma, 'Una retaguardia al rojo. Las violencias en la zona republicana' in *Violencia Roja y Azul. España, 1936-1950*, ed. by Francisco Espinosa (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010), p.198

events of May, a claim that has been taken at face value in the historiography.²⁶ It is likely that the functioning of the *Patrullas* as adjuncts of the defence committees during this period is at the root of this confusion.²⁷

As a result of the frenetic activity of the defence committees, around 6500 - 7000 libertarian revolutionaries were mobilised.²⁸ In addition to Spanish libertarians, barricades were mounted by members of the POUM and also by foreign revolutionaries in Barcelona, such as the German anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the *Gruppe Deutsche Anarcho-Syndikalisten im Ausland* (Group of German Anarcho-Syndicalists in Exile - DAS) and Italian anarchists who had left the front but who had regrouped in Barcelona in order to form a new battalion.²⁹ It should also be borne in mind that several anarchist activists on the periphery of the city remained confined to their neighbourhoods without actively participating in the events in spite of a readiness to do so if necessary.³⁰

The mobilisation was backed up by a degree of popular support among working class non-combatants, indicated by a successful general strike throughout the city.³¹ There is also anecdotal evidence of wider community participation in the building of barricades. Albert Weisbord observed that ‘the large crowds that gathered around [the

²⁶ For example, in Godicheau, *No Callaron*, p. 38. Their role is also played down in Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona*, p. 150.

²⁷ In addition to the testimony of Joan ‘Remi’ a hostile witness also reported that the *Patrullas* responded to the orders of the defence committees. See the telephone conversation between the leading Communist Vicente Uribe and an unnamed interlocutor, recorded at 12.15 am on the morning of 7 May, ‘Dossier elaborat per Josep Tarradellas, relatiu als Fets de Maig i a la posterior repressió del POUM’, Fons ANC1-1 / Generalitat de Catalunya (Segona República).

²⁸ See the convincing estimates in Aguilera Povedano, ‘Los hechos de mayo de 1937’, pp. 789-816. Here the total numbers of combatants is suggested to be between 7000 and 7500 on the revolutionary side.

²⁹ Aldo Aguzzi, ‘Un anarquista italiano en las Jornadas de Mayo’, in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, pp. 155-7. On the DAS, see D. Nelles et al., *Antifascistas alemanes en Barcelona (1933-1939). El Grupo DAS: sus actividades contra la red nazi y en el frente de Aragón* (Barcelona: Editorial Sintra, 2010).

³⁰ See Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 154.

³¹ In a report on the May days prepared for the internal discussion bulletin of the Barcelona POUM prior to the planned celebration of the local party congress, which in the event never took place, Josep Rebull affirmed that ‘The movement was greeted with sympathy by the working class in general in the first days – proof of this is the breadth, rapidity and unanimity of the strike – and left the middle classes in a state of watchful neutrality, influenced, naturally, by terror.’ See Josep Rebull, ‘Las Jornadas de mayo’ <<http://es.internationalism.org/book/export/html/3244>> [accessed 18 September 2014].

barricades] clamoring for action left no doubt that the overwhelming mass of workers were wholeheartedly behind the vanguard and were only awaiting the orders of their respective organizations to march forward'.³² Orwell also recalled popular participation in barricade building: 'long lines of men, women and quite small children were tearing up the cobblestones, hauling them along in a hand-cart that had been found somewhere, and staggering to and fro under heavy sacks of sand', a testimony corroborated by the report of Edi Gmür, a Swiss Communist volunteer in Spain.³³ Orwell also states that, in the POUM headquarters: 'the office upstairs was ceaselessly besieged by a crowd of people who were demanding rifles and being told that there were none left'.³⁴

Such a degree of enthusiasm and willingness to participate does not mean that working class support for the rising was unanimous. Diego Camacho was unsure of popular support in his neighbourhood, noting that people 'seemed shocked, as if wondering whether we hadn't all gone crazy. It was difficult to know if they approved or disapproved of seeing rifles on the street once more'.³⁵ Nevertheless, the mobilisation clearly indicates considerable popular backing for the revolution and 'its people' in opposition to the state. Orwell's account continues to be the subject of polemic, but it seems likely that his contemporary interpretation of events was widely shared:

The issue was clear enough. On one side the CNT, on the other side the police. I have no particular love for the idealised 'worker'... but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask which side I am on.³⁶

In any case, that such a widespread sentiment, which was not new, could result in an apparently successful mobilisation against the Republican state was remarkable when

³² Weisbord, 'Barricades in Barcelona'.

³³ See, respectively, Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 108, and Edi Gmür, '(En Barcelona, después de disfrutar de un permiso en Valencia)', in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, p. 184.

³⁴ Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 106.

³⁵ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 143.

³⁶ Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 106.

one bears in mind that thousands of the CNT's most seasoned militants had left Barcelona for the front, and that its *comités superiores* had nothing to do with it.³⁷ To that extent, therefore, the May events demonstrated both a degree of support for the anti-state programme defended by the radical anarchists and the fact that many workers did not question the continued viability of the anarchist project even in wartime.

Excluding foreign participants, who may have accounted for up to eleven per cent of the combatants, the libertarian mobilisation was composed of members of the JJLL, the Barcelona defence committees, the *Patrullas de Control*, FAI affinity groups, militia on leave, the MMLL, the AAD and specific unions of the CNT.³⁸ It should be noted that these groups had an overlapping membership. Members of the JJLL were also members of the CNT and, if they had joined the youth organisation prior to the revolution, would also have belonged to the FAI. Joan "Remi", for example, belonged to all three organisations and was also a member of the *Patrullas de Control*. Sara Berenguer was a member of her neighbourhood defence committee, the JJLL and the MMLL. Ada Martí, an active participant in the May days, also belonged to these three organisations and, as a member of the *Agrupación Los de Ayer y Los de Hoy* and a future contributor to the mouthpiece of the AAD, *El Amigo del Pueblo*, was probably also a member of the latter grouping.³⁹

³⁷ On perceptions of the respective quality of militants at the front and rear, see the Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 70.

³⁸ The figure of eleven per cent of revolutionary combatants in May being of foreign origin is estimated from the number of foreign victims and is provided in José Luis Oyón, *La quiebra de la ciudad popular. Espacio urbano, inmigración y anarquismo en la Barcelona de entreguerras, 1914-1936* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 2008), p. 474. The number of foreign victims on the libertarian side included at least five Italians and one Portuguese, although it should be noted that two of these Italians, Camillo Berneri and Francesco Barbieri, were not combatants but were arrested at home and then murdered. It is also known that several German anarcho-syndicalists participated in the fighting, and in this regard, the name of one anarchist victim about whom nothing is known, Elias Werna, is suggestive. For a list of the victims of the May days along with their organisational affiliation see Manuel Aguilera Povedano, 'Lista de víctimas de los Hechos de Mayo de 1937 en Barcelona', Miguel Aguilera Povedano blog (2013) <<http://wp.me/p2FTqL-8V>> [accessed 5 August 2014].

³⁹ *Los de Ayer y Los de Hoy* was formed by veteran members of the CNT at the beginning of the civil war and was affiliated to the Local Federation of the FAI. It was intended to bridge the generational divide between older and younger activists in the movement. According to Negrete and Oehler, it had agreed to

The participation in the events of members of the MMLL meant the visible return of one of the most important features of the July days: armed women on the barricades.⁴⁰ Their presence not only added to the sensation, summed up in *La Batalla*, that ‘The spirit of July has once more taken possession of Barcelona’, but also confirmed that the socio-cultural aspect of state reconstruction was no more complete by May than was the project to regain a monopoly of violence.⁴¹ This should be borne in mind when we note Sara Berenguer’s recollection that: ‘It seemed to me that the effervescence of the first days had returned.’⁴² Comparisons with the July days were widespread during the street fighting, and were indicative that the struggle was understood by revolutionary combatants as a point of rupture, the opportunity to ‘begin again’ sought by radicals, discussed in the previous chapter.⁴³

Aside from membership of the CNT, which applied to the vast majority if not all the libertarian combatants in May, the most common organisational denominator within this movement has generally been taken to be the JJLL.⁴⁴ At a National Plenum later in the month, the delegate for the Catalan Regional Defence Committee stated that the JJLL had ‘borne the brunt’ of the struggle in Barcelona.⁴⁵ It has been suggested that the preponderance of the JJLL in the May fighting was owing to the desire of younger libertarians to experience what they had missed out on in July, desirous of imitating the vanguard role played by more experienced revolutionaries in those days. With many of the combatants of July now at the front or dead, as well as several others now

adhere to the AAD at a meeting in Barcelona on 1 May: Negrete and Oehler, ‘Negrete and Oehler report back from Barcelona’.

⁴⁰ See the recollections of participants in Vega, *Pioneras y revolucionarias*, pp. 222-8.

⁴¹ *La Batalla* cited in Bolloren, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 432.

⁴² See Berenguer, *Entre el sol*, p. 88.

⁴³ See Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 126, and ‘Reunión extraordinaria que celebró el Comité Regional’.

⁴⁴ The prominence of the JJLL in the fighting was emphasised by friends and foes of the anarchists alike. In the aftermath of the events, *Solidaridad Obrera* was moved to publicly defend the JJLL, which it described as ‘the target for the rage of many people who are either ignorant or frankly counterrevolutionary’, see *Solidaridad Obrera*, 8 May 1937.

⁴⁵ See ‘Actas del Pleno Nacional de Regionales, Extraordinario, del Movimiento Libertario, celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de mayo de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 46 B.

incorporated in the administration of the state, it was the turn of the youth to show their mettle.⁴⁶ This hypothesis may have some merit but it is not substantiated by the evidence at our disposal. The average age of the victims from amongst the libertarian combatants whose age is known is 35.⁴⁷ This can be explained by the fact that the JJLL, in spite of its name, did not in reality function as an organisation of only younger members of the libertarian movement.⁴⁸

In its origins, the Catalan JJLL had operated as the cultural, educational and propagandistic wing of the FAI. During the war, the JJLL had taken over buildings in every district of Barcelona in order to set up educational *ateneos* and neighbourhood headquarters. Such spaces, in which young anarchists could mix with veterans, became integral to the organisational and social life of anarchists in Barcelona and were closely connected to the neighbourhood defence committees, the headquarters of which also served as centres of anarchist socialisation in this revolutionary period.⁴⁹ Membership of the JJLL was common to many members of affinity groups and of defence committees, and its place alongside these bodies in the vanguard of Catalan anarchism during the war is indicated by the joint Plenum of these three organisations discussed in the previous chapter. Involvement in the JJLL, which grew from less than 10,000 to around 50,000 members in Cataluña during the first year of the war, therefore led to an exposure to anarchist ideas and to the libertarian cultural world, and provided the opportunity to attend almost daily assemblies and gatherings.⁵⁰

By contrast to workplaces in Barcelona, where the departure of experienced activists, the introduction of compulsory unionisation and the production demands of

⁴⁶ Aguilera Povedano, 'Los hechos de mayo de 1937', p. 795.

⁴⁷ See Aguilera Povedano, 'Lista de víctimas de los Hechos de Mayo'.

⁴⁸ See Jesús L. Santamaría, 'Juventudes Libertarias y Guerra Civil (1936-1939)', *Studia Histórica*, 1 (1983), 215-22 (p. 217).

⁴⁹ See the recollections of JJLL members Diego Camacho and Sara Berenguer in, respectively, Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 56-62 and Berenguer, *Entre el sol*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ For membership figures see Santamaría, 'Juventudes Libertarias y Guerra Civil', p. 222.

the war economy had to some extent de-politicised the role of the CNT in certain factories, the *ateneos* and local centres of the JJLL and defence committees remained spaces of anarchist discussion and activity.⁵¹ While this anarchist character did not confer an ideological or strategic unity upon these specific organisations, membership did imply an active identification with anarchism in a way that wartime membership of the CNT alone did not. For the local JJLL, the combination of a strong purist current, absence from the spheres of government and hostility to the banal and sectarian anti-fascism of the JSU would make this an anarchism of a radical and anti-state nature. The prominent role that members of the JJLL played in the May days is therefore reflective of the mobilisation as a manifestation of the anti-statist anarchist conscience, as well as of the strong links between the centres of the JJLL, the neighbourhood defence committees and the Local Federation of the FAI. Youthful exuberance and impetuosity were not absent from the May days, but nor were they determinant factors.

At several removes from the escalating tension in Barcelona, the National Committee of the CNT was taken by surprise by events.⁵² The perspective of this leadership was expressed by Joan Manent Pesas, then Ministerial secretary to Joan Peiró, who remembered that ‘from a governmental point of view, for us it was catastrophic, so much so that it was as if we were going to lose the war the next day’.⁵³ Despite *Solidaridad Obrera* describing the attack on the *Telefónica* as a ‘monstrous provocation’ on 4 May, it made no gesture of support for those of its readers behind the

⁵¹ Active participation in the Barcelona CNT varied, as before the war, from industry to industry, and from one workplace to the next. Even in this most revolutionary of cities, it was possible for activists to feel ‘isolated’ as anarchists in their workplace, ‘Antonia Fontanillas. Correspondence with the author’ (Dreux, 2012). Some examples of the difficulties the CNT faced during the war in galvanizing the Barcelona work-force to participate actively in the work-place are provided in Michael Seidman, *Workers Against Work. Labor in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), p. 95. That this should not be overstated, however, is indicated by the grass-roots support for the socialisation campaign discussed in the previous chapter.

⁵² Jordi Arquer, a leading member of the POUM, was in Valencia when news of the May days arrived. He was able to speak to Joan Peiró, who was none the wiser about what was taking place in Barcelona. See the Jordi Arquer file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p.74

⁵³ Joan Manent Pesas file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 57.

barricades.⁵⁴ At this point, state power in the city was effectively confined to the centre and, with the artillery at the hill of Montjuïc in the hands of the CNT and trained on the Generalitat, the revolutionaries held the upper hand. As much was enthusiastically conveyed to a meeting of representatives of the Catalan libertarian movement by Merino on the morning of 4 May, in spite of Valerio Más, Regional Secretary of the Catalan CNT, warning those in attendance of the danger facing the movement if the situation was allowed to continue.⁵⁵ By contrast, Merino reported that, from his point of view ‘our position is unimprovable... The fact that we have been able to take the city and to take Civil Guards prisoner should give an idea of the state of our morale; that is to say, that of our comrades’.⁵⁶

This apparent slip of the tongue would likely have revealed to those present the extent of Merino’s involvement, if his detailed knowledge of the situation had not already done so. In any case, the ‘governmental point of view’ was not dominant at this meeting, where several delegates raised possibilities that went beyond the resignation of those responsible, which was considered a minimum requirement for the cessation of hostilities by the delegates of the unions and the representative of the defence committees. Other delegates stressed their opposition to negotiations with the Generalitat. The delegate from Gerona declared that ‘it is useless to hold joint rallies: we are like the spider and the fly. We have to go all out [to finish with] the Government. If we allow our governmental activity to get in our way we will never be able to operate freely’. The delegate from the Healthworkers’ union expressed a ‘conviction that we have been too tolerant. The order of the day is to liquidate these provocations, so that nobody dare contradict the Organisation. With the facts as they stand we are convinced that if the Government is to take a step back for once then it will be due to fear’. The

⁵⁴ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 4 May 1937.

⁵⁵ ‘Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día cuatro de mayo de 1937, por el Comité Regional y los demás comités responsables de Cataluña’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 85 C.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

delegate from the Food Supplies Union found it ‘paradoxical that we are about to enter talks with those who less than a few hours ago were calling us mutinous and uncontrollable’.⁵⁷ The meeting ended, as one delegate noted, with two positions in evidence, which while not explicitly stated had to do with whether the CNT would be prepared to head up the mobilisation, with the implication of bringing down the Generalitat, or whether it would continue to negotiate with its governmental partners. While the negotiations continued, the meeting ended with the more radical option hanging in the air.

That same day, *La Batalla*, the daily newspaper of the POUM, called on the working class to form committees for the defence of the revolution.⁵⁸ This was to be the closest that the POUM would come to taking the initiative during the events, as the party was understandably unwilling to act independently of the CNT. Representatives of the POUM met with the regional CNT leadership at the beginning of the fighting, on the night of 3 May. Their proposal, to form a joint revolutionary leadership and ‘destroy the internal enemy’, was politely rebuffed.⁵⁹ Juan Andrade, of the POUM executive, also made contact with the Regional Committee of the FAI during the events, and towards the end of the fighting urged a co-ordinated military action that would at least secure a better bargaining position for the revolutionaries, but this was also rejected by the anarchists.⁶⁰ Although unlikely to have been decisive, Andrade’s decision to approach the Regional Committee of the FAI, as opposed to the more radical Local Federation

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See Weisbord, ‘Barricades in Barcelona’ and Wilebaldo Solano, ‘La Juventud Comunista Ibérica en las Jornadas de Mayo de 1937 en Barcelona’ <<http://www.fundanin.org/jcimayo.htm>> [accessed 15 September 2014].

⁵⁹ See Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 433, from which the reference to destroying the internal enemy is taken (Bolloten is quoting Julián Gorkin, a member of the POUM’s executive committee). See also the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 42-4.

⁶⁰ Juan Andrade, ‘La revolución española y el POUM’, in *Juan Andrade (1897-1981). Vida y voz de un revolucionario*, ed. by Pelai Pagès, Jaime Pastor and Miguel Romero (Madrid: La Oveja Roja, 2008), p. 90.

which was directly involved in the events, was indicative of the distance of the POUM from the internal radicalisation of the anarchist movement in Barcelona.

The mobilisation in defence of the revolution had revealed to the participants the opportunity to deliver a comprehensive blow to the counterrevolution in the city. The Thalmanns, stationed behind a barricade on La Rambla de les Flors on the first night of the fighting, recalled that the workers there were convinced that ‘now the end had arrived for the Stalinists in Cataluña’.⁶¹ Moving from the defensive to the offensive had further implications, however: would the victorious revolutionaries impose their programme? The situation in May brought back to the surface the questions the libertarians had debated in July, that of collaborating with the state or ‘going for everything’.⁶² By May, however, the experience of what one member of the JJLL described as ‘forty-eight hours of revolution and ten months of counter-revolution’ had given a clearer, if not a definitive, idea of what ‘going for everything’ could mean in the context of civil war and revolution: socialisation of industry, unity based on loyalty to the revolution, and the people armed.⁶³ It was also clear that these ends could not be attained while the government was left standing.

The ‘governmental point of view’ of the National Committee of the CNT was now divided from that of the activists of Barcelona by a labyrinth of barricades. Appealing over the radio for calm on 4 May, García Oliver, who had arrived in Barcelona on a peace-making mission, declared that ‘even if I had a rifle or a bomb in my hand, I would not know against whom to fire, because all those fighting are my brothers’.⁶⁴ This speech was so far removed from what the young militants who idolised him expected to hear that rumours proliferated that the Minister of Justice had been

⁶¹ Thalmann, ‘La sublevación en Cataluña’, p. 114.

⁶² This is discussed in Helmut Rüdiger, *Ensayo crítico sobre la revolución española* (Buenos Aires: Imán, 1940), p. 23; Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 143, and García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 429.

⁶³ *Ideas*, 20 May 1937. The quote is from an article by Francisco Pérez, a member of the JJLL in Tamarite (Aragón).

⁶⁴ García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 426.

taken hostage and forced to make the speech under duress.⁶⁵ As far as the *comités superiores* were concerned, however, the combatants had allowed themselves to be provoked by their adversaries and, incorrectly believing themselves to be defending the CNT, were in fact risking a military disaster for which the organisation would be blamed.⁶⁶ This stance put the exhortations to workers to resist disarmament of a few days earlier in perspective, and whether or not such slogans were merely hot air, the incompatibility of maintaining a position of even nominal resistance to state reconstruction while participating in that same process was brutally exposed by the events of May. Any contemporary hopes that these same committees would lead the libertarian movement in an offensive against the counterrevolution were thus to be disappointed.⁶⁷

The ‘*comités superiores de defensa*’: from a plan of attack to demobilisation

On 5 May, those coordinating the neighbourhood defence committees drew up their plans for the military defeat of the forces of the state in Barcelona. The Italian anarchist Ernesto Bonomini, then sharing a house in the city with Camillo Berneri, reported that, at the end of the second day of fighting, the defence committees decided to mount a final assault on the enemy positions, whereupon ‘The comrades in the castle at Montjuïc immediately put themselves at the orders of the [neighbourhood defence] committee, and at the agreed hour were prepared to bombard the Generalitat, the police station and

⁶⁵ See Peirats, *The CNT Vol. 2*, pp. 123-4. For the disbelieving and indignant reactions to the speeches over the radio of the CNT and the FAI representatives, see Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 379 and p. 382, the ‘García’ file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 19, and Bonomini, ‘Semana sangrienta’, p. 153.

⁶⁶ See the official report compiled by the National Committee in the aftermath of the events and published as an appendix in Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución*, pp. 255-63, also García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 420.

⁶⁷ See the contemporary, eye-witness reflections on the possibilities and dangers for the CNT should it take an aggressive stance in Jane H. Patrick, ‘Cuatro cartas de Barcelona’ in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, pp. 165-7. Jane Patrick was a veteran Glaswegian anarchist and one of the founders of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, who had travelled to Barcelona with fellow anarchist Ethel MacDonald.

the Hotel Colón [Headquarters of the PSUC Central Committee]'.⁶⁸ The defence committees in the suburbs were told to ready themselves to march on the centre of the city and occupy centres of government and the premises of the PSUC.⁶⁹ The Tierra y Libertad column, stationed at the Espartaco barracks, which had at first maintained an almost entirely defensive posture, prepared to launch an operation to overpower the Communist-controlled Carlos Marx barracks, also on 5 May.⁷⁰ In Gràcia, on the initiative of the neighbourhood defence committee, an agreement for coordinated action was established between the POUM, the CNT defence committees, the JJLL, the JCI and the DAS.⁷¹ That same day, amid rumours that the POUM was about to be declared illegal, the party activists stationed in its headquarters on Barcelona's main thoroughfare, La Rambla, reluctantly readied themselves for an assault on the nearby Café Moka, which had been occupied by Assault Guards.⁷²

According to Joan 'Remi', this plan 'did not come from the Regional Committee or the Local Federation but from the Regional Committee of defence groups [the Regional Defence Committee]... which had nothing to do with the Regional Committee of the union... The defence groups were something separate, and they'd reached the limit of their patience'.⁷³ The delegate of this Regional Defence Committee present at

⁶⁸ See Ernesto Bonomini, 'Semana sangrienta' in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ Ibid., for the general outline of the plan. On the column organised in Sants, see 'Entrevista amb Joan "Remi"', p. 98, and for Gràcia, the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 48-9.

⁷⁰ See Aldo Aguzzi, 'Un anarquista italiano en las Jornadas de Mayo', in *Barcelona, mayo 1937*, p. 160.

⁷¹ See the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 54. In 'La Juventud Comunista Ibérica en las Jornadas de Mayo', Solano makes the link between the policy advocated in *La Batalla* on 4 May and the formation of this committee. The JJLL delegate at a meeting of the *comités superiores* of the libertarian movement would later affirm that links between the JJLL and the POUM had been formed purely on a temporary basis and due to the exigencies of the moment, see 'Reunion extraordinaria del comité regional de Cataluña con asistencia de la camarada ministra de sanidad, el comité nacional y demás comités y camaradas responsables de la organización. Celebrada el día 8 de Floreal de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A. Neither source is particularly reliable, given that Solano, as an important figure in the POUM, may have wished to overstate the influence of that organisation, while the JJLL representative, questioned by the libertarian movement's leadership in the hostile and panicked atmosphere following the May events, would have been prudent to play down any such initiative. For his part, Helmut Kirschey, a leading figure in the DAS, would later affirm that he had had no contact with the POUM at all, see Kirschey, 'A las barricadas', p. 176. Solano's recollections to Fraser that it was the defence committee of Gràcia who took the initiative seems the most plausible explanation.

⁷² Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 117.

⁷³ 'Entrevista amb Joan "Remi"', p. 103.

the meeting of representatives of the Catalan libertarian movement on the morning of 5 May was evidently under pressure from those behind the barricades to sanction a plan of attack: 'We can't put up with any more. We will be in serious danger if we don't act quickly. We can't hold back the neighbourhoods any longer, they want an all-out attack and nothing else.'⁷⁴ García Oliver reports seeing Julián Merino in the 'Casa CNT-FAI' 'giving orders on a telephone reserved for the Regional Committee', and it is highly likely that Merino was a delegate member of the regional organisation co-ordinating the defence committees.⁷⁵ Matías Suñer Vidal, a member of the FAI who participated in the fighting, testified that at this time he was 'at the orders of a secret revolutionary committee [of which Merino was a member]... that directed military operations against the PSUC' - we might assume this was the Regional Defence Committee.⁷⁶ Severino Campos later recalled that Merino convoked the meeting of 5 May.⁷⁷ It may well have been Merino who made the suggestion at this meeting that a 'Council of Defence' be formed.⁷⁸ In any event, the meeting ended with the decision to nominate new members to the Regional Defence Committee who would augment the existing body. These new members were José Manzana and José Xena, to be aided by the CNT Councillor for Defence in the Generalitat, Francisco Isgleas, and Gregorio Jover, a veteran *cenetista* and former member of the *Nosotros* affinity group, who was at that point lieutenant colonel of a division on the Aragón front, back in Barcelona briefly on account of the unfolding crisis. He had brought with him a resolution agreed by those in his division to

⁷⁴ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada por el Comité Regional de Cataluña con asistencia de casi todos los compañeros más responsables de la organización', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 85 C.

⁷⁵ García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, p. 421.

⁷⁶ See 'Suñer Vidal, Matias' (2016) <<http://militants-anarchistes.info/spip.php?article13135>> [accessed 4 June 2016].

⁷⁷ See Giménez, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche*, p. 567.

⁷⁸ While the possibility that this delegate was suggesting the formation of an alternative authority to that of the Generalitat is seductive, it is impossible to verify. The word used is not 'Junta' but 'Consejo', evoking the Defence Council of Aragón, which Merino was involved in founding. Nevertheless, it also seems possible that what was being suggested was the broadening of the existing Regional Defence Committee, which is what in fact took place. Nor is it clear who was speaking, as the delegate appears in the minutes as 'F.L', which could stand for the Local Federation of Affinity Groups (Merino), or the Local Federation of Unions.

march on Barcelona, which was, in a further example of how democratic procedure at the front was trumped by bureaucratic procedures in the rear, rejected by the delegates at the meeting, seemingly without discussion.⁷⁹ Following the failure of García Oliver to make an impact on the combatants, the broadening of the Regional Defence Committee suggests an attempt by the regional *comités superiores* to co-opt it, in tacit recognition that it was its authority, not that of the *comités superiores*, that was respected on the barricades. Although this manoeuvre is not alluded to in the historiography, it would seem likely that these heavyweight additions to the defence committee structure played a significant role in the subsequent demobilisation of the rising. Significantly, the account of Matías Suñer Vidal also names Manzana as a member of the committee directing events on the ground.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, perhaps as a consequence of the plans of the defence committees to move onto the offensive, elements of the AAD saw an opportunity to advance their programme. Delegates from the *Agrupación* had already met with representatives of the POUM executive committee on 4 May, agreeing that the best that could be hoped for from events was an orderly withdrawal following the abandonment of the barricades by the governmental forces and assurances that no repression would be visited upon the combatants.⁸¹ On 5 May, however, the grouping drew up and distributed a leaflet

⁷⁹ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada por el Comité Regional de Cataluña con asistencia de casi todos los compañeros más responsables de la organización'.

⁸⁰ 'Suñer Vidal, Matías'. The other person named as a member of this committee is Luciano Ruano, pseudonym of the Argentinian anarchist Rodolfo Prina. Ruano had been a part of the action group that murdered the Catalan nationalist former police chief Miquel Badía and his brother in April 1936. His presence at the meeting of 5 May is confirmed by Campos: see Gimenoólogos, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche*, p. 567. His membership of the Regional Defence Committee in May 1937 would appear unlikely, although it should not be discounted, due to his having been sentenced to death by a meeting of the CNT-affiliated metalworkers' union on 27 January 1937, for crimes of robbery and murder committed in the Aragonese countryside: see Agustín Guillamón, 'Justo Bueno (1907-1944)' (2014) <<http://grupgerminal.org/?q=system/files/JustoBueno-1907-1944-Guillamon.pdf>> [accessed 4 June 2016]. His tenure as Durruti's replacement on the Aragón front had also brought accusations of arbitrary shootings and plunder. His eventual murder, carried out on 15 July, appears to have taken place with the common consent of the regional *comités superiores* and even his friend and fellow action group member Justo Bueno. His girlfriend, his brother and his brother's girlfriend were killed alongside him. For further biographical information see Gimenoólogos, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche*, pp. 557-69.

⁸¹ See Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 70.

behind the revolutionary barricades, urging the combatants to remain at their posts. It demanded the execution of those responsible for the provocation, the socialisation of industry and the replacement of the Generalitat with a revolutionary Junta in which the POUM, having fought alongside the revolutionaries, would be represented.⁸² The leaflet was later disowned in the strongest terms by the Regional Committee, which described its content as ‘absolutely intolerable’ and further stated that, a new government of the Generalitat having been formed, ‘everyone must accept its decisions given that we are all represented within it.’⁸³ The leaflet was only distributed with great difficulty. Badius would later state that some people lost their lives while distributing it, while the manner in which it was received by the combatants evidently varied from the enthusiastic to the hostile.⁸⁴ The newspaper of the *Agrupación, El Amigo del Pueblo*, would later claim that the leaflet was received ‘with jubilation’ on the part of ‘the men of the barricades’.⁸⁵ By contrast, Clara and Paul Thalmann, who helped distribute the leaflet, recalled that ‘Everywhere we were received with distrust... In many places we came across a brusque refusal, they rejected us.’⁸⁶

The AAD was not the appropriate formation to take on a vanguard role at this time, and it was probably not the intention of its chief animators that it should do so, in spite of the hopes of the international, heterodox leftist milieu that had gravitated towards it.⁸⁷ The question at issue was whether the revolutionaries of the defence committees would be able to follow through with their plans, not only in flagrant

⁸² See AGRUPACIÓN “AMIGOS DE DURRUTI”, ‘Trabajadores’, PDLR, Fons DH, DH 6 (1), 4-Amigos de Durruti (CNT-FAI). The leaflet is reproduced in Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 78.

⁸³ See the report attached to a FAI circular dated 1 June 1937, ‘FAI Comité Peninsular Secretariado. Circular 28-1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 49 A. See also *La Noche*, 6 May 1937. The Councillors of the Generalitat had collectively resigned and been replaced by a temporary ‘unity’ government of the anti-fascist forces on 5 May.

⁸⁴ See the letter of Jaime Badius to Burnett Bolloten, 24 June 1946, reproduced in Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 155.

⁸⁵ See *El Amigo del Pueblo*, 12 June 1937.

⁸⁶ See Thalmann, ‘La sublevación en Cataluña’, p. 116.

⁸⁷ Aside from the Thalmanns this milieu also included Moulin, the pseudonym of Hans David Freund, who assumed leadership of the Trotskyists in Spain during the May days and had maintained some contact with the AAD.

opposition to the desires of the *comités superiores*, three of whose chief representatives, Rodríguez Vázquez, García Oliver and Montseny, were now in Barcelona, despatched from Valencia by Largo Caballero to call for calm, but also in spite of the new additions to the Regional Defence Committee. Time was of the essence. While Pons Prades remembered that nobody among the libertarians doubted that ‘in the end we would make ourselves the masters of Barcelona’, the reality was that hunger and fatigue would come into play the longer a state of watchful deadlock was maintained.⁸⁸ As much had been predicted on 4 May by ‘Aurelio’ (probably Aurelio Fernández in spite of it being unusual to have delegates identified by their first names in the minutes of meetings): ‘This is going to end in chaos, through fatigue. They’ll go at it today, tomorrow as well, but in a few days tiredness will conquer everyone, if not the lack of ammunition. The movement must be directed: does that suit the CNT or not?’⁸⁹ The following day it was reported that the CNT activists in the *Telefónica* building had not eaten since the events began.⁹⁰

On 5 May, the anarchist emissaries of the Republican government in Valencia were locked in negotiations with the Generalitat.⁹¹ Pressured by the *comités superiores* to await their outcome, the neighbourhood defence committees instructed the improvised columns preparing to march on the centre from the suburbs to hold back.⁹² The members of these columns belonging to the POUM were advised by Nin of the impossibility of proceeding without the co-operation of the CNT, and thus the attack on the Café Moka also failed to materialise.⁹³ Meanwhile, the commander of the Tierra y

⁸⁸ Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 77.

⁸⁹ ‘Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día cuatro de mayo’.

⁹⁰ ‘Reunión extraordinaria celebrada por el Comité Regional de Cataluña con asistencia de casi todos los compañeros más responsables de la organización’.

⁹¹ See the National Committee report in Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución*, p. 258 and Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la Guerra*, p. 167.

⁹² ‘Entrevista amb Joan “Remi”’, p. 130.

⁹³ See Solano, ‘La Juventud Comunista Ibérica en las Jornadas de Mayo’ and the manifesto written by Andreu Nin in the aftermath of the events and distributed around the working class districts of Barcelona, in Nin, *La revolución Española*, p. 336.

Libertad column was ordered by the Regional Committee of the CNT not to proceed with the planned assault on the Carlos Marx barracks.⁹⁴ In an effort to break the deadlock, the JJLL in Gràcia launched an extraordinary appeal, addressed ‘to the authentic revolutionaries’:

The continuous provocation brought about by the politicians and the armed police bodies has had as its consequence a new rising of the workers affiliated to the CNT, FAI, JJLL and POUM... It would be a vile joke to play on the comrades who have fallen in the bloody struggles against these animals if we were to accept a new trap laid by the politicians, when it is us workers with arms in hand who must have the final word. If the comrades sealed off in our committees do not have sufficient energy to push on ahead we must relieve them and delegate a Revolutionary Committee capable of doing so. Comrades, it's now or never! Let's do away with the armed police bodies that offer no guarantees as to the revolutionary future. Let's do away with the political parties that attempt to immobilise our cause with their poison. Let us not wait another moment. While some remain on the barricades defending the revolution with arms, others must proceed rapidly to the socialisation of wealth and the means of production. We won't accept ambiguities. Either we get rid of the armed police, politicians and other enemies of the working class or they will get rid of us.... Let us learn from what we've lived through and not leave a single institution standing that represents the hateful past. Revolutionaries! Forward with the social revolution above everyone and everything else!⁹⁵

As with the leaflet produced by the AAD, this proclamation from the JJLL in Gràcia is notable for its acknowledgement of revolutionary solidarity with the POUM and its recognition of the mobilisation as an opportunity to implement the radical programme and rectify the half-measures of July that had left standing the institutions of ‘the hateful past’. It is also notable for its derision of the *comités superiores*, ‘sealed off’ from

⁹⁴ See Aguzzi, ‘Un anarquista italiano’, p. 160.

⁹⁵ ‘Las Juventudes Libertarias de Gracia a los auténticos Revolucionarios’, Fons ANCI-1 / Generalitat de Catalunya (Segona República).

events. However, while the solution of these ‘authentic revolutionaries’ was to replace these committees, to do so they required, at the very least, the backing of the defence committees that had initiated the rising.

At that point, the members of the JJLL and the neighbourhood defence committees on the ground were anxiously awaiting word from what Joan ‘Remi’ intriguingly refers to as the ‘*comités superiores de defensa*’, that is to say, the committees that co-ordinated the defence committees at a local and regional level.⁹⁶ These committees were under a great deal of pressure, and had no doubt been made aware by their new members and by the *comités superiores* that an autonomous initiative would be disowned by the organisation. Diego Camacho recalled that the delegates from the neighbourhood defence committee, transmitting information to the JJLL headquarters in Gràcia, were conscious that the representatives of the Generalitat were not negotiating in good faith and that the logic of the *comités superiores*, in insisting on a negotiated settlement, was flawed. Nevertheless:

...the idea that anarchism must never be tainted with the responsibility of losing the war seemed to weigh upon them. It was, therefore, that fear that produced the committees’ hesitation with regard to adopting a radical resolution.⁹⁷

As Wilebaldo Solano affirmed with regard to the defence committees:

It is highly difficult that this kind of position... crystallises and affirms itself. There is discontent. There is unease. There is even opposition... But from that to a clear rupture... there is a big difference... What is more is the question of pride in the organisation. They were capable of

⁹⁶ ‘Entrevista amb Joan “Remi”’, p. 130. The plural is used here following Joan ‘Remi’ but it would seem more likely, from the minutes of the regional meetings, that there was only one such committee operating in Barcelona, which was probably the Regional Defence Committee that, before the war, had been composed of members of the *Nosotros* affinity group but whose composition had changed immediately once the conflict began. See Chapter One. It is possible that ‘Remi’ is referring to both this committee and the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, which is to say, the principal source of Merino’s authority.

⁹⁷ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 165-6.

criticising the organisation, of criticising their leaders. But the moment arrived at which the criticism halted. The definitive step was not taken.⁹⁸

Josep Rebull, a local member of the POUM, would state that the failure of the revolutionaries to take the Generalitat by force could only be explained by such 'psychological factors'.⁹⁹ A further point must be borne in mind, however, which was unknown to these activists of the POUM and which has generally been disregarded by the historiography, which is that the composition of the body co-ordinating the defence committees in Barcelona had been augmented at the meeting of 5 May by the nomination of four additional members. Of these, Isgleas was a Councillor in the Generalitat and Manzana a front-line officer who had overseen the militarisation of the Durruti Column. While the position of Xena and Jover was more ambiguous, it is probable that by the afternoon of 5 May, the initial members of the committee were not acting with a free hand, regardless of whether its members were assailed by doubts or not. To judge by his subsequent behaviour, discussed in the following chapters, it would seem that Merino, at least, was untroubled by such 'psychological factors', although he would later admit to bitterness as to the lack of courage shown by his comrades.¹⁰⁰

The orders of the defence committees to hold back were not uniformly accepted throughout the revolutionary ranks and arguments reportedly raged in the Espartaco barracks, where the Tierra y Libertad column was stationed, and in the 'Casa CNT-FAI' itself.¹⁰¹ In spite of the combative manifestos put out by the JJLL and the AAD, however, the backing of the defence committees was crucial to the success of the mobilisation, and it is unlikely that any initiative external to those bodies was ever

⁹⁸ See the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 127.

⁹⁹ Rebull, 'Las Jornadas de mayo'. Rebull, isolated on the extreme left of the POUM, attempted during the May days to persuade the Executive Committee of his party to undertake an independent military initiative to secure a better bargaining position for the revolutionaries. This attempt came to naught. See Agustín Guillamón, 'Josep Rebull de 1937 a 1939: la crítica interna a la política del CE del POUM durante la Guerra de España', *Balance. Cuadernos de historia del movimiento obrero*, 19 and 20 (2000).

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter Five.

¹⁰¹ See Aguzzi, 'Un anarquista italiano', p. 160 and Rüdiger, *Ensayo crítico sobre la revolución española*, p. 23.

considered. Even the leaflet of the AAD issued on 5 May should not be seen in that context. While the line it expressed was clearly contrary to the pacifying appeals of the *comités superiores*, the AAD did not believe itself capable of carrying out its programme alone, but instead wanted to win support for that programme within the movement in order to influence the policy of the organisations. It was later affirmed, in the by-then underground organ of the *Agrupación*, that ‘We were not going to attempt an isolated action or persevere with a conduct that we could not sustain with the resources of the *Agrupación* alone.’¹⁰² Juan Andrade, who had contact with members of the AAD, later recalled that ‘[the AAD] did not want to be anything more than an internal opposition within the FAI’.¹⁰³

By Thursday, with the arrival of well-armed Assault Guards from Valencia imminent, the slow abandonment of the barricades had begun. The Catalan flag replaced the black and red flag of the CNT flying over the *Telefónica* building.¹⁰⁴ But the May days did not represent a victory for Catalan nationalists as such, as the effective autonomy enjoyed by the region since July came to an end with the arrival of the Assault Guards and the assumption of central governmental control over public order.¹⁰⁵ The anarchists’ contestation of the state’s monopoly of violence was dealt a severe blow when, on Friday 7 May, it was announced that the *Patrullas de Control* had placed themselves at the orders of the central government. That same day, *Solidaridad Obrera* appeared in a special edition of two pages, declaring the struggle to be over and

¹⁰² *El Amigo del Pueblo*, 12 June 1937.

¹⁰³ Andrade, ‘La revolución española y el POUM’, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ See Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War*, pp. 279-83. Orwell observed that, in the wake of the May days, the Republican flag became visibly prominent in Barcelona for the first time during the conflict, see Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, p. 123.

reproducing appeals for calm and serenity from Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez and Federica Montseny.¹⁰⁶

The bleak prediction of the radicals regarding the consequences of inaction proved correct. While the *comités superiores* of the CNT had done what they could to hold back their members, their opponents had taken advantage of what opportunities they had to strengthen their position.¹⁰⁷ At a meeting of the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI on 13 May, Severino Campos, speaking for the Regional Committee of the FAI, declared that ‘When we obeyed the cease-fire, they came against us so violently that we suffered many losses.’¹⁰⁸ Important anarchist critics of the Communist Party and its policy had been murdered. The corpses of twelve members of the Catalan JJLL from the Sant Andreu district were dumped in the cemetery at Cerdanyola. They had been tortured to death on 4 May.¹⁰⁹ The most famous case was that of Camillo Berneri, shot on 5 May along with his comrade and compatriot, Francesco Barbieri.¹¹⁰ Berneri had published scathing critiques of Soviet Union policy, particularly with regard to its continued commercial relations with Nazi Germany and persecution of anarchists, in the Spanish heterodox leftist review *Orto* as far back as August 1933.¹¹¹ He had also publicly defended the POUM and, in an article completed just before his murder, declared the attacks of the PSUC on the POUM to be ‘an act of sabotage against the anti-fascist struggle’.¹¹² As his residence was situated next to a PSUC-controlled

¹⁰⁶ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 May 1937. The placing of the *Patrullas* at the service of the government took place on Thursday 6 May, according to the CNT’s own report. See Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución*, p. 261.

¹⁰⁷ See the report of the National Committee of the CNT in Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución*, p. 261; Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 163 and p. 171; Aguzzi, ‘Un anarquista italiano’, pp. 160-1 and Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la Guerra*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁸ See ‘Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña, estando presentes todos los Comités responsables, celebrado en el día 13 de Floreal del año 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 39 A.

¹⁰⁹ See Aguilera, *Compañeros y camaradas*, pp. 124-5.

¹¹⁰ Their deaths were reported in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 11 May 1937.

¹¹¹ See Camillo Berneri, ‘Moscú y Berlín’, in *Orto (1932-1934) revista de documentación social*, ed. by Javier Paniagua (Valencia: Biblioteca Historia Social, 2001), pp. 989-93.

¹¹² Camillo Berneri, ‘En defensa del POUM’ <<http://www.fundanin.org/berneri2.htm>> [accessed 9 February 2016].

barricade, once it had been registered and his identity confirmed, his fate was sealed.¹¹³

In an ex post facto justification for his death, the PCE's official history of the war would later label him as the 'chief theoretician of the "putschist" policy'.¹¹⁴

On 7 May, the Local Federation of the JJLL met to exchange impressions of what had occurred. Although there was agreement on the need to adopt procedures appropriate to underground activity, there was no such accord as to the import of the events. Diego Camacho remembered that: 'I had a Bolshevik conception of the revolution. I thought that... having failed to assault the Palace of the Generalitat and put the Stalinists of the PSUC to the sword, we had been defeated.'¹¹⁵ The young libertarian was, however, struck by the optimism of Diego Ruiz Arnau, an anarchist doctor then in his mid-50s, who considered that the people had 'demonstrated their resolve to confront the counterrevolution'.¹¹⁶ Eduardo Pons Prades was also optimistic that the revolutionaries' show of strength would alter the course of events.¹¹⁷ This echoed the attitude that the CNT's Regional Committee had displayed in its meeting with the POUM, that the counterrevolutionaries would be given pause now that the workers had 'shown their teeth'.¹¹⁸ At a meeting of the *comités superiores* immediately after the events, discussed below, Josep J. Domènech, the former Supplies Councillor of the Generalitat and then Public Services Councillor, in a comment that reflected the complacency and ingenuity of the leading stratum of the CNT-FAI at this time, affirmed that, with 'tact and good sense', the *Telefónica* would soon be returned to the control of the CNT, because the new occupants knew nothing of telephones!¹¹⁹ However, the

¹¹³ See Guillamón, *Los Comités de Defensa*, pp. 238-40.

¹¹⁴ *Guerra y Revolución en España 1936-1938*, Vol. 3, coord. by Dolores Ibárruri (Moscow: Editorial Progreso, 1971), p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 174.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

¹¹⁷ See the Eduardo Pons Prades file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 71.

¹¹⁸ See the Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, pp. 42-4.

¹¹⁹ See 'Reunión extraordinaria del comité regional de Cataluña con asistencia de la camarada ministra de sanidad, el comité nacional y demás comités y camaradas responsables de la organización. Celebrada el día 8 de Floreal de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 39 A.

disappearance on Friday 7 May of Alfredo Martínez, member of the Regional Committee of the JJLL and secretary of the FJR, was the first sign that the cessation of hostilities would not imply an end to the repression, which was given a particularly grisly aspect by the convergence of a triumphal imposition of ‘order’ on the part of the police and the instructions given to Stalinists worldwide to exterminate ‘Trotskyists’.¹²⁰ In this regard it is worth noting that Martínez had been the JJLL member ‘who had worked hardest in the creation of the FJR’, and had spoken at a POUM rally in December.¹²¹

In this context of defeat and impending terror, the Thalmanns exchanged impressions with the Trotskyists Erwin Wolf, Moulin and Grandizo Munis, who represented the miniscule Bolshevik-Leninist organisation in Spain (the *Sección Bolchevique-Leninista de España*).¹²² While Munis and Wolf, who had not been in Barcelona during the events, were optimistic about the possibilities for a revolutionary advance, Moulin was circumspect. For the Thalmanns, by contrast, no optimism was warranted: ‘The May uprising, in which we have participated, was the Spanish Kronstadt’, a defeat for the revolution that would prove to be definitive.¹²³ As the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt has historically been defended by the Trotskyist

¹²⁰ Martínez’s disappearance was reported in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 May 1937. On Stalin and the campaign against ‘Trotskyism’, particularly with regard to Spain, see Elorza and Bizcarrondo, *Queridos Camaradas*, pp. 333-4 and pp. 345-6.

¹²¹ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 May 1937.

¹²² The Bolshevik-Leninists were affiliated to Trotsky’s Fourth International organisation, in which some division existed regarding how to relate to the POUM, the target of fierce polemics by Trotsky both before and after the war. See Leon Trotsky, *La revolución Española 1930-1939. Selección de escritos* (Madrid: Diario Pública, 2011), passim. On how the secret services of the USSR conspired to encourage division and mistrust among Trotsky and his followers with regard to Spain, see Georges Vereeken, *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement* (London: New Park, 1976), especially pp. 161-7 and pp. 175-85. Wolf had been Trotsky’s secretary in his Norwegian exile. Both he and Moulin would be murdered by Stalinist agents within months. Munis would survive the war, breaking with the Fourth International over its attitude to the Second World War. A lifelong Marxist, he delivered the eulogy at Trotsky’s funeral, wrote an influential history of the Spanish revolution, and, after returning clandestinely to Spain during the Barcelona tram strike in 1951, spent five years in Franco’s jails.

¹²³ Kronstadt is a naval base thirty kilometres west of St Petersburg, whose name has become synonymous with the uprising which took place there in 1921 in the name of soviet democracy, and which was bloodily suppressed by the Bolsheviks, with the personal approval of Lenin and Trotsky. In an article written during his French exile in 1971, Badius would also affirm that ‘May 1937 is the Spanish Kronstadt’. See Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 65.

movement, the Thalmanns' remark left Munis apoplectic. Grinding his teeth, he declared his interlocutors to be 'puerile anarchists' and 'clowns'. Nevertheless, in terms of representing a defeat for working class participation and control that represented a point of no return on the trajectory of the revolution, the Thalmanns' analogy was to prove both prescient and apposite.¹²⁴

The Experience of Defeat

Following the May days, the divide between the leading cadres of the CNT and its remaining activists in the rearguard was such that the organisation has been described as being effectively, if not formally, split.¹²⁵ On the night of 8 May an enlarged meeting of the Catalan libertarian movement took place in Barcelona.¹²⁶ Present were many of the leading figures of the Regional and National Committees of the CNT and the FAI: in addition to Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez and Federica Montseny, yet to return to Valencia, were the Sub-secretary for Defence in the Catalan Government, Juan Manuel Molina, the Public Services Councillor, Josep J. Domènech, the CNT delegate for public order in the Catalan Government and one of those responsible for the *Patrullas de Control*, Dionisio Eroles, a CNT delegate at the Municipal Council, Vicente Perez Combina, and members of the Regional Committee of the FAI and fellow contributors to *Ideas*, José Xena and Severino Campos, along with other delegates from the localities and youth organisations. Earlier that evening members of the Barcelona city police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, had opened fire at the car carrying Federica Montseny, injuring her secretary and another passenger, while others were surrounding the home of Dionisio Eroles even as the meeting took place. Five of Eroles's bodyguard had been taken out of

¹²⁴ For the account of this meeting, see Thalmann, 'La sublevación en Cataluña', pp. 119-20.

¹²⁵ See François Godicheau, *La Guerre d'Espagne*, pp. 330-5.

¹²⁶ 'Reunión extraordinaria del comité regional de Cataluña'.

their homes and shot.¹²⁷ It was therefore in an atmosphere of high tension that the meeting revealed the fault lines that the events of the previous days had brought to the surface in the Spanish libertarian movement. In that context, the leading figures of the organisations continued in their role as ‘fire-fighters’, attempting to calm spirits and stressing the need to avoid being provoked by the forces of law and order.¹²⁸ This attitude was summed up early on in proceedings by the National Secretary, Rodríguez Vázquez, who stated that ‘All problems have to be resolved one by one, with calmness and serenity, sacrificing part of our ideological concepts for the good of the common cause.’¹²⁹

Conflict arose at the meeting over the responsibility of the *comités superiores* for the repression that the newly arrived Assault Guards were unleashing in the Catalan region. The leadership had assured CNT members that the crisis would pass with the removal of the officials responsible for the assault on the *Telefónica* building, and yet, the area around the French border, until recently recognised as a zone of libertarian influence, had been ‘invaded’, averred the delegate Arenas, with the apparent acquiescence of the *comités superiores*. This delegate was almost certainly Juan Giménez Arenas, known as ‘the Quijote of Banat’, a town in the border region of Cataluña, who was secretary of the JJLL in Sants and a former combatant in the Durruti Column, who had taken part in the fighting in May.¹³⁰ A heated argument took place between José Xena and the delegates of the border region.¹³¹ Xena, who had provided the only vote in favour of ‘going for everything’ at the famous Regional Plenum of 21

¹²⁷ See ‘Conferencia celebrada per “Hugues” entre el ministre de sanitat i Marian Vázquez amb ministres de justícia i governació amb referència a la tramesa de forces de seguretat a Catalunya’, Fons ANCI-1, Generalitat de Catalunya (Segona República).

¹²⁸ The appellation ‘fire-fighters’ had been used on the barricades: see ‘Entrevista amb Joan “Remi”’, p. 127.

¹²⁹ ‘Reunión extraordinaria del comité regional de Cataluña’.

¹³⁰ For a short biography, see ‘Juan Giménez Arenas – anarquista conocido como el Quijote de Banat’ <<http://puertoreal.cnt.es/es/bilbiografias-anarquistas/4337-juan-gimenez-arenas-anarquista-conocido-como-el-quiote-de-banat.html>> [accessed 30 July 2014].

¹³¹ ‘Reunión extraordinaria del comité regional de Cataluña’.

July 1936 discussed in Chapter One, had apparently maintained a position of radicalism from that point on. From May, however, we find him continuously demanding internal organisational discipline, part of a wider dynamic by which intermediate cadres whose relationship to state collaboration had been ambiguous found themselves continually facing down lower level activists from the suburbs and provincial towns. His first such test may have been in imposing demobilisation from within the expanded Regional Defence Committee discussed above. Given Xena's prominent role among the radical advocates of socialisation in the previous months, his subsequent activity provides further evidence of the extent to which that campaign had obscured the divisions within the CNT, and which May 1937 would expose.

Further disagreements arose over the question of disarmament and the release of prisoners taken by libertarians during the fighting. On the question of disarmament, José Manzana, another member of the expanded Regional Defence Committee, stated that:

this morning we have spoken to the neighbourhood committees and these are resisting as far as possible... the voluntary hand-over of weapons. Naturally, if we impose ourselves they will do so, but that would be unjust given that we have spent twenty years inculcating rebelliousness and disobedience in the masses and cannot all of a sudden demand that they be obedient and disciplined... it is not right that a weapon that is worth a life and the sacrifice of several comrades be handed over like this.¹³²

The delegate for the Defence Section of the CNT explained the reluctance of the neighbourhood defence committees to release their prisoners, four hundred of whom had in fact been released the previous day by the defence committee of the Sants neighbourhood, without assurances that the same magnanimity would be shown the

¹³² Ibid.

imprisoned comrades of the CNT.¹³³ This produced a heated debate with Miguel Barrachina, who had been a member of the defence committee of Gràcia in July 1936, who insisted on the need to obey the agreements taken by the organisation. To this the exasperated delegate for the Defence Section declared that ‘for the agreements to be obeyed they must be approved beforehand in consultation with the comrades’.¹³⁴ It was clear, however, that for the *comités superiores*, further debate was to be avoided, and no further guarantees from the government or the PSUC were to be sought, still less wrested by force.

While there can be no doubt that the leading cadres of the CNT saw the May insurrection as a disaster and a return to normality as desirable, their insistence on releasing prisoners with no sign that their enemies would follow suit is hard to explain. The priority of the organisation was to avoid culpability for a collapse of the anti-fascist front. The order of the day was to avoid provoking further disharmony, an attitude which extended to discouraging relatives of those who had been killed in the fighting from attending their funerals, for fear that they might ‘mount some sort of demonstration’.¹³⁵ This was combined with complacency as to the power and political will of their rivals, particularly those in the security forces and in the PSUC. Sure that the provocative manoeuvre of May had ‘failed’, the National Committee of the CNT

¹³³ *Solidaridad Obrera* had reported the release of the prisoners with the accompanying reflection: ‘It would be logical for such a noble gesture to be met with an analogous response from their opponents of yesterday, but friends of today’: *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 May 1937.

¹³⁴ ‘Reunion extraordinaria del comité regional’.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* The approach of the CNT to the deaths of its members during the May fighting presents a remarkable contrast with the previous tendency to make martyrs of the fallen. See Casanova, *Anarchism*, p. 150. See also the advice given to those grieving in *Solidaridad Obrera*, 7 May 1937. The funeral cortege of Camillo Berneri was accompanied, in defiance of orders, by members of the DAS, carrying a black flag. See Francisco Madrid, ‘Los anarquistas internacionales en la Revolución Española’ (n.d.) <<http://www.cedall.org/Documentacio/IHL/Anarquistas%20Revolucion%20Espanola.pdf>> [accessed 5 August 2014]. The report of the funeral in *Solidaridad Obrera* also noted a significant representation of Italian comrades, see *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 May 1937. Outside of Barcelona, the rules were relaxed. An ‘enormous multitude of comrades’ accompanied the corpse of the 19-year old member of the JJLL, Isidoro Martínez García, at his funeral in Badalona. See the CNT-FAI’s organ in that town, *Via Libre*, 8 May 1937.

evidently trusted that the show of strength on the streets would deter their opponents from further provocations.¹³⁶

Relevant in this regard is the discussion of the AAD at the meeting, whose leaflets were described as ‘weapons launched by the true disturbers of order’ to create ‘discord among those who must always be united’. Such intemperate language far exceeded what the *comités superiores* were prepared to use for the agents of state reconstruction, even behind closed doors. Yet more revealing, however, was the admission that the organisation would have to mount a campaign of propaganda to counter the *Agrupación* ‘because the ideas that they express in these leaflets are well received in our ranks’.¹³⁷ Earlier that day, the AAD had distributed a manifesto that affirmed the revolutionary nature of the May days and which castigated the *comités superiores*: ‘The treachery is of an enormous scale. The two essential guarantees of the working class, security and defence, are offered on a plate to our enemies.’¹³⁸ The leaflet went on to affirm that the *Agrupación* remained on a war footing and that its ‘indomitable spirit’ would be maintained. This was to prove particularly difficult, however, as the *comités superiores* moved quickly to crack down on the AAD.

On 12 May, a plenary meeting of individual union leaderships authorised the Local Federation of unions in Barcelona to track down the leadership of the AAD and to demand an explanation from them for the leaflets printed during and after the May days. The following day, at an enlarged meeting of the Catalan Regional Committee, at which representatives from all branches of the libertarian movement were present, a campaign of slander was begun against Jaime Balius, a leading figure within the AAD and by then something of a veteran of the CNT. Attendees were warned that ‘we must have the

¹³⁶ See the report in Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución*, pp. 261-3.

¹³⁷ ‘Reunion extraordinaria del comité regional’.

¹³⁸ See AGRUPACIÓN “AMIGOS DE DURRUTI”, ‘Trabajadores’, PDLR, Fons DH, DH 6 (1), 4-Amigos de Durruti (CNT-FAI). The leaflet is reproduced in Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, pp. 223-7.

upmost care insofar as [the AAD] is concerned, because it is said that the secretary of the group is an old communist'.¹³⁹ At a time when it was frequently averred that the AAD was composed of *agents provocateurs*, the subtle insinuation that Balius might still be serving the interests of 'communists' was a carefully chosen slur designed to cause the grouping the maximum possible discredit. The suggestion that the AAD contained *agents provocateurs* appeared in the CNT's response to the leaflet distributed by the AAD during the May days.¹⁴⁰ *El Amigo del Pueblo*, the mouthpiece of the AAD, appeared for the first time within a week of this meeting in a heavily censored edition that attempted to announce the beginning of a battle over the meaning and purpose of the CNT and the FAI with the headline 'We are not provocateurs! We are the same as ever! Durruti is our guide! His flag is our flag! No-one will take it from us! Long live the FAI! Long live the CNT!'.¹⁴¹ Pressed to provide the Local Federation of unions with a list of the *Agrupación*'s members, the AAD instead responded with a letter advocating that their ideas should be debated at assemblies of unions and CNT activists.¹⁴² This, of course, was out of the question. At the end of the month, it was publicly declared that the AAD had been expelled from the CNT.¹⁴³

By the time that the *Juventudes Libertarias* of Cataluña met for a Regional Congress on 15 May, a whispering campaign had also begun against a leading figure in

¹³⁹ See 'Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña, estando presentes todos los Comités responsables, celebrado en el día 13 de Floreal del año 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 39 A. Prior to 1931, Balius had been active in the ranks of Catalan nationalism. On his conversion to anarchism he briefly passed through the dissident communist Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers' and Peasants' Bloc, later to merge with the Izquierda Comunista de España [Spanish Communist Left] to form the POUM), which at the time was still a part of the CNT. His public repudiation of nationalism and unambiguous adherence to anarchism throughout the Spanish Republic cannot have been unknown to those who now tried to use traditional anarchist antipathy to Marxism against one of those Spanish anarchists who had openly advocated an aggressively anti-Stalinist policy within the CNT.

¹⁴⁰ See *La Noche*, 6 May 1937.

¹⁴¹ *El Amigo del Pueblo*, 20 May 1937.

¹⁴² 'FAI Comité Peninsular Secretariado a las Regionales. Circular 28-1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 49 A.

¹⁴³ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 28 May 1937. Most individual members of the AAD were never successfully expelled from the organisation as the specific union branches to which they belonged, as well as the local organisations of the JJLL, refused to ratify the decision of the *comités superiores*. For further discussion of the AAD in the aftermath of the May events, see Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, pp. 79-94 and Amorós, *La revolución traicionada*, pp. 242-8 and pp. 251-8.

both that formation and the AAD, Juan Santana Calero. It was suggested that Santana Calero had abandoned Málaga precipitously in the face of the fascist advance. His arrival in Barcelona, however, in February 1937, may have been owing to his participation at a rally of the JJLL. José Peirats recalls being told of Santana Calero's apparent 'cowardice' in the aftermath of the May events, which suggests that it was a rumour deliberately concocted at this time.¹⁴⁴ The second week of May had seen the appearance of Santana Calero's flysheet, *Esfuerzo*, in Barcelona. Aside from the manifesto of the AAD, this was probably the first libertarian publication after the May events to offer an unequivocal defence of the revolutionary side in that conflict, likening the revolution's defenders in Barcelona to those who fought fascism at the front and those who had defeated the mutiny in July.¹⁴⁵ The edition called for the release of the revolutionary prisoners and the 'revolutionary defence of the workers against their enemies', and was also noteworthy in maintaining its pre-May attempts to divide the JSU and urging revolutionary unity.¹⁴⁶ This strategy was not limited to Cataluña, as demonstrated by articles highlighting the lack of internal democracy in the JSU and its consequently anti-revolutionary policy in the organ of the CNT in the province of Granada, *Hombres Libres*.¹⁴⁷ This position was, to an extent, echoed in a joint manifesto of the Catalan CNT, FAI and JJLL, made public on 11 May. Although lacking the stridency of *Esfuerzo*, this manifesto appealed to workers of the UGT to distance themselves, on the basis of class unity, from counter-revolutionary politicians.¹⁴⁸ This tactic was to recede in all branches of the libertarian movement, however, and was to suffer an immediate blow at the Regional Congress of the JJLL.

¹⁴⁴ Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 332. See also Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁵ *Esfuerzo*. Periódico mural de las Juventudes Libertarias de Cataluña, second week of May, 1937.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Hombres Libres*, 7 May 1937.

¹⁴⁸ Published in *Ruta*, 14 May 1937.

Santana Calero's call, in *Esfuerzo*, for 'fraternisation and alliance among all young revolutionaries' encountered an obstacle in the form of a policy proposal drawn up for discussion at the Congress, and published beforehand in *Ruta*.¹⁴⁹ The signatories of this proposal had drawn a different conclusion from their experience of the events in May, and urged that relations with all 'political elements' be broken off, stating that 'Our contact with the so called Youth Front should be suspended'.¹⁵⁰ Even after fighting on the same side of the barricades as the POUM, the purist current of the JJLL refused to make distinctions as to the efficacy of alliances with 'Marxists', and had been strengthened in their conviction that such 'political' tactics represented an 'abandonment of principle'.¹⁵¹ The rationale of this approach was explained at the Congress by the delegate for the socialised *Espectáculos Públicos* (show business) industry, who wondered: 'how are we going to unify with young Marxists when they are fighting amongst themselves?'.¹⁵² The nuanced understanding of the leadership of the JSU as something other than 'Marxist', which had allowed Santana Calero among others to appeal to that organisation's membership on the basis of a shared, authentically revolutionary, socialism, had clearly failed to convince all libertarian militants. Nevertheless, the FJR was defended on such terms by several delegates at the Congress. The delegate of the Distribution sector affirmed that the FJR was a vehicle through which to attack the JSU and attract 'the amorphous masses'. The delegate of Premià de Mar went so far as to declare that the participation of the local JJLL in the FJR would continue regardless of the decision of the Congress.¹⁵³ However, the fact that the delegate from Gràcia could support the purists' proposal, even after the formation in that neighbourhood of a committee composed of anarchists and POUM members during

¹⁴⁹ *Ruta*, 14 May 1937. The signatories were the JJLL sections of the anarchist stronghold of La Torrassa in Hospitalet, Seo de Urgel, one of the border regions then experiencing heavy police repression, the Malatesta Battalion, the Barcelona health workers and the town of Mollerusa in the province of Lleida.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² 'Actas del Congreso Regional de las JJLL celebrado en Barcelona los días 15 de mayo y siguientes', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 239/03.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

the May days and the promulgation of a manifesto that explicitly recognised the POUM as ‘authentic revolutionaries’, is demonstrative of the level of opposition to the FJR at the Congress. In spite of evident division, a majority eventually agreed to completely separate the JJLL from ‘political’ activity. The nineteen year old Ramón Liarte was named the new Regional Secretary, in place of Fidel Miró.

Miró’s absence from the Congress may have inclined the balance towards the purist position. Detained during the May events, the outgoing Regional Secretary’s involvement was limited to a letter favouring the continuation of revolutionary unity. Also absent was the Vice Secretary, Alfredo Martínez, the Secretary of the FJR and its most prominent promoter within the JJLL, who was missing, presumably murdered. Aside from these absences and the traditional purist antipathy to ‘politics’, however, it should also be borne in mind that this Congress took place with a national governmental crisis as its backdrop. The crisis had been provoked by Communist determination to accuse the POUM of responsibility for the May events and to have the party declared illegal as a consequence. For the *comités superiores*, also happy for the POUM to take the blame, any association with the party was now toxic. Wilebaldo Solano, Secretary of the POUM’s youth section, the JCI, was therefore correct to perceive a confluence of interests among the *comités superiores* and the purist tendency of the JJLL at this Congress.¹⁵⁴ There was an ‘extensive’ intervention by the Regional Committee of the FAI, which made reference to the ongoing ministerial crisis in Valencia, and bluntly stated that the JJLL lacked a Regional Committee ‘appropriate for the times’.¹⁵⁵ Given that the Secretary of the JJLL was in prison and both the Vice Secretary and a further Committee member, the Uruguayan Juan Rúa, had disappeared, presumed murdered,

¹⁵⁴ Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Actas del Congreso Regional...’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 239/03.

this intervention is illustrative of the kind of cynical opportunism Solano identified.¹⁵⁶ Although the avowed apoliticism of the purists clashed with the policy of the *comités superiores* and would provoke further divisions in the libertarian movement in the months to come, the intention of the former to return the JJLL to a role strictly limited to propaganda and education would have been preferable from the point of view of the *comités superiores* to an ongoing commitment to revolutionary unity with the POUM, with all the complications that might imply for the CNT on a governmental level. In their rejection of ‘politics’, therefore, the purists were, consciously or not, performing a political role. As Solano put it: ‘At that point, they [the *comités superiores*] did not have a replacement team within the JJLL that would carry out their policy and they turned to the most extreme *faistas* with whom they were in disagreement in order to change it’.¹⁵⁷ The voluntarist position, advocated by the likes of Santana Calero and in the May manifesto of the JJLL of Gràcia, could thus be side-lined. Miró, meanwhile, would find himself *persona non grata* at the headquarters of the regional JJLL on his release from prison, and would be coaxed into the national structure of the FIJL as a defender of collaborationist orthodoxy by Pedro Herrera, who was a fellow member of the affinity group *Nervio*, and Rodríguez Vázquez.¹⁵⁸ The attentions of the *comités superiores* would then turn to disciplining the purists.

Meanwhile, the governmental crisis ended when Largo Caballero refused to move against the POUM in the absence of any evidence linking them to the mobilisation of May. This precipitated the withdrawal of the Communist ministers, who were followed by the rest of the cabinet, with the exception of the CNT ministers, the UGT representative Ángel Galarza and Largo Caballero himself. In the resulting negotiations,

¹⁵⁶ Juan Rúa was the Regional Committee delegate for liaison with JJLL combatants in Aragón. He was detained at a control point en route to the front and was never seen again. See Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 178.

¹⁵⁷ Wilebaldo Solano file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 87.

¹⁵⁸ See Miró, *Vida intensa*, p. 206 and pp. 209-10.

Rodríguez Vázquez made it clear on behalf of the CNT that the organisation would not participate in any government over which Largo Caballero did not preside. On 17 May it was officially announced that Juan Negrín would be the new Prime Minister. Negrín was a member of the Socialist Party who had already come into conflict with the CNT in his role as Finance Minister in the outgoing cabinet.¹⁵⁹ Largo Caballero had been ousted from government, and with him went his allies in the CNT.¹⁶⁰ On 18 May *Solidaridad Obrera* declared on its front page that ‘A Counterrevolutionary Government has been formed.’¹⁶¹

The following day the Regional Committees of the Catalan libertarian movement met in an atmosphere of confusion and no little pessimism. Support for the National Committee’s unconditional and unwavering support for Largo Caballero was far from unanimous, but when Severino Campos, the delegate of the Regional Committee of the FAI, attempted to block approval of a national manifesto praising the outgoing Prime Minister, his objections were overruled. This disagreement was revealing of the bureaucratisation of the libertarian movement underway. Campos is recorded as complaining that ‘While it is true that it was agreed that the three Committees [JJLL, CNT and FAI] would work together, the [CNT] Regional Committee of Cataluña has no right to so praise a politician without respecting the vote against doing so of one Committee, which has as much right to express its opinion as any other.’¹⁶² The severity of the situation facing the libertarian movement was beginning to dawn on the *comités superiores*, but in spite of the demands of the delegate of the Regional Defence

¹⁵⁹ See the recollections in the Joan Manent Pesas file, Col·lecció Ronald Fraser, AHCB, p. 50.

¹⁶⁰ On the government crisis, see the accounts from different perspectives given in Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 462-73, Graham, *The Spanish Republic*, pp. 299-307, and Enrique Moradiellos, *Don Juan Negrín* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2006), pp. 245-9. The latter’s interpretation of events is indicated by his loaded description of the CNT’s exit from government as ‘desertion’: Moradiellos, *Don Juan Negrín*, p. 249.

¹⁶¹ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 May 1937.

¹⁶² See ‘Reunión celebrada el día 19 de mayo de 1937, estando presentes los comités: Regional de Cataluña – JJLL-FAI-FL- y DR –Presidentes de sindicatos y cargos representativos’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 95 B.

Committee for ‘urgent measures’ to be taken, the Regional Committee of the CNT insisted once more that ‘no strikes or violent action’ were to be undertaken under any circumstances.¹⁶³ Pérez Combina approached the heart of the matter when he stated that ‘we are the masters of the economic situation, but the economy is useless if alongside it we have no arms... Do not think that we will be respected if we are disarmed’.¹⁶⁴ The next day, the editorial on the front page of *Ideas* took up this theme with characteristic urgency and voluntarism:

Workers! You have the opportunity to be free. For the first time in social history the arms are in our hands; do not release them... Always remember that it is planes, cannon and tanks that the fronts need to quickly overcome fascism... what all the politicians want is to disarm the workers... and take from them everything they have conquered at the cost of so much blood, of so many proletarian lives... Disarm those who want to disarm you.¹⁶⁵

As the May days had demonstrated, however, it was one thing to possess arms, another to use them. With a National Plenum of the libertarian movement approaching, the same edition of *Ideas* drew attention to the issues that would have to be confronted within the libertarian movement before any coordinated approach to the question of arms, and the attendant questions of power and the fate of the revolution, could be broached. ‘Am I to consider counterrevolutionaries to be my brothers?’ wondered the Argentinian painter Gustavo Cochet in one contribution, indicative of the bitterness that the demobilisation had generated:

‘Cease-fire!’ was the cry... Very well, but what conditions were established for the cease-fire to take place? We were not defeated and we could have won, we had force and reason on our side, we had courage

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ *Ideas*, 20 May 1937.

and the consciousness of a revolutionary duty. I repeat: what conditions were demanded?¹⁶⁶

In the event, the National Plenum was a somewhat subdued affair. Although the apparently radical outcome ratified opposition to and non-collaboration with the ‘Government of the Counterrevolution’, of more significance was the ongoing concern for internal discipline and refusal to countenance any further mobilisation ‘on the street’.¹⁶⁷ The delegate for the Central region did envisage the possibility that, with the agreement of the organisation nationally, comrades in Cataluña and Valencia could ‘move fully against the repressive governmental action’, but this intervention found no echo among the other delegates, least of all those from the regions in question. Crucially, the agreement not to collaborate did not extend to a withdrawal of the multiple councillors and municipal delegates of the libertarian movement working in various branches of state administration. Furthermore, it was based on a calculation that the UGT, under the influence of Largo Caballero, would continue in an attitude of hostility to the new government. The flaws in this calculation were becoming apparent even as the Plenum took place, and allowances were made in the agreements to revise the non-collaboration stance should the UGT position change.¹⁶⁸ No critique or reflection on the experience of collaboration itself was made, and the criticism voiced by the Catalan delegates of the National Committee’s handling of the crisis were limited to the ingenuity with which the latter had tied the fate of the organisation in government to the person of Largo Caballero.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. See below for a discussion of Santana Calero’s article in this edition.

¹⁶⁷ See ‘Acuerdos del Pleno Nacional de Regionales celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de mayo de 1937’ included in ‘Circular 25-1937’ from the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, Barcelona, 31 May 1937, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 49 A.

¹⁶⁸ The National Committee highlighted ‘the fact that strong nuclei of the UGT have manifested their adhesion to the current Government, against the position that the Executive adopted from the first moment’. See ‘Actas del Pleno Nacional de Regionales, extraordinario, del Movimiento Libertario, celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de mayo de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 46 B. There was some opposition to making policy dependent on that of the UGT, but this was overcome with the bureaucratic assurance that any new position would be elaborated at a future Congress.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

In short, the Plenum did not reflect the division existent in the libertarian movement, its moment of controversy limited to the Andalusian delegates' censure of a National Committee circular regarding Francisco Maroto.¹⁷⁰ The circular, signed by Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez on 3 May 1937, was issued in response to a letter sent by Maroto, whose imprisonment had become a *cause célèbre* for the libertarian movement throughout the Republican zone. The circular implied that, contrary to widespread libertarian belief, Maroto – a veteran CNT member described variously in the circular as ‘a kid’ and ‘a puppet’ – did indeed have a case to answer.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, it was also clear that his true crime, as far as the National Committee was concerned, was to have publicly criticised the *comités superiores*. There was no sign at the Plenum of what the National Committee referred to in its circular as the ‘notorious irresponsible elements that abound in our ranks’.¹⁷² The expulsion of the AAD was ratified unanimously, and it was decided that Liaison Committees be set up in the regions (albeit with the prior consent of the committees in question) to further cohere the different branches of the libertarian movement.¹⁷³ This latter measure had been proposed by the Catalan delegation to end ‘the lack of unity among the three branches of our movement’. These Committees were to focus on propaganda, defence and investigation, although both the delegation for the Central region and the National Committee also raised the possibility of creating an ‘organ of political direction’ within the movement.¹⁷⁴ In the aftermath of the May events, the *comités superiores* were thus sketching out an institutional

¹⁷⁰ See ‘Comité Nacional Circular Nº 7’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG), 46 B.

¹⁷¹ At a Peninsular Plenum of the FAI in July, Maroto averred that this assertion could have been used against him by the authorities. The response of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI was to repeat the line of the National Committee of the CNT, that Maroto’s temperament had led him into a trap set by his political enemies. See *Memoria del Pleno Peninsular de Regionales celebrado en Valencia los días 4, 5, 6 y 7 de Julio 1937* (Valencia: FAI, 1937), pp. 25-31.

¹⁷² ‘Comité Nacional Circular Nº 7’.

¹⁷³ See ‘Acuerdos del Pleno Nacional de Regionales’.

¹⁷⁴ See ‘Actas del Pleno Nacional de Regionales’.

framework by which the three branches of the libertarian movement could be transformed into a single, top-down entity.¹⁷⁵

Attempts to take up the challenge of the JJLL of Gràcia to replace those *comités superiores* ‘sealed off’ from the rest of the movement would thus face an uphill battle as the ‘bolshevisation’ of the CNT continued apace in spite of the organisation’s exit from central government, an event echoed at the regional level when the reorganisation of the Generalitat led to the ejection of the CNT at the end of June.¹⁷⁶ It is possible that the departure from these governmental bodies in fact accelerated the process of bureaucratisation, as the majority of former Ministers and Councillors would subsequently be ushered into existing or newly established *comités superiores*. In his memoirs, Martínez Prieto alleges that the National Committee under the jurisdiction of Rodríguez Vázquez was ‘converted into a monstrous bureaucratic apparatus full of draft-dodgers and people who did little other than “hang around” and waste time’.¹⁷⁷ In *Ideas* ‘Fontaura’, the veteran purist Vicente Galindo Cortés, wrote that ‘The bureaucracy is taking on terrifying proportions. Certain individuals are living in the best of worlds. They are “emancipated” from labour – because spending three or four hours chatting in an office cannot be called work - and they receive salaries such as they had never dreamed possible.’¹⁷⁸ Although Galindo Cortés did not state clearly that the targets of his reproaches included activists of the CNT, in the chapters that follow we will see more evidence of grass-roots resentment at the proliferation of organisational committees in the libertarian organisations, the majority tasked with imposing internal discipline. In the same edition of *Ideas*, Santana Calero raised the alarm against enforced homogeneity in the libertarian camp, perceiving:

¹⁷⁵ This observation is also made in Peirats, *The CNT*, Vol. 2, p. 184.

¹⁷⁶ The CNT had objected to the reduced influence that it would have in the reshuffled government Companys had initially presented to the organisation. ‘No longer strong enough to impose conditions’, the CNT was simply excluded: Pagès i Blanch, *La Guerra Civil espanyola a Catalunya*, p. 120. See also Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles*, pp. 223-5, and Peirats, *The CNT*, Vol. 2, pp. 198-202.

¹⁷⁷ Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo II*, p. 184.

¹⁷⁸ *Ideas*, 20 May 1937.

an attempt to make of the press and of men, pieces that respond to one leadership, even when that leadership embodies fatal errors for the transformative process of the Spanish Revolution... What is attempted is to paralyse the vigorous offensive against this [collaborationist] line, the results of which have been so deplorable for the revolutionary movement.¹⁷⁹

Making a connection that would become increasingly clear to the ‘anti-statists’ he was addressing, the article accused the *comités superiores* of ‘threatening our principles and, what is worse, denying the consequences of our intervention in the state’.¹⁸⁰ As we will see in the chapters that follow, it would be on the basis of a critique of this intervention that the radical sectors would attempt to alter the course of the libertarian movement in Spain.

Conclusions

The May rising in Barcelona was predicated on the prior crystallisation of a vanguard grouping around the neighbourhood defence committees, the JJLL and the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, organised in defence of a radical programme and mandated by a Plenum of the FAI to struggle against ‘the counterrevolution’. The mobilisation these bodies effected was so successful that it briefly appeared likely that the ‘error’ of July oppositional anarchists had identified would be rectified, and the seat of Catalan government, left standing during the short summer of anarchy, would be toppled in this springtime of the radicals. Nevertheless, the rising failed. The programme of the revolutionary conscience was not carried through to its ultimate conclusion. Worse for the radicals, by showing the limits of the hand they could yet play, they not only failed to mount a thoroughgoing offensive against their adversaries, but also left themselves open to further repression by the state.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

It was not ideological scruples that had prevented the military victory of the revolutionaries but acquiescence to the assertion of the CNT and the FAI's organisational hierarchy. The hypothesis presented here is that the radical anarchists rose on account of the mandate granted by the April plenum of the Barcelona FAI to the defence committees to undertake armed resistance to the 'counter-revolution'. In that sense, we can only appreciate why both the mobilisation and the demobilisation occurred through an understanding of the participants as committed members of organisations whose internal mechanisms they respected. Whether the radicals would have been as prepared to accept the decision to demobilise had they known that the Regional Committee had altered the composition of the Regional Defence Committee is moot. Nevertheless, the addition of four prominent CNT members to this Committee at the regional meeting of 5 May is a significant discovery that enhances our understanding of how this demobilisation was enacted.

Hitherto, explanations for the demobilisation have tended to depend on appeals to the 'psychological factors' discussed above. Without wishing to dismiss their importance, such explanations fail to overcome the logical inconsistency in this argument: that it was the defence committees who ordered both the mobilisation and the demobilisation. Can the abrupt change of tack from planning an all-out assault one day to ordering a demobilisation the next be explained by doubt and organisational loyalty? Perhaps, but it ought to be remembered that the co-ordinators of the initial mobilisation were respectful of the organisational norms of the libertarian organisation and believed the action to have been mandated by constitutional means. Alternative explanations, such as that of Helen Graham, that García Oliver and the *comités superiores* of the libertarian movement 'saw the bigger picture: not only... in terms of the overriding imperatives of the war... but also in terms of the overall balance of firepower *within Republican Spain*', fail to account for the fact that the plan of attack drawn up by the

defence committees was communicated to the barricades after García Oliver's arrival and widely derided appeal.¹⁸¹ Even allowing for the existence of important 'psychological factors' and residual respect for the increasingly 'sealed off' *comités superiores*, it would seem possible that the decision on 5 May to alter the composition of the Regional Defence Committee could have been decisive in tipping the balance. Merino and others co-ordinating the rising may have found themselves outnumbered, their recommendations contradicted, by the new additions with one foot in the Regional Defence Committee and one in the *comités superiores*. It is possible that this was not a conscious manoeuvre on the part of the regional *comités superiores*, but it would not need to have been in order to have an impact, and it follows an established pattern of ad-hoc, bureaucratic resolutions taken behind closed doors undermining the initiative and resolve of those on the street. On the other hand, if it was a conscious manoeuvre then it was a logical one: the *comités superiores* recognised the limitations of their own influence over those on the barricades and took appropriate measures to instead change the composition of the Regional Defence Committee, whose authority certainly was still respected by the broader activist base, as is confirmed by the testimonies of Joan 'Remi' and Matías Suñer Vidal.

The May days had demonstrated that the architects and promoters of the radical programme in Barcelona were far from isolated from the wider membership of the libertarian movement, and remained capable of mobilising broader community support. The participation of the CNT in government, and the maturation of anti-fascism as an emerging dominant ideology in Republican Spain, had not precluded the continued success of the anarchists' anti-state project in Barcelona. When García Oliver entered the 'Casa CNT-FAI' and caught sight of Merino occupying a telephone booth, animatedly making and taking one call after another, it was clear that both the

¹⁸¹ Graham, 'The Barcelona May Days', p. 521.

governmental and radical wings of Spanish anarchism continued to stake a claim to the authority and resources of the libertarian movement. Following these events, it was evident to both sides that such co-existence was no longer possible.

In May 1937, the two faces of Spanish ‘anarcho-Bolshevism’ had confronted one another. The revolutionary conscience mounted an insurrectionary mobilisation in order to defend the revolution and advance the radical programme. The *comités superiores*, identified by the radicals as ‘sealed off’ from the wider membership, saw this mobilisation as a disaster. Members of government in a time of war and leaders of an organisation that was responsible, to a great extent, for the continued ability of the war-time economy to function, their perspective differed entirely from that of the street-level activists who saw in May an opportunity to halt the reconstitution of the state, and to ‘go for everything’. To that extent, the comparison with Kronstadt is even more suggestive, as it pitted the revolutionary conscience against the previously revolutionary leadership:

...what the rebels of Kronstadt demanded was only what Trotsky had promised their elder brothers and what he and the Party had been unable to give. Once again... a bitter and hostile echo of his own voice came back to him from the lips of other people; and once again he had to suppress it.¹⁸²

García Oliver, who had mocked Peiró and Pestaña for failing to take on the mantle of Lenin and Trotsky at the Madrid Congress of 1931, had himself shifted role from dashing strategist of revolutionary action to an increasingly authoritarian defender of the new state order. If May served to confirm this transition, it would become yet more evident in the months that followed. Condemned by the *comités superiores*, the Spanish revolutionary conscience only fell into line when the order to demobilise came from the

¹⁸² Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 512-3.

neighbourhood defence committees, themselves instructed by a delegate body whose composition had been altered by a bureaucratic manoeuvre. Organisational bolshevisation thus trumped the ‘anarcho-Bolshevism’ of vanguard initiative.

May was the point at which the ambiguous nature of the CNT’s position was resolved definitively in favour of state reconstruction, even though the events precipitated the organisation’s exit from government. The mobilisation, which appears to have been at least partly co-ordinated from underneath the noses of the *comités superiores* inside the ‘Casa CNT-FAI’, also revealed to this leadership stratum that a tightening of internal discipline was required. In this process, formerly voluntarist anarchists would be relied upon as enforcers, in particular García Oliver, but also, as the regional meeting of 8 May revealed, those whose position as regards state reconstruction had hitherto been ambiguous, such as Xena and Eroles. For the anti-statist conscience, by contrast, the success of the mobilisation vindicated the radical programme and convinced several voluntarists, not least Merino, of the capacity of the radicals to take on and defeat the state. In spite of the fact that they had ended in defeat, therefore, the radical perspective following the May events would be reaffirmed through a renewed effort to break with state collaboration, backed up with the threat of a return to the streets. While the context of increasing pressure from without and increasing polarisation within the libertarian movement presented new and difficult challenges to the radicals, therefore, the truly definitive nature of the defeat that May represented would only become clear after several more months of anarchist struggle against the state.

Chapter Four: 'Permanent Effects of a Temporary Position', June - July 1937

After the events of May 1937, the space in which the oppositional currents of Spanish anarchism could operate was greatly circumscribed by a combination of violent police and military repression, the increasingly bureaucratized and hierarchical nature of the libertarian movement, and the extension of conscription in the Republican rear. Ever greater numbers of activists were absorbed by a war whose course gave little cause for optimism: Bilbao fell in June, Santander in August and Asturias in October. Meanwhile, in the rear, thousands of anarchists and POUM militants were jailed, above all in Cataluña.¹ Local centres of the JJLL, the neighbourhood defence committees and those frequented by foreign revolutionaries were subject to police raids, registers and closure.² The targets of such actions were thus those same centres through which the libertarian mobilisation in May had been effected. Outside of Barcelona, in the Catalan provinces, anarchists complained of 'reigns of terror' being installed in areas formerly dominated

¹ Between May 1937 and the end of summer 1938 around 4000 anti-fascists were imprisoned for varying lengths of time in Cataluña alone. The vast majority were members of the CNT. See the database of names compiled by François Godicheau, 'Los Hechos de Mayo de 1937 y los "presos antifascistas": identificación de un fenómeno represivo', *Historia Social*, 3. 44 (2002), 39-63. The *comités superiores* tended to play down the quantity of CNT members in prison, but José Xena admitted at the Extraordinary Congress of the IWMA in December that 'one and a half thousand' were in jail as he spoke. See 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París', PDLR, Fons SA 5/5 (2). George Orwell reported in articles for the *New English Weekly* in July and September 1937, that: 'When I left Barcelona in late June the jails were bulging; indeed, the regular jails had long since overflowed and the prisoners were being huddled into empty shops and any other temporary dump that could be found for them. But the point to notice is that the people who are in prison now are not Fascists but revolutionaries; they are there not because their opinions are too much to the Right, but because they are too much to the Left': George Orwell, 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' (1937) <<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/scw/orwell2.htm>> [accessed 11 March 2015].

² Within days of the May events, the building that housed the International Committee of Anti-fascist Emigrés in Barcelona was occupied and its inhabitants arrested, apparently by agents of the Soviet Union. See Kirschev, 'A las barricadas', pp. 175-6. The occupation and closure of the neighbourhood defence committee headquarters in Les Corts, housed in a former convent, took place in June at the hands of a squadron of Assault Guards. See Berenguer, *Entre el sol*, pp. 95-8. The social centre run by the *Agrupación Los de Ayer y Los de Hoy* was raided and the entire contents of its library removed. The *Agrupación* wryly commented that the quality of its enemies' publications would surely improve as a consequence. See the *Boletín de la Agrupación Anarquista Los de Ayer y Los de Hoy*, July 1937. In August, the arts centre run by the Fine Arts and Liberal Professions union of the CNT was also raided and its contents confiscated. See María Eugenia Prece, 'Barcelona y Guerra Civil', <<http://ccpe.org.ar/textos.pdf>> [accessed 15 February 2016], part of a series of works related to Gustavo Cochet held at the Museo Gustavo Cochet.

by the CNT.³ In August the Regional Defence Council of Aragón was dissolved by government decree, whereupon troops of the 11th Division of the Popular Army under the Communist Enrique Lister broke up the region's collectives and arrested hundreds of libertarians.⁴

The refusal of the *comités superiores* of the libertarian movement to countenance an armed defence of the collectives and of the Council is revealing of the attitude that the oppositional anarchists would be confronted with throughout this period. According to César M. Lorenzo:

... their passive attitude can be explained by their lack of concern for an organisation that had been constituted without their authorisation and by flouting internal discipline; it can also be explained by their desire to collaborate with Negrín, and consequently, to avoid provoking any serious conflict that would poison relations.⁵

The radical anarchist programme was therefore opposed by the *comités superiores* on the grounds of both the challenge this posed to their own authority, and to its potential for disrupting their ongoing commitment to governmental collaboration. In such circumstances of external repression and institutional marginalisation, it is perhaps surprising that radicals were able to carry out any oppositional activity at all. Yet the example of Aragón also shows that some mid-level figures within the CNT and the FAI considered the question to be chiefly one of will: the revolution could yet be defended

³ This expression was used in a CNT report of 25 June in relation to Puigcerdà. The report states that rightist elements, including the former mayor, who had escaped after 19 July 1936 had returned and ordered that members of the CNT and the FAI leave the town. It further states that six anarchist militants had been murdered by the security forces on 10 June and their widows subsequently bullied and humiliated. See CDMH, PS Barcelona, 842/4, which contains similarly disturbing accounts from Amposta, Tortosa and Torelló.

⁴ Lister himself claimed that somewhere in the region of 120 libertarians were arrested. See Enrique Lister, *Nuestra Guerra. Aportaciones para una Historia de la Guerra Nacional Revolucionaria del Pueblo Español 1936-1939* (Paris: Colección Ebro, 1966), p. 155. In fact the figure was probably initially 475, see Casanova, *Anarquismo y Revolución*, p. 273. On the dissolution of the Defence Council of Aragón, see *ibid.*, pp. 264-97, Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 525-31, Díez Torre, *Trabajan para la eternidad*, pp. 216-20, and Walther L. Bernecker, *Colectividades y revolución social. El anarquismo en la guerra civil Española, 1936-1939*, trans. by Gustau Muñoz (Barcelona: Crítica, 1982), pp. 427-30.

⁵ Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles*, p. 249.

and the reconstruction of the state rolled back through armed action. As Joaquín Ascaso, the former President of the Defence Council of Aragón, reflected:

We would have resisted, remaining at our posts and taking responsibility for all that might have occurred. In spite of the defeatist opinion of the CNT we would have defended our Council with arms in hand, as that is how we understand the Revolution, as we are today the same anarchists and revolutionaries that we were yesterday.⁶

Whether this attitude was widespread in Aragón is hard to gauge, however. It is possible that the denouement of the Barcelona May days had convinced some influential activists of the futility of armed resistance to the forces of the state. This is the impression given by the testimony of Eugenio Sopena Buil, Secretary of the Committee of Collectives in Barbastro in Huesca, where troops came to take over the headquarters of the CNT:

There were three divisions of the CNT on the Huesca front and... had there been a clash between those defending the building and... the government forces that attacked it, things would have gone as they did in Cataluña... I was one of those who said we should not put up resistance. There were many youths with weapons... We didn't fire a single shot... I said: open the door... With that they arrested us all and took us to jail. There was no struggle.⁷

Nevertheless, in Barcelona, where members of the defence committees were aware of how close they had come to gaining a victory over their opponents, the May events had not been accepted as a definitive defeat by the activists who had initiated them. In fact, we might surmise from the combative nature of the threats and statements issued over the months that followed, that they remained confident of their capacity to mobilise their forces. The exit of the libertarian movement from spheres of government

⁶ Taken from an interview with Joaquín Ascaso on his release from prison, first published in the Swiss review *Le Réveil* on 23 October 1937. Reprinted in Ascaso, *Memorias*, p. 189.

⁷ Taken from a 1976 interview conducted by Frank Mintz, included as an appendix in Díez Torre, *Trabajar para la eternidad*, pp. 506-7.

was considered by some as an opportunity to employ extra-legal measures in defence of the revolution, while armed insurrection continued to be invoked as a viable option at Plenums as summer turned to autumn.⁸ Furthermore, resentment at the pacifying role of the *comités superiores* in May and at the apparent return to bourgeois normality in the Republican rearguard, embodied in the privileges of a minority at a time of generalised scarcity and the release of rightists and clergy from Republican jails, fuelled a continuous critique of CNT and FAI policy that would persist into 1938.⁹

What remained at issue was the ongoing commitment to anti-fascist collaboration that had served to undermine the mobilisation in May. Considering this policy to have been responsible for the abandonment of the barricades, the radicals' strategy over the summer of 1937 was to attempt to force the libertarian organisations to change course. In Cataluña, the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups (the Barcelona FAI) was central to the attempts to urge the withdrawal of anarchists from all official positions.¹⁰ Such a withdrawal from state collaboration could only be countenanced if serious consideration was given to the question of whether to continue collaborating in the anti-fascist war effort, and on what terms, and whether to forcibly confront the authorities of the Republican state, regardless of the impact this might have on the same. As this

⁸ As late as October, at Plenums of the Barcelona FAI, anarchists urged an insurrectionary response to the repression and marginalisation of the libertarian movement in Spain. This is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

⁹ See the discussion of *Anarquía* below. Complaints about the release of fascist prisoners from their detention on Calle Santaló were aired at regional meetings of the CNT. See 'Reunión del Comité Regional celebrada el día 8 de Julio de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A. In August 1938 a letter of protest was written in the name of the Libertarian Movement of the neighbourhood of Armonía de Palomar (the name given to the Barcelona suburb of Sant Andreu during the war), which read: 'While it seems that those who are considered the foremost figures of our movement are treated with a certain consideration by the official elements of other parties and organisations, this is not the case for the immense majority of our activists who are persecuted, jailed and even murdered, as in the worst times of counterrevolutionary repression. Nevertheless we are yet to witness a single virile gesture on the part of our Committees or our most representative men to prevent such abuses.' The letter was signed by the defence committee (by then known as a *comité de coordinación* – coordination committee), anarchist *agrupación* and various youth and cultural associations of the neighbourhood. See CDMH, PS Barcelona, 842/17.

¹⁰ The debates within the Catalan FAI in this period have been referred to by historians but have not been discussed in as much detail as below. See Godicheau, *La Guerre D'Espagne*, pp. 332-5 and Amorós, *La Revolución Traicionada*, pp. 315-9 and 324-6. A recent exception to this rule is Guillamón, *La represión contra la CNT*, especially pp. 198-231.

chapter will discuss, the radicals did not shirk from confronting these questions, but were nevertheless incapable of forcing through the change of direction they considered necessary.

The ‘anarchist ship back on course’? Debating collaboration outside of government

A National Plenum of the libertarian movement held at the end of May 1937 arrived at apparently radical agreements, which affirmed that the libertarian organisations ‘would not collaborate directly or indirectly’ with the new ‘Government of the counterrevolution’ and would instead carry out ‘propaganda criticising [its] work’.¹¹ Nevertheless, the temporary renunciation of collaboration in central government occasioned by the premiership of Juan Negrín did not imply a reassessment of state collaboration in principle. On the contrary, CNT councillors in local and municipal government were instructed to remain at their posts, while the erstwhile anarchist Ministers publicly defended their records at rallies.¹² Barely had the agreements of the National Plenum been publicised when, on 3 June, the National Committee of the CNT found itself obliged to issue a note to the press denying that it had offered its support to Juan Negrín’s administration.¹³ The previous day, the CNT mouthpiece *Solidaridad Obrera* had published on its front page the news that the National Secretary of the organisation, Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, had met with the new Prime Minister of the Republic, under the headline: ‘Before the difficulties of the moment, the CNT offers its support to the Government’.¹⁴ In its denial of the following day, the National

¹¹ ‘Acuerdos del pleno nacional de regionales celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de mayo de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 49 A.

¹² See ‘Actas del pleno nacional de regionales extraordinario del movimiento libertario celebrado los días 23 y sucesivos de mayo de 1937’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 932/4.

¹³ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 3 June 1937. The National Committee reported to a National Plenum that it had received the impression from Negrín that there was little enthusiasm within the new government in regard to possible collaboration from the CNT, see ‘Acta del Pleno Nacional de regionales celebrado los días 2 y sucesivos de junio de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 46 B.

¹⁴ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 June 1937.

Committee insisted that the meeting had only dealt with the possible conditions required for any future collaboration.

Such ambiguity met with the scorn of several notable anarchists in France. The revolutionary syndicalist publication, *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, commenting on the apparent contradiction between the agreements of late May and the behaviour of the *comités superiores*, stated that the latter ‘must be made aware that this revolution will be defended, in spite of them, against their errors and against their deficiencies’.¹⁵ *Le Combat Syndicaliste* was the journal of the French affiliate organisation of the IWMA, the *Confédération Générale du Travail - Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire* (The General Confederation of Labour – Revolutionary Syndicalist - CGT-SR), formed in 1926, whose secretary, Pierre Besnard, was a well-known veteran of the movement, and the then General Secretary of the IWMA.¹⁶ The *Fédération anarchiste de langue française* (Francophone Anarchist Federation – FAF), a tiny organisation whose role relative to the CGT-SR was intended to be analogous to that of the FAI and the CNT in Spain, had already agreed on 19 May that its fund-raising activity in solidarity with the Spanish anarchist movement would from then on be directed towards the ‘oppositional’ anarchists of that country.¹⁷ Such voices, emanating from a small organisation, nevertheless disturbed the leadership of the CNT, unable to ignore its critics abroad because, on the one hand, they shared an international organisation, the IWMA, and on

¹⁵ *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, 11 June 1937.

¹⁶ The size of the CGT-SR in 1937 was probably around 5000 members, while *Le Combat Syndicaliste* had a circulation of around 6000, although it is likely that it was read by ‘two or three times that number’, see David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917 to 1945* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), p. 151.

¹⁷ See ‘Informe sobre las actividades de las organizaciones y de algunos anarquistas franceses, en relación con la lucha antifascista española’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 523/13. On the FAF, see Berry, *The French Anarchist Movement*, p. 248.

the other, because of the danger that such criticisms would find an echo among their own rank and file.¹⁸

That radicals in Spain shared a similar perspective to those in France was to become increasingly clear, however, and was signalled by the appearance of a new oppositional publication in June. *Frente y Retaguardia* was the newly-established mouthpiece of the JJLL at the front and in the rear at Huesca, and would provide support to the ‘purist’ line of the Catalan and Aragonese JJLL until its closure was ordered by the *comités superiores* at the end of the year. It mocked the ‘order’ that had been imposed on Cataluña and Aragón, echoing Rosa Luxemburg’s famous ‘Order Prevails in Berlin’ in ironically reporting certain declarations of Joan Comorera, ‘the shoe-shine boy of the Catalan bourgeoisie’, to the effect that victory had been obtained over the ‘fascists and provocateurs’ within the ranks of Spanish anarchism.¹⁹ A further article affirmed that Barcelona remained ‘a battle ground’, and that the struggle had not yet been given up.²⁰ José Peirats, in an article entitled ‘Permanent Effects of a Temporary Position’, made a connection comparable to that drawn in *Le Combat Syndicaliste* between state collaboration and the calibre of the CNT as a revolutionary organisation:

Many of the youth already think like perfect Communists or republicans, although they do so in the name of the CNT. Therein lies the danger. That of taking seriously a purely theatrical and transitory role. These are the permanent effects of a temporary position.²¹

An attitude of ambivalence towards state collaboration was also in evidence among veteran libertarians on the Aragón front, where attempts on the part of the newly

¹⁸ The international aspect of oppositional anarchism was a continual preoccupation of the *comités superiores* and is discussed in more detail in this and the following chapter.

¹⁹ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 26 June 1937. ‘Order Prevails in Berlin’, the last known piece of writing by Rosa Luxemburg, may be found at <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm>> [accessed 10 March 2015].

²⁰ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 26 June 1937.

²¹ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 26 June 1937.

created *Comisión Asesora Política* (Political Advisory Commission - CAP) to have telegrams sent from majority libertarian divisions of the army protesting the CNT's ejection from the Generalitat met with short shrift.²² The delegate sent to the front reported that Gregorio Jover had declared himself 'very happy that the CNT was no longer collaborating and therefore would not even consider sending telegrams of protest'.²³ The CAP, whose secretary was García Oliver, had been set up at a Regional Plenum of the Catalan libertarian movement in June with the aim of co-ordinating the branches of the movement in the region.²⁴ It was viewed with some suspicion by Catalan anarchists, not least because its stated function of co-ordination was supposedly already being carried out by the regional Liaison Committee, established following the agreement of the National Plenum in May, discussed in the previous chapter. At a meeting of the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT on 2 July, Pujol, the delegate for the metal and steel industry, commented on the acronym meaning 'head' in Catalan, and on the apparent desire of its members to place themselves above the norms of the libertarian organisations.²⁵ On 12 July complaints were made about the multiplicity of committees, along with the suggestion that 'many comrades want to quit work in order to pretend that they are looking after the organisation'.²⁶

That such 'co-ordination' was in any case required was demonstrated by the stance adopted by the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups in Barcelona, which constituted a serious challenge to the CNT's continued commitment to state collaboration. This body felt compelled to respond to a statement issued on 14 June by a joint plenum of the Catalan regional CNT unions and FAI affinity groups which

²² See 'Reunión del Comité Regional y demás comités responsables celebrado el viernes día 2 por la tarde del mes de julio de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ On the role of García Oliver in the CAP see the recollections contained in Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 196-8, and Peirats, *De mi paso*, pp. 349-51.

²⁵ 'Reunión del Comité Regional y demás comités responsables celebrada el viernes día 2 por la tarde del mes de julio de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

²⁶ 'Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña celebrada el día 12 de julio de 1937 estando presentes casi todos los miembros del mismo', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

favoured continued collaboration in the Catalan Generalitat on the terms that had operated hitherto.²⁷ The response, which was probably written by Merino, called for a Regional Plenum of affinity groups to discuss such matters, and made a thoroughgoing critique of governmental collaboration and the rhetoric with which libertarians had justified this policy:

In order to collaborate we not only interrupted the impetuous rhythm of the struggle against the rotten apparatus of the State, but also, dominated and obsessed by the degenerative atmosphere of the political world, we, the irreconcilable enemies of that oppressive mechanism ‘had to’ accept the paradoxical and ironic ‘mission’ of re-evaluating its functions as a regulatory apparatus of human activities and repressor of individual and collective liberties, and were thereby ‘nobly’ condemned to sterility and to the failure of our struggles and possibilities in the interests of a washed-out and outmoded antifascism and a war that is not for true freedom.²⁸

The notion of a ‘re-evaluation’ of the state was possibly in reference to García Oliver, whose speech in defence of his record as the Minister of Justice had tacitly acknowledged the role of the CNT in reconstructing a Republican state that had been all but toppled.²⁹ Whether or not this was the case, the statement of the Local Federation clearly identified state collaboration as the factor by which libertarians had become the agents of their own repression. Even more striking was perhaps the first public reconsideration of the character of the Spanish civil war from an anarchist perspective, as a war that was ‘not for true freedom’. This was to be taken up again at the Regional Plenum of Barcelona Anarchist Affinity Groups in July, and is discussed in more detail

²⁷ See ‘Dictamen que presenta la ponencia nombrada por el pleno regional de sindicatos de la CNT y federaciones de grupos de la específica, celebrado en Barcelona el día 14 del corriente, para dictaminar el tercer punto del orden del día’, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives (IISG) 17 B.

²⁸ ‘Federación Local de Grupos Anarquistas de Barcelona, Circular Nº 11’, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archive (IISG) 49 A.

²⁹ ‘Until the Government created new organs of justice, incorporating the People’s Tribunals and the normal jurisdiction... the people had had to fulfil this role and they had done so’, Juan García Oliver, *Mi gestión al frente del Ministerio de Justicia*, p. 9.

below. Following the May days, during which Merino had played a key role, there was a feeling that a reorientation of the FAI could steer the CNT away from its postures of collaboration and compromise. The statement of the Local Federation was the opening salvo in this battle of ideas, and Merino would be among the most vocal advocates of a more combative policy within the Catalan FAI over the following months.

Under his stewardship, the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups was at the forefront of attempts to both publicise and oppose repression, as well as to renovate the libertarian movement and force a break with the policy of collaboration. As early as January 1937, it had been rebuked by the Peninsular Committee of the FAI for undertaking independent activity in solidarity with interned anarchist prisoners without first seeking the approval of Dionisio Eroles.³⁰ In late June it carried out a fact-finding mission to Puigcerdà, which resulted in a report on the repression the CNT was undergoing in the town.³¹ It was also responsible for the publication *Anarquía*, the first number of which appeared in Barcelona on 1 July 1937. This was an underground or ‘clandestine’ publication, which was not submitted to the state censor. Godicheau considers that *Anarquía* was probably connected to the first *Comisión Jurídica*, a new body set up by the CNT to take over the role of the *comité pro-presos*, the traditional prisoner support group of the Confederation.³² Although the *Comisión Jurídica* had been set up as a formal alternative to the highly politicised and direct-action focussed prisoner support committees, the new approach was only reluctantly adopted, and was in fact rejected by certain sections of the movement inside and outside the prisons.³³ In spite of such misgivings, the first *Comisión Jurídica*, which in any case proved too radical in its methods for the *comités superiores*, was thus allied to the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, demonstrating the continued centrality of prisoner

³⁰ See the letter of 21 January 1937, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 944/7.

³¹ See ‘Informe sobre los sucesos de Puigcerdà’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 842/4.

³² Godicheau, ‘Los periódicos clandestinos’, pp. 186-8.

³³ See Godicheau, *No callaron*, pp. 52-5.

solidarity work to anarchist activism during both the peace and war years of the Second Republic, excepting only the ‘short summer of anarchy’, when it was unnecessary.

That the first *Comisión Jurídica* came into conflict with the *comités superiores* is unsurprising when we consider that the new body immediately made a point of denouncing the Code of Justice drawn up by the erstwhile minister, García Oliver. At the Regional Plenum of Catalan Anarchist Affinity Groups in July, the delegate of the affinity group *Convicción y Firmeza*, Alfons Miguel Martorell, a member of the action group *Los Solidarios* alongside García Oliver as far back as the 1920s and a close and trusted collaborator of the latter until at least the autumn of 1936, made the acid observation that ‘Franco would sign up to the Code of Justice elaborated by García Oliver’.³⁴ The *Comisión Jurídica*, meanwhile, claimed that it was gaining ground as best it could, ‘given that it was an activist of our own organisation that has put so many obstacles in our way in a juridical sense’.³⁵ During the civil war, initiatives undertaken in defence of anarchist prisoners in Spain were invariably connected to oppositional currents, and threatened to embarrass the *comités superiores*. So it was that relations between the CNT and the IWMA were even further damaged when on 23 July Besnard announced the formation of a committee in solidarity with the ‘victims of the Spanish counterrevolution’.³⁶ The non-Spanish sections of the IWMA and the *Comisión Jurídica* were also united in their particular concern for foreign anarchist activists in Spain due to be deported in the wake of the May events, an issue that would be brought up at the Paris Congress of the IWMA, discussed in the following chapter. There, the *comités superiores* would show a lack of interest in the fate of their international comrades that was entirely at variance to the ‘enormous value’ their continued presence in Spain was

³⁴ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’. On Martorell, see ‘Anarcoefemèrides del 20 de febrer’ <<http://www.estelnegre.org/anarcoefemerides/2002.html>> [accessed 3 December 2014].

³⁵ See ‘Informe de la Comisión Jurídica a los comités locales y regionales’, 19 June 1937, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 842/4.

³⁶ See *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, 23 July 1937. The CNT responded with a circular addressed to French anarchists calling on them not to give their support to this new committee. On the widening rift between the CNT-FAI and the CGT-SR, see Berry, *The French Anarchist Movement*, pp. 244-50.

considered to represent by the *Comisión*.³⁷ Prisoner solidarity was thus united to a spirit of internationalism and was inseparable from opposition to the policy of the *comités superiores* in this period, a connection that was embodied by the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups in Barcelona and its work in the *Comisión Jurídica* and its publication, *Anarquía*, which affirmed its opposition to collaboration over the course of July.

The third issue of *Anarquía* echoed Gregorio Jover in welcoming the CNT's exit from government, commenting that 'at least [the organisation] will be able to breathe fresh air'.³⁸ The fourth edition went further, considering the moment to be particularly propitious for the movement to reassert its traditional anti-statism:

In opposition, and even underground, the CNT, returning to the anarchist fold - albeit a return forced by circumstances - can, once again, be itself, propagate its positions from the unions, moralise its atmosphere, which has become somewhat strained in these times of collaboration, purge its ranks and recover the respect and sympathy of the workers... through a new and clear activity, free from alien and disturbing influences that destroy or falsify it.³⁹

If, the author continued, this prognosis was to prove over-optimistic, if the 'anarchistic personality' of the CNT's leaders had been 'completely lost amidst the cosy complacency of the ministerial or councillor's armchair', then other, 'new and upstanding activists' would have to take their place, and put the 'anarchist ship back on course towards the longed for freedom'.⁴⁰

The editorial of the same edition made clear both the practical and ideological reasons for opposing state collaboration, in terms suggestive of Merino's involvement:

³⁷ 'Informe de la Comisión Jurídica'.

³⁸ *Anarquía*, 12 July 1937.

³⁹ *Anarquía*, 18 July 1937.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

We contest collaboration on the grounds of both principles and interests. Principles, because through collaboration we struggle against our own ideals. Interests, because even the most ardent supporter of collaboration must have been convinced that we have gained nothing by it and lost much... Through collaboration, in addition to granting prestige to the forms of Government... it has been made clear that our convictions are not very firmly rooted in our consciousness. The worst of all is that: after the fact of collaboration; after many comrades and the Committees have sung its virtues, with what moral authority, with what force can they now combat it?⁴¹

In other words, the renovation of anarchism and the affirmation of anarchist ideas would require the renovation of the *comités superiores* if such an affirmation was to have any credibility. Similar conclusions could be drawn from an article published at the end of the previous month in *Frente y Retaguardia* by Vicente Rodríguez, a prominent member of the JJLL and founder of the FECL, who had until June co-edited *Acracia* with José Peirats. Rodríguez critically evaluated the notion that the limitations of the Spanish revolution revealed a fundamental flaw in anarchism itself, affirming on the contrary that ‘The regime of collectives and socialisation has only failed when obstacles have been deliberately placed in its way by politicians and bourgeois elements, who have been respected by a revolution that has not known how to arrive at its ultimate consequences.’⁴² It was the dilution of anarchism, rather than the ideas themselves, which had led to the current impasse:

The current situation in Spain corroborates our affirmations. Liberty will not be achieved through authoritarian means...Anarchism stuck inside authoritarianism, had necessarily to fail... The failure of authoritarianism as the solution to the vital problem of society is the most palpable evidence that we anarchists can give to affirm that only a federalist

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Frente y Retaguardia*, 26 June 1937.

regime animated by mutual aid and solidarity... will provide the true solution to the social problem... We can also affirm that the failure of certain individuals who have distanced themselves from the fundamental principles of anarchism does not imply the failure of the ideas that such people claim to represent... Have the ideas failed? No; men have.⁴³

The Catalan section of the JJLL would also make plain this critique within the national plenums of the FIJL. There its delegates would be joined by representatives from the Aragón front such as Amador Franco, who declared at a Regional Congress of the JJLL of Aragón in July that:

...if we commit the error of continuing this [political] policy, of accepting its constitution, its customs, its collaboration, we will soon find ourselves trapped in a spider's web that will prevent us from making any gesture in defence of our dignity.⁴⁴

In reference to the agreement of the CNT and the FAI to wage a propaganda campaign against the Communist Party, one of the Catalan delegates to the National Plenum of the FIJL held in Valencia at the beginning of August affirmed the need for any such campaign to be framed within a wider renunciation of collaboration, in a clear echo of the arguments advanced in *Anarquía*, cited above: 'if after uncovering the abuses and errors of the Government we then reveal our own desires to collaborate we would be doing nothing more than contradicting our anarchist theories'.⁴⁵

Against such appeals, however, the Peninsular Committee of the FIJL declared that the question of whether or not the libertarian movement collaborated in governments was beyond the prerogatives of the FIJL and should be left to the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad*, pp. 58-9.

⁴⁵ 'Actas del pleno de regionales de la FIJL celebrado en Valencia los días 2 y 3 de agosto de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 237/01.

judgement of the CNT and the FAI.⁴⁶ In any case, the Catalan section was in a minority within the national youth organisation, and its strategic or ideological interventions were necessarily limited. Rather, it was frequently restricted to defending the right of the section to maintain a line that was at variance to the rest of the FIJL.⁴⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, the outcome of the May Plenum of the Catalan JJLL, where divisions between the ‘purists’ and the supporters of the FJR had led to the abandonment of the latter organisation, could be read as a form of tactical retreat. This is because the rupture with the POUM’s youth organisation, the JCI, occasioned by the exit from the FJR, broke one of the bonds of solidarity that the mobilisation of the May days had appeared to confirm.⁴⁸ The weeks subsequent to this, which had seen the appearance of *Anarquía* and the statement of the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, suggested that this retreat need not be permanent. Clearly, there was a unity of criteria among the anarchists of the JJLL and those of the affinity groups responsible for *Anarquía* with regard to state collaboration. Side-lined within the FIJL, the anarchists of the Catalan and Aragonese JJLL would now have the opportunity to take their arguments to the Regional Plenum of the FAI, where the potential for co-operation between ‘voluntarist’ and ‘purist’ anarchists must have been apparent.

The editorial of *Anarquía* cited above may be seen in this light, and it would appear that Merino, its probable author, was once again consciously attempting to provide a bridge between the voluntarist and purist wings of radical anarchism that would enable strategic co-operation. This was in evidence at the Regional Plenum of the

⁴⁶ ‘Actas del pleno de regionales de la FIJL celebrado en Valencia los días 2 y 3 de agosto de 1937’.

⁴⁷ The question of federalism and the radical anarchist resistance to the homogenising pressure of the *comités superiores* is addressed in the following chapter.

⁴⁸ Although, as late as July, delegates to the Plenums of the FIJL continued to advocate the maintenance of the FJR as a device with which to expose the counterrevolutionary nature of the JSU (see ‘Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias. Acta de la sesión cuarta del día 2 de Julio de 1937’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 237/1), the dissolution of the FJR had been announced two months previously in the newspaper of the JCI, *Juventud Comunista*, 27 May 1937. Following the proscription of the POUM on 16 June, libertarian co-operation with that party was necessarily limited to public declarations of support and circumstantial acts of solidarity such as offering sanctuary to its activists.

FAI at the beginning of July, discussed below. As has been stressed throughout this thesis, the categories of voluntarism and purism were not fixed, but can be usefully applied to the different approaches of radical anarchists to the question of state collaboration. At this time, the purist tendencies could be seen to affirm the integrity of anarchist principles, in the statements of the Catalan JJLL and in the pages of *Ruta* and *Frente y Retaguardia*, whereas the ‘voluntarist’ current, which in the summer of 1937 found a voice in *Anarquía* and the publication of the AAD, *El Amigo del Pueblo*, placed greater emphasis on the working class as the agent of revolution and on the need for anarchists to exit the organs of the state and return to the unions and affinity groups. The wording of the Local Federation’s statement which called for a Regional Plenum, cited above, also seems to have been carefully chosen in this respect: making state collaboration the chief target of its polemic, it also affirmed that it was necessary to ‘maintain the purity of anarchist principles’ and to elaborate a proactive response to the failures of state collaboration. The statement acted as a clarion call to all anarchist opponents of state collaboration to recognise an ally in the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, and set the tone for the stormy debates at the Regional Plenum when it took place:

It is necessary that the healthy reaction that...has begun against these procedures [of state collaboration] spreads throughout our organisations and strengthens our resolve to pulverise our eternal adversaries with the unity, action and power of our movement... It is indispensable that we react with firmness once and for all against this morbid apathy that breaks our morale and wounds our own interests... Out with political collaboration, everyone to the affinity groups and the unions... You must keep in mind... that while the union organisations and many affinity groups of the region consider that we must and can collaborate, we the Affinity Groups of Barcelona maintain different criteria.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ ‘Federación Local de Grupos Anarquistas de Barcelona, Circular N° 11’.

That discontent was widespread among Catalan anarchists throughout the summer of 1937 is evidenced by the embattled tenor of the meetings of the committees. At a meeting of the Regional Committees of the libertarian movement on 9 June it was admitted that ‘the criticisms made against the Committees are the same for everyone, the hostile mood against us is everywhere gaining momentum’.⁵⁰ This mood was also, albeit rarely, explicitly expressed in the anarchist press. On 8 July, *Anarquía* published a short article for which it was subsequently censured by the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, which read, in part:

In the name of the Law, the ‘guardians of order’ commit outrages, loot the unions, destroy the constructive labour of the CNT and the FAI, tread on and tarnish the revolutionary economy, manifested in the collectives, broken up by the uniformed hordes. And all this with the consent of the... responsible Committees of the CNT. For shame! ... An end must be put to this chaos.⁵¹

At a meeting on the following day, the affinity group *Germinal* agreed to write to the Local Federation demanding that the author responsible for this article be sanctioned and that the weekly publication’s title and use of the FAI’s name be rescinded. The affinity group further agreed to push for Merino’s removal as Secretary of the Local Federation, suggesting that he was associated with the publication of such critiques.⁵²

⁵⁰ ‘Reunión del Comité Regional celebrada el día 9 de junio de 1937, estando presentes los demás comités responsables.’ CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 95 B.

⁵¹ *Anarquía*, 8 July 1937. Following the intervention of the *comités superiores*, the subsequent issue claimed that the article had been published by mistake and that it was not ‘in the spirit of *Anarquía* to attack any responsible Committee’ and that, on the contrary, its pages were open to any member of said committees, see *Anarquía*, 12 July 1937. In the meantime, at the Peninsular Plenum of the FAI held in Valencia earlier in the month, the delegate of the National Committee of the CNT had brought the Plenum’s attention to the appearance of the publication, a ‘libellous broadsheet’, which questioned the policies of the ‘Confederal committees’. The Plenum subsequently instructed the Catalan Regional Committee of the FAI to disavow the publication. See ‘FAI Comité Peninsular, Circular 36-1937, Barcelona 12 de Julio de 1937’, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archive (IISG) 49 A and *Memoria del Pleno Peninsular*, p. 52.

⁵² See ‘Acta de la reunión del grupo ‘Germinal’ celebrada el día 9 de Julio con asistencia de cinco compañeros’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1312 / 2.

The *comités superiores* saw it as their duty to check the hostile mood; on 22 June the new Regional Secretary of the Catalan CNT, José Juan Domènech, reported back from a meeting with the Catalan President Lluís Companys, at which the former acknowledged that ‘what worried him [Domènech] most was the atmosphere of hatred that was growing in the wake of these [repressive post-May days] events, to such an extent that he feared that the day was coming when the Committees would be unable to hold back the natural desire for revenge among those affected’.⁵³ The Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, by contrast, declared that ‘for the good of the movement’, this hostile mood make itself felt where it might have most impact, urging in the statement discussed above that an end be put to the ‘street and café criticisms of the *compañeros* and the Committees’, because ‘everything that has to be said can and must be said in the unions, in the activist meetings, in the meetings of the affinity groups’.⁵⁴

The fruits of this perspective were felt at the Regional Plenum of Catalan Anarchist Affinity Groups held from 1 to 3 July. This assembly would reveal the depth and extent of the radical critique of the policy of the libertarian organisations that was being advanced by Catalan anarchists at this time, as well as unease as to the purpose and meaning of the war and the role of the FAI, and also suggested a confluence of the perspectives and tactics advanced by purist and voluntarist elements. It would further reveal, however, how seriously this opposition was taken by the *comités superiores*, which mobilised its most recognisable and respected figures to prevent the strategy advanced by the anarchist *grupos* from resulting in any concrete agreements or activity.

Anti-militarism, anti-nationalism and the ‘war that is not for true freedom’

⁵³ ‘Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña, celebrada el día 22 de junio de 1937. Estando presentes los demás Comités responsables’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁵⁴ ‘Federación Local de Grupos Anarquistas de Barcelona, Circular N° 11’.

The central drama of the Regional Plenum of Catalan Anarchist Affinity Groups in July was the attempt on the part of the radicals to adopt, as the official policy of the Catalan FAI, the withdrawal of anarchists from all ‘official positions’, which is discussed in the final subsection of this chapter. The fact that such a move would undoubtedly have a negative impact on the war effort helps to explain why this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. However, in order to understand why such a move could be countenanced by so many members of the Catalan FAI it is necessary to look again at how anarchist attitudes to the war were changing during this period. Previously, the social content of the war had been emphasised by even the most radical anarchists, in opposition to the characterisation of the conflict as a war of national liberation fought in defence of democracy. José Alberola had articulated the radical perspective in a speech given in March 1937: ‘It is said that we must renounce our ideas in order to win the war. If what they call war was nothing more than that we would have to be deserters. But it is principally a social conflict’.⁵⁵ By the summer of 1937 there were ample signs that this perspective could no longer be sustained, not least because of the participation of sectors of the anarchist movement in the recasting of this ‘social war’ as one of national independence.

As discussed above, anarchists in Spain and abroad had linked the ‘error of participation’ in government to a concomitant degeneration in the ideology professed by prominent activists. An article in *Terre Libre*, the mouthpiece of the FAF, averred that some could no longer claim to be anarchists because ‘they promote *l’union sacrée*, patriotism, nationalism and so on’.⁵⁶ As we have seen, however, anarchist collaboration in the reconstruction of the Republican state drew on pre-existing ambiguities within the

⁵⁵ Alberola, *Interpretación anarquista de la revolución*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ *Terre Libre*, May 1937. The article was almost certainly authored by Voline (pseudonym of Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eikhenbaum), who had been instrumental in setting up the first soviet of St Petersburg in 1905 and who had later fought in Nestor Makhno’s anarchist army of the Ukraine during the Russian Civil War, before being expelled from the Soviet Union in 1921.

movement that were identifiable not only in its gradualist, but also its purist and voluntarist sectors. There were thus parallels between the rhetoric of Montseny in 1931 and 1936, when the Republic was defended as the ‘progressive’ and more ‘civilised’ alternative facing the Spanish working class.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is evident that war and state collaboration served to accelerate the process by which concepts of nationhood and an intermingling of the categories of ‘people’ and ‘proletariat’ became prevalent in Spanish anarchist discourse.⁵⁸ Relevant in this regard is the presence on the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* of Salvador Cánovas Cervantes, a proponent of a ‘racial’ understanding of Spanish anarchism who had been ejected from the CNT after standing for election during the Second Republic.⁵⁹ A particularly egregious example of this trend was provided by an editorial in *Solidaridad Obrera* on 26 May, the front page headline of which read ‘Our revolution must be Spanish!’.⁶⁰ Although a thinly veiled attack on Soviet intervention in Spain, the nationalist rhetoric employed in this article stressed the ‘Iberian, independent and national’ character of the Spanish proletariat, ‘unconnected to any foreign influence’, and opposed the ‘purely Spanish, purely Iberian, purely peninsular’ position of the CNT and the FAI to those of the ‘parties of exotic origin’ in Spain, a position ‘which can be summarised in the phrase: *Spain for the Spanish*’.⁶¹

Such positions were characterised as ‘national anarchism’ by Alexander Schapiro, an anarcho-syndicalist veteran of the Russian revolution, writing in *Le Combat Syndicaliste*: ‘To eulogise racism and disparage “exoticism” are two simultaneous and

⁵⁷ See Chapter One.

⁵⁸ See Angel Smith, ‘Los anarquistas y anarcosindicalistas ante la cuestión nacional’, in *Izquierdas y nacionalismos en la España contemporánea*, ed. by Javier Moreno Luzón (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 2011), pp. 145-6.

⁵⁹ See Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *¡Fuera el invasor! Nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la Guerra civil Española (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2006), pp. 71-2, and Martin Baxmeyer, “‘Mother Spain, We Love You!’: Nationalism and Racism in Anarchist Literature during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)”, in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, ed. by Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 205

⁶⁰ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 May 1937.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

complementary phenomena that indicate, to say the least, an anti-revolutionary state of mind.⁶² It was not only foreign anarchists who found fault with this tendency, however. Six months later, in the JJLL publication *Faro*, discussed in the following chapter, which published contributions from the international anarchist movement, Antonio Morales Guzmán, former secretary of the Local Federation of the CNT in Granada, provided one of the more coherent statements of anarchist internationalism to appear in this period, stressing that anarchists must combat:

all borders, all dividing lines and every division of race, class or sect. The young libertarians know well enough that beyond those borders our brothers and sisters live in hunger, poverty and exploitation. Our war, the war of all peoples who struggle to free themselves from the yoke of tyranny, is not Spanish, and still less nationalist.⁶³

Traditionally, such anarchist antipathy towards nationalism had gone hand in hand with anti-militarism, a commitment that was also tested in this period.⁶⁴ Already, at a Regional Congress of the JJLL on 17 April 1937, the delegate from Puigcerdà had lamented the consequences of the military ‘pose’ adopted by García Oliver.⁶⁵ This was in reference to a speech in March in which the then Minister of Justice had urged those entering officer training in the Republican army ‘to bear in mind that enlisted men “should cease to be your comrades and become the cogwheels of our military machine”’.⁶⁶ The delegate noted the opprobrium with which French comrades had greeted such language, providing further evidence of the international nature of the critique of state collaboration, which in turn contributed to the worsening of relations between the *comités superiores* and the CNT’s critics abroad.

⁶² A translated copy of Schapiro’s article, ‘¿Nacional-Anarquismo?’, was included in a dossier of offending articles and persons relating to anarchists in France that was compiled by the National Committee of the CNT over the summer: ‘Informe sobre las actividades de las organizaciones y de algunos anarquistas franceses’.

⁶³ *Faro*, 19 November 1937.

⁶⁴ On the connection between Spanish anarchist anti-nationalism and anti-militarism, see Smith, ‘Los anarquistas y anarcosindicalistas’, p. 142.

⁶⁵ ‘Congreso Regional de las JJLL celebrado el día 17 de abril de 1937’.

⁶⁶ Bollothen, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 328.

At a tempestuous Plenum of the IWMA in Paris on 11 June, the CNT delegates were made to suffer what they regarded as the indignity of attacks on their conduct from miniscule and in some cases barely operative sister organisations, and were unable to prevent the anti-collaborationist motions passed at this meeting being reported to the young purists of the *Quijotes del Ideal* affinity group in Barcelona by the Portuguese anarchist Vivian Fragua, who had attended as a delegate of the Argentinian anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*.⁶⁷ The indignities continued. At a fund-raising rally held in Paris later that month, scuffles broke out in the crowd when García Oliver and Montseny were met with shouts of ‘murderers!’ and ‘what about Camilo Berneri?’.⁶⁸ ‘Must we continue, impassive, putting up with and collaborating with these “comrades”? Can we continue in the IWMA, when the IWMA in its assemblies does nothing but censure and admonish us?’ wondered Rodríguez Vázquez in a circular of 26 June. In July, he took to the pages of *Solidaridad Obrera*: ‘What right have they to censure us? With what authority do they speak to us of intangible or immaculate principles?...Work, like us, for the unity of the proletariat, to destroy fascism, our enemy number one, and you will continue to be anarchists, doing honour to the ideal. If you are not capable of that, shut up. Do not mention Anarchy, which is too pure to be stained by stupidity and fanaticism.’⁶⁹ The National Secretary’s article was in turn responded to by Schapiro: ‘Did comrade Berneri, murdered by your allies in Barcelona, have the right to criticise you? In any case he did so, and you ignored his warnings!... through your so-called “anti-fascist” alliances you are, without

⁶⁷ See Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, p. 214.

⁶⁸ See ‘Comité Nacional (Circular nº 12) A la Regional de Cataluña’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 463/5. The CNT’s delegation to the Plenum of the IWMA included David Antona, who reported that the Spanish delegates had met with the ‘systematic opposition’ of the CGT-SR, which had attempted to make IWMA support for the CNT conditional on a commitment to never again participate in government. The principal delegate for the CGT-SR was Schapiro, who alleged that the CNT ‘had dragged its history and its principles through the mud’. See ‘Notas sobre el último Pleno de la AIT que acaba de celebrarse en París’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 46 B.

⁶⁹ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 6 July 1937.

wishing to and without even realising it, helping construct a red fascism to fight the white one'.⁷⁰

In June, delegates from the Durruti Column voiced similar unease as to the political character of the rearguard in a meeting with the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT. Whether this would lead them to question the fundamental cause for which they believed themselves to be fighting was unclear, but the delegates stressed that the anarchist combatants were: 'sacrificing their health and their life for an ideal, which they believe they will see implanted very soon on the Iberian peninsula; and now they find that they have enemies both at the front and in the rear.'⁷¹ On 4 June, at a rally held in the Olympia theatre in Barcelona to pay homage to the defenders of Madrid and the Basque country, a delegate speaker who had arrived from the Spanish capital asked the assembled throng: "Do you want to win the war?" and the crowd, one hundred per cent revolutionary, barely answered the question. One person shouted out "What we want is to win the revolution!"⁷²

The statement issued by the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups later that month, in which the war was characterised as being a struggle that was 'not for true freedom', was therefore the culmination of growing libertarian unease as to the meaning of the war, the fate of the revolution, and the militarist and nationalist positions adopted by the *comités superiores*. Such sentiments were again in evidence at the Regional Plenum of Anarchist Affinity Groups of Cataluña in July, where during the second session Merino urged the FAI to confront its enemies in the rearguard, 'forgetting for a

⁷⁰ See *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, 23 July 1937. Schapiro was a close and long-standing friend of the veteran CNT militant Eusebi Carbó i Carbó, who, following his exit from the first Economic Council of the post-19 July Generalitat had been working in the Propaganda Commission of the CNT's National Committee. This may have been another cause of concern for the latter body. See Margarita Carbó and Eusebi Carbó i Carbó, *Vida i Militancia. Un anarquista al servei de la Generalitat de Catalunya* (Valls: Cossetània Edicions, 2014), pp. 28 and 42.

⁷¹ See 'Pequeña reunion celebrada entre una Delegación, de la División de Durruti, y algunos compañeros del Comité Regional, Comisión de Guerra y Comité de Relaciones del frente y de la retaguardia', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁷² *Amanecer. Órgano de la Escuela de Militantes de Cataluña*, May-June 1937.

moment that fascism is in Aragón'.⁷³ This frank admission that, in order to regain hegemony in the rear, Spanish anarchists would need to temporarily 'forget' the war against fascism, was complemented in the following session by the analysis of Simón Tapia Colman, who was to become a musician of world renown during his post-war Mexican exile, who was speaking as a delegate of the affinity group *Hispania*:

There is absolutely nothing for us to do in this war, since it has been transformed from a workers' war into an imperialist war. We must say that we are prepared to lose everything except our anarchist movement, which cannot compromise before a bourgeois war. We must set a deadline for the Government to make an immediate rectification, otherwise we must withdraw all support from the war effort.⁷⁴

This was thus the second intervention at the Plenum to call for attention to be diverted from the war effort to face the enemy in the rearguard. It is further remarkable for its qualification of the war as 'imperialist' in nature.⁷⁵ The reference to losing 'everything except our anarchist movement' is a clear allusion to the phrase wrongly but widely attributed to Durruti, that Spanish anarchism 'renounced everything except victory', echoing in turn Lucía Sánchez Saornil's defiant 'for the war everything, except liberty', discussed in Chapter Two. These sentiments were to be reiterated in *Anarquía* later that month, which declared that: 'everything can be done except that which endangers our principles'.⁷⁶ Tapia Colman evidently placed the integrity of the movement above the

⁷³ 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña celebrado el día 1 de julio de 1937 y sucesivos', Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives (IISG) 17 B.

⁷⁴ 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña'.

⁷⁵ The notion that the war was originally a social conflict that then became an imperialist war is chiefly associated with the small group of Italian left Communists (about 30 in number) who had fought at the front at Huesca in the International Lenin Column controlled by the POUM. They left the front in opposition to militarisation in October 1936. See Agustín Guillamón, 'La Izquierda Comunista ("los bordiguistas") en la Guerra de España (1936-1939)', *Balance. Cuaderno de historia*, 1 (1993) (corrected and updated in February 2008), pp. 14-24. It is clear from the interventions recorded here that several anarchists had also arrived at this position.

⁷⁶ *Anarquía*, 12 July 1937. On the invention of the Durruti quote, see Paz, *Durruti*, p. 727. The phrase was used by the *comités superiores*, who also attributed it to their fallen comrade. See Federica Montseny's speech of 21 July 1937, *El mitin del Olympia en Barcelona 21 de Julio de 1937* (Barcelona: Talleres Gráficos Bosch, 1937), p. 22, and 'La FAI al pueblo: "Renunciamos a todo, excepto a la

anti-fascist war effort, a position that was immediately hailed by another delegate, on this occasion that of the affinity group *Rebeldes*, who declared that, for Tapia Colman's proposal to have an effect, it was necessary to:

arrive at the agreement that those in official positions withdraw from them, as the way that the war is going endangers us. The moment has arrived to confront our political enemies, and not to allow, as has happened up to now, the organisation to prevent us from saying the truth about the war.⁷⁷

Such characterisations of the war as were voiced at this Plenum were to find an echo in the days and weeks that followed. At a meeting of the Catalan region of the CNT on 5 July a delegation from the Aragón front complained of the effect on morale that the political intrigue and frivolity of the rearguard had on the comrades on the front-line. Pujol, the delegate from the steel and metal industry used this opportunity to link the character of the war with the question of the revolution and the purpose of the libertarian movement:

To my mind the war has been corrupted. It is no longer the struggle of the libertarians against oppression. It has been converted into a struggle between two fascisms, the red and the black, and that is why the Confederal combatant is alienated: He sees clearly that he is fighting for a cause that is not his own... In my opinion it is necessary to hold, not a limited meeting of this or that Committee, but a meeting of the entire organisation in Spain, so that it might determine whether the war should be continued with or not, and we must initiate the true revolution.⁷⁸

victoria””, statement of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, 1 October 1937, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 49A.

⁷⁷ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

⁷⁸ ‘Reunión del Comité Regional celebrada el día 5 de julio de 1937. Presidida por el compañero Laborda’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A. Pujol may have been Higinio Pujol, who had been a member of the revolutionary committee of Poble Sec in July 1936.

The same delegate would report a week later of a generalised reluctance to mobilise for the front among workers in his industry, an attitude that was attributed to the absence of Confederal divisions organised according to libertarian characteristics.⁷⁹

Considering the war to be for a cause that was ‘not their own’, ‘not for true freedom’ or even that was fought on behalf of ‘red fascism’, the radical wing of the libertarian movement thereby rejected the priorities of the *comités superiores*, who considered the anti-fascist war to take precedence over the revolution, and the armed defence of the latter to be undesirable, or even impossible.⁸⁰ The representatives of these committees responded to this challenge with both rhetoric and methods familiar from times of war. At the Regional Plenum of the FAI in July, the delegate of Diego Abad de Santillan’s *Nervio* group, José María Lunazzi, an Argentinian teacher known as ‘*El Gringo*’, denounced the aforementioned characterisations of the conflict as ‘sowing defeatism, creating confusion and encouraging activities that represent treachery to the war against fascism, upon the victory of which we must build a new world’.⁸¹ It was also upon accusations of ‘defeatism’ that the purist anarchist publication *Frente y Retaguardia* was shut down by the *comités superiores* at the end of the year.⁸² Such interventions shed light on what the delegate of the *Rebeldes* group had meant when he referred to the organisation preventing anarchists ‘from saying the truth about the war’. Prior to its suppression, *Frente y Retaguardia* had also come into conflict with the Catalan School of Activists, set up under the auspices of the CNT

⁷⁹ ‘Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña celebrada el día 12 de julio de 1937, estando presentes casi todos los miembros del mismo’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁸⁰ At a meeting of the National Committee on 30 June, the National Secretary of the CNT, Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez had affirmed that the organisation in Cataluña was not capable of ‘resorting to force’, see ‘Reunión del Comité Nacional del 30 de Junio de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 68 C.

⁸¹ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

⁸² See the letter to the Liaison Committee of Lleida from the Defence Section of Cataluña, 16 December 1937 which urged that future publication of the review was to be prevented ‘at all costs’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 512/8. Nevertheless, within a month a new clandestine publication, *El Incontrolado*, had appeared, written by young libertarian soldiers, which was similar in content and tone. On *El Incontrolado*, see Godicheau, ‘Periódicos clandestinos’, pp. 194-5, which does not, however, link its appearance to the suspension of *Frente y Retaguardia*.

veteran Manuel Buenacasa as a training centre for libertarian activism, after featuring an article in which it urged the school ‘not to become a political institution, preparing the new deputies of the FAI’. In response, it was announced that the School would report the purists’ aspersions to the Regional Committees of the CNT and the FAI, ‘so that they might make the appropriate decisions’.⁸³

Still more troubling for the libertarian conscience than the censorship by the *comités superiores* of what they regarded as ‘defeatism’, was the willingness of the same to accept the use of courts-martial to impose military discipline on anarchist combatants. This became evident when, on 15 July, a battalion of the 25th and 26th Divisions, operating on the Aragón front, refused orders to enter into battle. The Regional Committee of the Aragonese CNT declared that it would ‘accept the sentence pronounced’, provoking the opposition of radicals in Cataluña. Again it was Pujol, the delegate of the steel and metal industry, who raised a protest at the meeting of the Regional Committee, declaring that he was ‘unwilling to give his approval to this grave event about to take place’, and asking that his opposition be noted in the minutes:

It is not for the Organisation to take on the role of executioner of those who have perhaps acted according to the dictates of their conscience, which opposes all authoritarianism and discipline, [an attitude] that we ourselves have inculcated in them!⁸⁴

Pujol’s intervention was seconded by the delegate from the construction industry, while that of the Local Federation of unions suggested that the case was related to the fact that the libertarian combatants had to face two enemies, one in the front and one in the rear. A delegate from the Liaison Committee drew the attention of those present to the ‘contradiction’ implied by comrades who had accepted militarisation now wishing to

⁸³ *Amanecer. Órgano de la Escuela de Militantes de Cataluña*, December 1937.

⁸⁴ ‘Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña efectuada el día 19 de Julio de 1937, estando presentes las delegaciones siguientes: Luz y Fuerza, Sanidad, tres miembros del Comité de Enlace, Alimentación, Construcción, Fabril, JJLL, FL, dos de la CAP, Artes Gráficas, Distribución y Siderometalúrgica’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

reject military discipline, a cynical remark given that militarisation had been imposed in the teeth of much anarchist opposition. The meeting eventually agreed to urgently contact the authorities in Valencia and Aragón requesting clemency.⁸⁵

Such appeals to authority were a compromise between the acceptance of military discipline on the part of the *comités superiores*, who would even threaten to impose martial discipline on oppositional anarchists in the rear in the summer of 1937, and the tactics being argued for at the base of the Catalan FAI.⁸⁶ At the Regional Plenum of that organisation in July, radical interventions abounded. During the third session, the affinity group *Amor y Verdad* urged the withdrawal from official positions, a boycott of and systematic opposition to the state and the ‘return to a new 19 July’.⁸⁷ The group was represented at the Plenum by the delegate José Viladomiu, a founder member of both the FAI and the CNT in Gironella, who had fought in the Tierra y Libertad column before abandoning the front in March 1937 in opposition to the militarisation of the column.⁸⁸ So we might speculate that, just as the radicalisation of the Barcelona FAI prior to the May days appears to have been influenced in part by the return to the rearguard of recalcitrant elements of the Gelsa section of the Durruti Column, so the radical policies advocated by Catalan anarchists in this period, and their refusal to subordinate the fate of the revolution to the demands of the war, was likewise informed by the presence among them of respected figures who had made plain their own priorities through the abandonment of the frontline.⁸⁹ As Alberola had indicated, the revolutionary, social content of the war had been integral to radical anarchist

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ On the threatened use of military discipline in the rear, see the intervention of García Oliver at the extraordinary meeting of 10 August discussed in the following chapter.

⁸⁷ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’. The *Amor y Verdad* affinity group was based in the Catalan municipality of Gironella, where prior to the war it had been active in opposition to ‘*treintismo*’, see the introduction, by Josep Cara Rincón, Jordi Jané Roca and Josep Quevedo García to *Luz y Vida. Una publicació obrera de Gironella. Edició Facsímil, 4/11/1932 – 24/11/1933* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Gironella i Centre d’Estudis Josep Ester Borràs, 2003), pp. 13-21.

⁸⁸ See Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, pp. 630-1.

⁸⁹ As suggested in Chapter Two, Merino may also have returned from the front due to his opposition to militarisation.

participation. Once this became harder to perceive, anti-nationalism and anti-militarism returned to the forefront of the libertarian conscience, informed by both the strident denunciations of veteran anarchists exiled in France and the reports and deserters arriving in Cataluña from the front. ‘Forgetting for a moment’ that fascism was in Aragón, anarchists in Cataluña attempted to reassert the revolution in the rear in order to revive the revolutionary content of the war.

‘Ships without honour’: the Regional Plenum of the Catalan FAI

The statement through which the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups in Barcelona had convoked the Regional Plenum of July had made government collaboration the fundamental issue to be discussed at the Plenum. There, several affinity groups would propose radical alternatives to the policy, and Merino’s objections would be further elucidated, alluding to both the undemocratic methods by which the policy of collaboration had been arrived at, and its ineffectiveness in advancing the libertarian cause:

The comrades were duty bound to recognise that Companys, Largo Caballero and Azaña could not stop being bourgeois. That is why we said before a much disputed majority, that this was not the way... In the economic sphere, the CNT and the FAI have made progress that has not been consolidated, because in the governments of Valencia and Cataluña our ministers have done nothing to consolidate it.⁹⁰

The initial exchanges at the opening session of the Regional Plenum reflected disquiet at the situation the anarchists found themselves in. Suffering repression at the hands of ‘a microscopic enemy that had become gigantic’, the question of who was to blame for this state of affairs resulted in the censure of the Regional Committee of the FAI and, opposed to this, a wider self-criticism that affirmed that ‘the responsibility belongs to

⁹⁰ See ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

everyone, and each of us must accept our part'.⁹¹ The intervention in this question of the affinity group *Devenir*, to which Juan Santana Calero belonged, affirmed that the Regional Committee, whose secretary was Severino Campos, had proved itself inadequate but that 'we cannot call the comrades traitors nor call for them to be shot'. This was an attempt to distance the affinity group from the second manifesto of the *Agrupación Amigos de Durruti* (AAD), issued while Santana Calero was under arrest, and for whose content he was being made to answer as a member of the *Agrupación*. The relatively muted role of the delegate from *Devenir* at this Plenum suggests that the bullying campaign to which he was being subjected may have had some effect.⁹²

During the second session of the Plenum the attendees became more specific in their critique and in proposals for a change of direction. The delegate from Pla de Besós lamented that the FAI, on uniting itself with the CNT, had changed its character and that 'in this way, we have made ourselves accomplices in the absorption of anarchism by the union organisation'.⁹³ This was a widely felt position, and was to become a frequent complaint among the anarchists of Barcelona over the remainder of 1937. The complaint was confirmed in its essentials by Severino Campos on behalf of the

⁹¹ The quotes here are from the affinity groups *Cultura y Acción* and *Amigos*, respectively.

⁹² See the previous chapter for the whispering campaign begun against Santana Calero in this period. When the young activist attended a National Plenum of the CNT on 2 June, he was summarily dismissed from the assembly by Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, see 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de regionales celebrado los días 2 y sucesivos de junio'. Moving on to the National Plenum of the FIJL that was being held concurrently, his presence was again questioned, this time by Severino Campos, attending not as a delegate but as a representative of the Regional Committee of the Catalan FAI. Although the purpose of such non-delegate representatives was to oversee the greater internal coherence of the Spanish libertarian movement, Campos, who was soon to resign as Regional Secretary of the FAI, evidently felt conflicted in this role, accepting Santana Calero's protestations and further defending him at a meeting of the Catalan region of the CNT, see 'Acta del Pleno Nacional de Regionales Extraordinario celebrado los días 1 y sucesivos de junio de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 239/03 and subsequent discussion at 'Reunión del Comité Regional de Cataluña, celebrada el día 4 de Pradiel de 1937. Estando presentes los Comités, Local y Regional de la FAI. Local de la CNT, Comarcas, El consejero Más, el compañero Fábregas', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁹³ 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña'. Pla de Besós was the name given to the Barcelona suburb of Sant Adrià de Besòs for the duration of the civil war. Its delegate at this Plenum was Antonio Bonilla Albadalejo, who had fought in the Durruti Column and contributed to the AAD mouthpiece, *El Amigo del Pueblo*. See 'Antonio Bonilla Albadalejo – anarquista de la columna durruti' <<http://puertoreal.cnt.es/bilbiografias-anarquistas/4329-antonio-bonilla-albadalejo-anarquista-de-la-columna-durruti.html>> [accessed 7 March 2015]. Bonilla was one of those most convinced that José Manzana had been responsible (whether deliberately or not) for the death of Durruti. See Gimenoólogos, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche*, pp. 405-6.

Regional Committee, who reported that the joint regional conferences of the libertarian movement to which the FAI had been invited had in fact side-lined the latter organisation, with the representatives of the CNT dictating events. Then, when Catalan delegates spoke at a national level, the National Secretary of the CNT had refused to acknowledge the separate character of the regional FAI, as the Catalan libertarian movement was now supposed to speak through one voice.⁹⁴

Towards the end of the second session of the Plenum, Julián Merino, speaking as the delegate of the *Cultura y Acción* affinity group, made a lengthy intervention that also located the problems of Spanish anarchism in the fact of the FAI's reduced role:

We have doubts as to the efficacy of this Plenum... It would seem that there is a deliberate interest in preventing the FAI from arriving at fixed positions with regard to questions of importance. We have taken the wrong road... If we were to go over the mistakes made in Spain, this Plenum would go on forever. Mistakes that no one has wanted to put right. As Campos said, the anarchist movement is influenced by hidden powers... We have always posited the FAI as the vanguard of the CNT, but since 19 July it has tailed behind the Confederation.

Offering a voluntarist solution to the situation, Merino continued:

We are not enamoured of grandiloquent gestures or crazy actions, but of restoring prestige to the movement... Due to a lack of political vision we have enabled the moral victory of certain gentlemen who are determined to bury our organisation... Everything is endangered by this activity and it must be put right. To that end we propose:

1. That all those with official responsibilities should withdraw from them and return to the unions.

⁹⁴ 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña'. This outcome confirms the observation made in the previous chapter as to the role of the Liaison Committees between the different libertarian organisations in the 'bolshevisation' of the movement. The Regional Committee of the FAI had included observations to this effect in its report prior to the Plenum, see 'Comité Regional de GGAA de Cataluña. Informe que presentamos a los grupos de nuestra actuación a partir del primero de abril del año en curso', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1335/10.

2. That in order to confront the repression, the FAI should put itself at the head of the struggle, forgetting for a moment that fascism is in Aragón.⁹⁵

Following this intervention, which was enthusiastically seconded by the affinity group *Los Mismos*, the Plenum broke to attend the unveiling of a plaque honouring Durruti.⁹⁶ When the Plenum reconvened, several newly arrived delegates presented their credentials. Given the turn that the Plenum was to eventually take, it is plausible that the break in proceedings had been taken advantage of in order to alert senior figures of the libertarian movement to what was taking place, and that the arrival of the new delegates reflected concern on their part. Campos, José Xena, Federica Montseny and García Oliver all spoke at the unveiling of the plaque, as reported in *Solidaridad Obrera* on 2 July 1937. The same edition, appearing on the second day of the Plenum, bore on its front page the headline ‘The CNT will collaborate with the Government to win the war’.⁹⁷ Given that this was not accompanied by any new development or public agreement on the part of the CNT, we may speculate that it was published as a deliberate attempt to influence the debate at the Plenum. Voices defending the position of the *comités superiores* were scarce in the early sessions of the July plenum. The intervention of the group Z, to which Fidel Miró belonged, urged that the committees ‘be given a margin of trust so they might act with the rapidity that the present moment demands’, but this was responded to by a point of order stating that the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups did not recognise this affinity group.⁹⁸

After the Peninsular Committee called for unity of action, affirming that ‘the FAI must formulate a minimum programme to be obeyed by all’, the delegate for the group

⁹⁵ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

⁹⁶ Members of *Los Mismos* included José García Perpina of the *Agrupación Faros* and José Pascual San José, of the Transport Workers’ Union.

⁹⁷ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 July 1937.

⁹⁸ The reason why the affinity group Z did not officially belong to the Local Federation in Barcelona is not provided in the minutes. It is interesting to note, however, that the Local Federation was not above using bureaucratic methods to silence its critics.

Humanidad observed that there were two currents present in the hall: that represented by the Plenum and that represented by the Peninsular Committee. A working group was formed to elaborate a position paper synthesising the mood of the Plenum that would be discussed at a later session. Thus, after a further, fourth session in which the discussion was again dominated by oppositional voices urging a settling of accounts with the enemies in the rear and a vanguard role for the FAI in the libertarian movement, the Plenum reconvened to hear and discuss the position paper presented by the working group. It had been drawn up by seven delegates, amongst whom three had already made radical interventions: Tapia Colman, Merino and Viladomiu, with another oppositional anarchist, José Peirats, on behalf of the group *Irreducibles*, ensuring a majority against the line of the Peninsular Committee. This combination also suggested an alliance between the combative voluntarism of Merino and the purist scruples of Peirats. It is likely, given the content of the paper presented, that José María Lunazzi provided the lone voice in opposition to the radical measures proposed.⁹⁹ The paper began with a ‘purist’ affirmation reminiscent of Peirats’s intervention at the National Congress of the CNT in May 1936: ‘The Iberian Anarchist Federation reaffirms its fundamental principles and affirms that it is not a class organisation but one of a widely libertarian and iconoclastic spirit.’¹⁰⁰ It went on to suggest, ‘in keeping with the spirit of the Plenum’, the following concrete proposals: withdrawal from all official positions, a public declaration that the ‘counterrevolutionary repression’ must cease immediately or the FAI would take the lead in combatting it ‘regardless of the situation of the war (which we, more than anyone, desire to win)’, ‘integral collectivisation’, socialisation ‘of all those activities that the workers deem appropriate’, and the creation of Confederal warehouses to oversee exchanges with the collectives in order to put an end

⁹⁹ The other members of the group were F. Alberola, of the *Asturias* group, and Pedro Serra Tubau, of the *Agrupación A*, from Gerona.

¹⁰⁰ For Peirats’s intervention at the National Congress in Zaragoza, see Chapter One.

to speculation.¹⁰¹ In essence then, this paper was a restatement of the radical programme that had developed prior to May and a reaffirmation, despite the assurance that the anarchists ‘more than anyone’ desired victory in the war, of the will to fight ‘the counterrevolution’ regardless of such considerations.

Although the paper was a faithful reflection of the mood of the Plenum up to that point, it was subjected to further discussion. No sooner had it been read out than one delegate, representing the *agrupación* of Vilafranca, insisted that it not be made publicly available. Further delegates opposed the withdrawal of comrades from official positions for a variety of reasons, not least because of the implication that this would have for the production of arms, a source of particular pride to the libertarian movement in Barcelona, given the notable role of anarchists in creating a viable war industry in the city.¹⁰² Since ‘official positions’ potentially ranged from ministries of government and municipal councillors to commissions of industry or workplace-based positions of authority, it was possible for delegates to agree with the withdrawal of some comrades and not others, and this was reflected in the discussion. There was further disquiet with regard to the fact that most members of the FAI who held official positions did so in the name of the CNT, in accordance with the agreements of the latter organisation; there was unease at the possibility that accepting this proposal would mean breaking the famous *trabazón* between the libertarian organisations as well as provoking a mass exodus of anarchists from positions of responsibility at all levels. The potential implications of the position paper may have influenced the apparent *volte face* on the

¹⁰¹ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

¹⁰² The CNT had collaborated with the *Comissió d’Indústries de Guerra* (War Industries’ Commission) from its creation on August 7 1936. The body had come under the jurisdiction of García Oliver during his tenure as Councillor of War in the CCMA, and also involved the notable participation of Eugenio Vallejo Isla, a leading member of the metalworkers’ union affiliated to the CNT. See Javier de Madariaga, ‘Les Indústries de Guerra. La fabricació, distribució, adquisició, control i experimentació de material bèl·lica’ in *Breu Història de la Guerra Civil a Catalunya*, ed. by Josep M. Solé Sabaté and Joan Villarroya (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2005), pp. 317-28.

part of the delegate of the group *Los Mismos*, who warned that ‘we must be very clear about what this Plenum agrees to, or we will have cause to regret it very soon’.¹⁰³

If the opening remarks with regard to the paper suggest a change in the mood of the Plenum, this was to be reinforced by the intervention of García Oliver who, given that this is the first time he appears in the minutes, must surely not have been present prior to this session. While previous delegates had been censured by the chair when straying from the point or making overly long contributions, the same rule did not apply to the man who had until recently been, in the name of the CNT, the Spanish Republic’s Minister of Justice, and was now Secretary of the CAP in Cataluña. His speech to the Plenum took in references to the Russian and French revolutions, the economic situation in Spain and various recollections relating to the early days of the struggle, causing the secretary responsible for the minutes to admit defeat and stop recording his intervention. While lacking an engagement with the issues as they had been expressed hitherto, it is possible that his words had an effect on wavering delegates, particularly when declaring that the anarchists ‘must not and cannot abandon any position but on the contrary must take more every day’.¹⁰⁴

As the debate dragged on into a sixth session, further important figures of the anarchist movement made an appearance, defending the record of state collaboration and urging the need for libertarian unity. Among the speakers were an unnamed representative from the National Committee of the CNT, Federica Montseny, ‘Isgleas’, who was probably Francisco Isgleas Piarnau, the former Minister of Defence in the *Generalitat*, and José Xena, the majority of whom were speaking not as delegates to the Congress but as observers with an ‘informative’ role (Xena may have been an exception in this regard). Montseny had in fact been sent by the National Committee of the CNT

¹⁰³ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

on an explicit mission to intervene in the Plenums of the Catalan libertarian movement.¹⁰⁵

José Peirats had made an impassioned defence of the oppositional position in response to García Oliver, declaring that it would be preferable to have ‘honour without ships than ships without honour’ and that: ‘If it is necessary to use violence let us use it, between the violence of our enemies and that of ourselves the latter is preferable, and if it is necessary to reinforce our positions by unleashing another 19 July then so be it.’¹⁰⁶ This call for anarchist violence was somewhat uncharacteristic on the part of Peirats and a further example of the contemporary confluence of purist and voluntarist perspectives among radicals. Peirats also asked that, if the paper presented by the working group was rejected, it be ‘recorded in the minutes, so that it may be archived and recognised as a historical document of the current revolutionary movement’. However, this tone of defiance was itself indicative of the direction that the debate was taking. The Plenum finally approved the following proposals of the group *Germen*:

1. To reject the paper of the working group due to the grave situation that would result from closing the way to future possibilities and its disparity with regard to the agreements taken by the Regional Plenum of the CNT;
2. To accept the proposals and orientations agreed to at the Plenum of the CNT with regard to collaboration;
3. On collaboration and participation in government in the future, that the Committees be given the authority to work in accordance with the circumstances of the moment, paying attention to the national agreements, as

¹⁰⁵ Montseny was accompanied by Manuel Amil Barcia. See ‘Reunión del Comité Nacional del 30 de Junio de 1937’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 68 C. On Amil Barcia, see the biography in Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’. Peirats was alluding to the phrase ‘Spain prefers honour without ships to ships without honour’, attributed to the nineteenth-century Spanish naval officer Casto Méndez Núñez.

exceptional procedures correspond to exceptional situations, thereby regaining and surpassing the positions lost.¹⁰⁷

A Plenum that had threatened to expose the divisions in the libertarian movement through the adoption of proposals that would have marked a complete rupture with the policy of its *comités superiores* thus resulted in what was in effect the only alternative outcome: a timid renunciation of the autonomy of the Catalan anarchist affinity groups and a voluntary ceding of decision-making responsibility to the movement's leadership. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that this was consequent upon the flooding of the Plenum by non-delegate libertarian grandees. Although not wishing to claim that the radical anarchists formed an absolute majority within the Catalan FAI, the abrupt change in the direction of the Plenum evinced by the minutes suggests that the radicals and the positions they defended were sufficiently persuasive as to dictate the tenor of assemblies, but only up until the point at which they were trumped by the appearance of the *comités superiores*.

The *comités superiores* had thus shown themselves capable of blocking any attempt on the part of the recalcitrant anarchists to elaborate an alternative strategy to state collaboration. Many radical anarchists would soon leave the rearguard to participate in an anti-fascist war whose purpose they were now beginning to question.¹⁰⁸ For the *comités superiores*, meanwhile, the Plenum of July 1937 had provided the fig-leaf of democratic approval for their continued exercise of executive decision-making power. As we shall see in the following chapter, the chief consequence of this retention of executive power was the surrender of the remaining strategic outposts controlled by the CNT in Barcelona. However, the extent to which this power could truly be brought to bear in making the libertarian movement a homogeneous organisation was limited,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Among those who did so were José Peirats and Juan Santana Calero. See Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, p. 113.

and would be tenaciously contested by the same anarchists that had attempted to elaborate an alternative to state collaboration.

Conclusions

In spite of being ejected from the Ministries and Councils of government in Valencia and Cataluña, the libertarian movement in Spain remained important to the administrative functioning of the Republican state, and its most prominent representatives remained committed to the Republican war effort, accepting the nationalist and militarist corollaries of state collaboration during war-time. In opposition to them, those currents representing the conscience of the Spanish revolution attempted to advance a different policy in the aftermath of the May events, demonstrating in the process the continued confluence of perspectives among voluntarist and purist radicals. While several voluntarists and purists of the pre-war period had become ardent supporters of collaboration, amongst the oppositionists we find many veterans of the struggle against *treintismo*, who shared a vision of the FAI as the radicalising agent or anarchist vanguard of the CNT. Those mentioned in this chapter include Merino, Pujol, Viladomiu, Peirats and Martorell. This shared vision enabled voluntarists and purists, including several members of the JJLL, to advance a unified perspective at the Regional Plenum of Anarchist Affinity Groups in July 1937. This anti-collaborationist tendency was therefore made up of the same ‘categories’ of Spanish anarchism that had successfully allied to unseat the moderates from their positions of responsibility during the Second Republic and, as before, was composed chiefly by mid-level CNT activists and union delegates who also belonged to the FAI.¹⁰⁹

As for the category of ‘*treintismo*’, it persisted insofar as it continued to be used as a derogatory term for those anarchists who appealed to exceptional circumstances to

¹⁰⁹ On the role of such union delegates in the radicalisation of the CNT during the Second Republic see Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, pp. 96-101.

justify collaborating with Republican politicians.¹¹⁰ During the civil war, this category was swollen by militants who were neither ideologically nor temperamentally ‘moderate’, but who nevertheless had become convinced of the need to prioritise anti-fascism over the social revolution. Their positions in governmental bodies or even in the *comités superiores* gave this prioritisation a professional imperative, while the course of the war gave it a moral urgency that brooked no disagreement. Consequently, those influential anarchists who had become convinced that the importance and grandeur of the Spanish libertarian movement was such that its intervention in the direction of the anti-fascist state was both necessary and potentially decisive, would spend much of the summer and autumn of 1937 engaged in a tireless propaganda campaign whose chief objective was to persuade their former comrades to no longer behave like anarchists. For this they were labelled ‘*treintistas*’ regardless of their activity prior to 19 July. In October, Merino would recall the ‘struggles against the FAI in 1931 on the part of the reformists of those days’, noting that ‘it is precisely today, in the midst of a revolutionary period when it would seem that those reformist intentions have been achieved’.¹¹¹

By contrast to the ideological battle waged against the ‘*treintistas*’ earlier in the decade, when a wave of insurrectionary strikes had radicalised the CNT, the period since 19 July had seen the libertarian movement, as one anarchist put it, ‘invaded’ by ‘a moderate spirit’.¹¹² A large proportion of the libertarian movement’s leading figures now occupied positions of responsibility in state-controlled industries, in municipal government, and in the increasingly bureaucratised libertarian organisations, while a great many members of the CNT in the rearguard had joined after 19 July 1936.

¹¹⁰ See the denunciation of the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT in *El Amigo del Pueblo*, 19 May 1937.

¹¹¹ ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista, celebrado el día 17 de octubre de 1937, para tratar de la nueva estructuración de la FAI’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1335/08.

¹¹² See the remarks made by the delegate of the *Humanidad* affinity group, ‘Acta del pleno de G.G.A.A., celebrado en Barcelona el día 21 de septiembre de 1937’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1307/7.

Whereas once the radical anarchists had ridden a wave of popular militancy to confront a gradualist tendency that they were able to present as out of touch and out of time, they now had to confront a different set of questions contextualised by obligatory union membership and the partial absorption of the libertarian movement into a militarised, anti-fascist state.

In this chapter I have set out how the radical anarchists of Barcelona responded to this challenge. The problem of the relationship to the state would be dealt with by withdrawal from official positions, that of the anti-fascist war by a readjustment of priorities that would see the counter-revolution met in armed confrontation in the rearguard, and that of the moderation of the CNT by a renovation of the *comités superiores* and a reaffirmation of the vanguard role of the FAI. Evidently, this would have supposed a complete break with the trajectory undertaken by the *comités superiores* up to this point. In opposing such proposals, the *comités superiores* employed bureaucratic measures to shut down oppositional voices at National Plenums and to censor the anarchist press. They also, however, did their utmost to persuade wavering activists, to defend their activity and to win votes at fractious Local and Regional Plenums. That they were able to do so may indicate, to an extent, their ongoing prestige within the movement and the limits of the radicals' appeal. We might also cite the experience of defeat in May and the ongoing repression of the libertarian movement, as well as the losses at the front, as being conducive to fatalism, a tendency, discussed in the following chapter, that can be seen in the choice of radicals to enlist in the army.

The struggle of the radical anarchists to alter the course of their organisations bore some resemblance to that of the left oppositionists in the Soviet Union in the early years of the revolution. This is true not only in terms of shared grievances, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, but in terms of the energy with

which their respective leaderships opposed them, employing a variety of methods. Confronting the crisis of 1921, the Bolshevik leadership, in addition to measures of outright repression, strained ‘every effort in appealing for unity in the party ranks against external dangers and internal difficulties’ so that they might win votes at meetings of local party branches.¹¹³ The upshot of such ‘victories’ was that, in Spain as in Russia, the official pronouncements, policies and press of the revolutionary organisations bore little relation to the defining features and principles of the respective revolutions. Having lost the battle to change the strategy of the libertarian movement, therefore, the radical anarchists in Spain turned their attention towards ‘salvaging the prestige’ of anarchism, a struggle analysed in the following chapter.

¹¹³ See Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 139.

Chapter 5: ‘Let us be worthy of Anarchy.’ Autonomous action and the defence of federalism, July – December 1937

It could be objected, and the living realities that have befallen us in this period of war confirm it, that we are moving with giant steps towards state capitalism, which for the proletariat will take the form of a new system of dependence; that the worker will only be valued as the stuff of the workshop or factory, and his personal liberty will be completely cut off... It is dangerously fatalist to accustom oneself to the state of things as they are in the belief that they cannot be changed, or to simply wrap oneself up in the played-out and imported cliché of the ‘circumstances’. Let us reject that fatalism and return to our previous, so regrettably forgotten line of conduct. Let us be worthy of Anarchy.¹

The above passage is taken from an article signed by Tomás Cabot that appeared in *Esfuerzo*, a publication resuscitated as an organ of the Catalan JJLL in the autumn of 1937.² It is immediately notable for the sophistication of its critique, particularly in the identification of ‘state capitalism’ as the emerging dominant tendency in the economy of the Spanish Republic. This phrase was chiefly associated with ‘ultra-left’ and anarchist analyses of the decline of the Russian Revolution, and was used within a year of the Soviet takeover by the group around the short-lived newspaper, *Kommunist*. This publication expressed similar concerns to those of Cabot, warning that the Soviet Republic was threatened by an ‘evolution towards state capitalism’: ‘The introduction of labour discipline in connection with the restoration of capitalist management of industry... will diminish the class initiative, activity and organisation of the proletariat. It threatens to enslave the working class’.³ In August 1918, the First All-Russian

¹ *Esfuerzo*, 7 October 1937.

² The title had formerly appeared, prior to June 1937, as a flysheet, edited by Juan Santana Calero. See Chapters Two and Three. Santana Calero was also heavily involved in the later publication, although its official editor was Ramón Liarte. I have not been able to find any information regarding Tomás Cabot aside from his contributions to *Esfuerzo*.

³ Taken from the first issue of *Kommunist*, published in April 1918 by the ‘Left Communist’ St. Petersburg Committee and the St. Petersburg Area Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (the Bolsheviks), cited by Lenin in N. Lenin, ‘“Left-Wing” Childishness’, a series of articles

Conference of the Anarcho-Syndicalists pledged to struggle ‘for emancipation from state capitalism’.⁴ Oppositional anarchists in Spain recognised the parallels with what had unfolded in Russia. Amador Franco wrote in *Esfuerzo*:

If we analyse what happened in that [Russian] movement, walking in the footsteps of the epic struggle of the Kronstadt sailors and in the struggles of the peasants in Ukraine, the stages undergone by that people, in its fight against global capitalism and the armies of its interior, seem to us to be the same as in our struggle, save for differences of time and characteristics... Furthermore, the partisans of true communism had to confront those who, in the name of the proletariat, in fact operated behind its back.⁵

The parallels are instructive; both in Russia in 1918 and Spain in 1937, the revolutionary changes in daily working life had been truncated, and dissident currents confronted revolutionary leaderships, Bolshevik and anarcho-syndicalist, who considered the increasing state control of industry to be inevitable, if temporary, steps on the path to victory.⁶

On the part of the CNT, this was made clear in no uncertain terms at the Extraordinary Congress of the IWMA, held in Paris in December 1937, which is discussed in detail in the final sub-section of this chapter. There, Alexander Schapiro characterised the economic conceptions put forward by the CNT in advance of the organisation’s Economic Plenum to be held in January 1938 as representing ‘a retreat to the well-known ideas of [corporative] or reformist unionism’.⁷ Far from suggesting an

published in *Pravda* in May 1918, available at

<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>> [accessed 13 May 2015].

⁴ See ‘Three Resolutions’ in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. by Paul Avrich (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 117.

⁵ *Esfuerzo*, 24 October 1937.

⁶ Lenin declared that ‘state capitalism would be a *step forward* as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic. If in approximately six months’ time state capitalism became established in our Republic, this would be a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have gained a permanently firm hold and will have become invincible in our country’, Lenin, *op. cit.*

⁷ The minutes in fact record Schapiro as referring to the ideas of ‘co-operative’ unionism, which I assume to be a misunderstanding or mistranslation of his words.

organisation of the economy that would satisfy revolutionary objectives, the CNT's proposals incorporated techniques commonly employed by bourgeois democracies and even totalitarian states.⁸ The 'new system of dependence' envisaged by Cabot, in which the worker 'will only be valued as the stuff of the workshop or factory', seemed to be given credence by the declarations at the Congress of the National Secretary of the CNT, Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, who indicated that workers' control of industry, and assembly-based workplace democracy, even amongst CNT members, were now anathema to official CNT policy:

The times in which we live do not permit either abundance or equality. They demand from everyone an elevated contribution of sacrifice that is hard to agree to, and which is even harder to demand of those who have joined the organisation more out of self-interest than idealism. That is why we must compromise with reality. We cannot allow workers to determine for themselves the mode of their salary; we cannot give a blank cheque to everyone, especially not the arrivistes... in such a situation it is highly natural that the complicated problems of the libertarian movement be reserved for the old guard, of absolute solidity.⁹

With 'the old guard' in charge and a 'dependent' workforce robbed of any decision-making power, workplace relations were thus established along traditional lines, a shift that had been reinforced after May 1937 by an increase in injunctions from the CNT hierarchy to the Spanish workforce to increase productivity and leave questions of living standards until after the war.¹⁰ For Schapiro, described by Martínez Prieto as 'the greatest enemy of the CNT', such arguments rested on the 'sophistry of capitalism that has always been employed to oppose the demands of the proletariat'.¹¹

⁸ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'. An example of such measures was the introduction of workers' record books or certificates, which were used in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and had been defended by Lenin. See the discussion in Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management*, pp. 116-8.

⁹ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'.

¹⁰ See Monjo and Vega, *Els treballadors i la guerra civil*, pp. 164-8; Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management*, pp. 116-24, and Seidman, *Workers Against Work*, pp. 132-42.

¹¹ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'. For this description of Schapiro, see Prieto, *Secretario General de la CNT de España en 1936, Tomo II*, p. 148.

In other words, the CNT leadership had positioned itself as an opponent of proletarian demands, and was prepared to buttress itself with capitalist ideology in order to do so. This explained why it now faced its own members from a position of power and authority, a process that Schapiro did not hesitate to describe as ‘bolshevisation’:

As regards the moral distinction between the ‘idealistic’ representatives of the masses and the masses themselves, this invariably results in the transformation of the activists into leaders and these end up making their own caste interests prevail over those of the supposedly ‘selfish’ masses.¹²

The two related concerns revealed in the above citation from Tomás Cabot, that the Spanish revolution had not led to a lasting emancipation of the working class, and that it was the duty of anarchists to resist a fatalist acceptance of this state of affairs, were now unambiguous dividing lines between radical anarchists and the *comités superiores* of the CNT-FAI, who were wedded to both the increasing centralisation of work-places under state control and to a fatalist, or ‘tragic’, reading of the Spanish revolution. References to the ‘tragic’ nature of the Spanish conflict were commonplace, and provided the famous German anarchist Rudolf Rocker with the title of his contemporary work, *The Tragedy of Spain*.¹³ Leon Trotsky, who in 1920 had referred to the situation of the Soviet Union as ‘in the highest degree tragic’, used the same formulation as Rocker for the title of an article on Spain in 1939.¹⁴ Through recourse to such a reading, the CNT representatives attempted to make their positions immune to criticism by presenting them as inevitable adaptations to the drama of the civil war, declaring at the Paris Congress that: ‘No-one must be allowed to speculate over our

¹² ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

¹³ Rudolf Rocker, *The Tragedy of Spain* (New York: Freie Arbeiter Stimme, 1937).

¹⁴ Leon Trotsky, ‘The Tragedy of Spain’, *Socialist Appeal*, 19 February 1939. For the context of his quote on the tragic situation of the USSR, see Lars Lih, “‘Our Position is in the Highest Degree Tragic’: Bolshevik “Euphoria” in 1920”, in *History and Revolution: Refuting Revisionism*, ed. by Mike Haynes and Jim Wolfreys (London: Verso, 2007), p. 118.

tragedy. It is a question of justice and morality.’¹⁵ As the above citation from *Esfuerzo* shows, however, such enjoinders rang hollow when directed at CNT members in Spain who were, after all, actors in the same drama. Consequently, the internal opposition, the existence of which the CNT’s *comités superiores* denied to the world, voiced its rejection not only of ‘state capitalism’, but also of the denial of its agency, its revolutionary will.¹⁶

By the autumn of 1937, however, the oppositional anarchists of Spain had to face the fact that their attempts over the course of the summer to force a change in the official policy of the libertarian movement had failed. Radicals lamented that ‘neo-anarchism has won the battle over true anarchism’.¹⁷ This was a term employed by a delegate at the Regional Plenum of Anarchist Affinity Groups in July and in the pages of *Frente y Retaguardia* to refer to anarchists whose anti-statism did not extend to democratic states. On 23 October, *Alerta...!*, a new underground publication, appeared in Barcelona, produced by the city’s defence committees. It also declared itself ‘tired of paradoxes. Anarchist ministers... anarchist governors... anarchist mayors and councillors.... Anarchist police... anarchist jailors... Climb the ladder if that is your ambition... but do not call yourselves anarchists’.¹⁸ Oppositional anarchists now appeared to assert that the divisions within the libertarian movement were such that they could no longer claim to share the same ideological tradition. As much was also asserted by veteran anarchists abroad, and is discussed in greater detail below.

Alerta...! provided sombre, if defiant, reading for partisans of the Spanish revolution. Under the headline ‘The proletariat has gained nothing’, the editorial of its first issue drew up a critical balance sheet of the revolution’s trajectory:

¹⁵ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

¹⁶ In this respect too there are parallels with the Left Communists of Russia, who were scolded by Lenin for insisting on a ‘determined class policy’ and a ‘determined policy of socialisation’: ‘Dear “Left Communists”, how determined they are, but how little thinking they display.’ In Lenin, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ ‘Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña’.

¹⁸ *Alerta...!*, 23 October 1937. On *Alerta...!*, see Godicheau, ‘Los periódicos clandestinos’, pp. 190-4.

We have lost thousands and thousands of comrades, the flower of our activist base... Of the Revolution barely anything remains, and what little that does is not consolidated. We will have to go back, to find the spirit of 19 July, to raise it up again and keep it strong, without trusting in anybody, without paying attention to any commonplace slogans.¹⁹

By the time that this editorial was published, nearly six months had passed since the May days, when the defence committees, alongside their allies in the Catalan JJLL, anarchist affinity groups and various unions of the CNT, had mobilised their forces in an attempt to recover on the streets of Barcelona the 'spirit of 19 July'. Since May, two further opportunities had presented themselves, in August and September, to begin where they had left off, but on both occasions, discussed in detail below, their initiatives were nipped in the bud by the libertarian hierarchies.

This chapter will analyse the activity of radical anarchists during the late summer and autumn of 1937, their defence of federalism and initiation of autonomous actions in the face of the 'bolshevisation' of the libertarian movement. As a consequence of their activity, these tendencies, embodied respectively in the Catalan JJLL and the affinity groups and defence committees of Barcelona, were marginalised by the regional organisations of the CNT and FAI, and by the end of the year, there were signs of bitterness and despair among all but the most indefatigable of radicals. With defeat came fissures in the alliance effected during the course of this battle between purist and voluntarist anarchists. There were signs of a retreat into ideology and introspection on the part of the former tendency, while the attempts at independent armed activity on the part of the latter led to their being threatened in the most violent of terms by senior CNT members. The Congress of the IWMA in December, analysed in the final part of this chapter, confirmed that the crisis of the libertarian movement, born in the Spanish conflict, had become a global crisis of organised anarchism, as the CNT moved to

¹⁹ *Alerta...!*, 23 October 1937.

silence what it referred to as ‘uncontrolled groups’ on the international plane.²⁰ Nevertheless, for all their disparity in method and temperament, radical anarchists were united, within and beyond the borders of Spain, in their concern for the dignity and integrity of anarchism.

Federalism in defiance of ‘neo-anarchism’

This impulse to defend the integrity of Spanish anarchism was consequent upon the defeat of practical proposals intended to reorient the strategy of the libertarian organisations. This was made apparent at the Regional Plenum of Anarchist Affinity Groups in Barcelona in July 1937, the first sessions of which are discussed in the previous chapter. Following the voting down of radical anarchist proposals to withdraw from state collaboration, the Peninsular Committee of the FAI sought to advance the ‘legalisation’ of the specifically anarchist organisation; that is to say, its formal constitution as a political organisation. This was intended to facilitate its participation in state bodies and thereby increase the libertarian presence in organs of collaboration.²¹ Legalisation also provided the Peninsular Committee with an opportunity to alter the internal organisation of the FAI along the lines that had been discussed as far back as December 1936 and which implied, as far as many radical anarchists could see, the adoption of a party political structure.²² The principal point of contention in the restructuring of the FAI was the proposed replacement of the affinity groups, the ‘*grupos*’, by larger ‘*agrupaciones*’, based on geographical locality and open to all self-declared anarchists, as the basic unit of the organisation. The question was brought

²⁰ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

²¹ See ‘Comité Regional de GG/AA/ de Andalucía. Circular Urgentísima’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 11/10, which contains the relevant report of the Peninsular Committee: ‘In many town halls, provincial councils and other organisations, the participation of our specific organisation on equal terms with the Communists and Socialists has been prevented, owing to the allegation that it is not a normally constituted organisation’. It had been worrying for the *comités superiores* that Manuel Irujo, the Basque Nationalist Minister of Justice under Negrín, had used the FAI’s continued ‘illegality’ as an excuse to eject the organisation’s delegates from representation in the running of the judiciary.

²² See, for example, Santana Calero, *Afirmación en la marcha*, p. 8: ‘The FAI has been converted into a political party through a restructuring that was also imposed by “circumstances”’.

forward for discussion at the aforementioned Regional Plenum in Barcelona no sooner than had the defeat of the radicals' practical proposals been confirmed, and was debated late into the night of 3 July, at the end of days of increasingly bitter argument.²³

For Julián Merino, secretary of the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, speaking on behalf of the affinity group *Cultura y Acción*, legalisation represented the ultimate indignity. He declared that 'the FAI has never required legalisms for its development, and its value has always been based upon acting outside of legalisation... every anarchist should be ashamed that this subject can even be discussed'. He accused the Peninsular Committee of wanting to turn the FAI into a political party and, when this was denied, retorted that 'if that is what you want then say so without euphemisms'. In spite of the angry tone of his intervention, however, it is apparent that Merino did not consider the debate to have been lost. 'As we do not know what they want to do with the FAI', he concluded, 'legalisation cannot be accepted'.²⁴ By contrast, there were signs of fatalism amongst other delegates, as the Plenum's highly contentious decision to ratify governmental collaboration earlier in the proceedings cast a shadow over the debate on status and structure. The delegate of *Pompeyo Gener* observed that 'we are wasting our time, when neo-anarchism has won the battle over true anarchism' and that, 'if we are to be consistent with what we have accepted with regard to collaboration we must also accept legalisation'.²⁵ The sentiments of this delegate were echoed by Simón Tapia Colman, on behalf of the *Hispania* affinity group, who had adopted a radical position at the Plenum on the question of collaboration and the war effort, but who now stated that, having failed to

²³ The question had not appeared on the original agenda of the Plenum, but the Peninsular Committee had included this item on its agenda for the Peninsular Plenum of the FAI that was to take place in Valencia shortly after. It was therefore discussed with a view to providing a mandate to the Catalan delegates to the Peninsular Plenum. See 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña'.

²⁴ 'Acta del pleno regional de grupos anarquistas de Cataluña'.

²⁵ Ibid. It is unknown whether this delegate belonged to an affinity group named '*Pompeyo Gener*' or whether this was a delegate of the rationalist school of the same name.

rectify the FAI's line of conduct, 'if we have approved collaboration, it would be contradictory not to legalise the FAI'.²⁶

Other delegates expressed concern for the integrity of Spanish anarchism, which was considered to be worth preserving regardless of circumstance. The terms of the debate thus foreshadowed what was to be the crux of the struggle within the libertarian movement over the course of the autumn: a fatalist submission to circumstance or a prioritisation of the dignity of anarchism. The delegate of the affinity group *Móvil* declared that 'if we legalise ourselves, the FAI will lose its prestige, as our colossal strength is due to the activity that we have undertaken since before 19 July', while other delegates considered legalisation to represent the 'negation of ourselves as anarchists'.²⁷ Although several speakers spoke in support of the line of the Peninsular Committee, viewing legalisation as an opportunity to increase anarchist influence among the Spanish working class, the motion to legalise the FAI was defeated by 43 votes to 27, with a high number of abstentions.²⁸ Thus when a delegation of the Catalan FAI made its way to Valencia the following day to participate in the Peninsular Plenum of the organisation, it was without a mandate to approve legalisation and the concomitant restructuring of the FAI.

The Aragonese affinity groups had likewise viewed the Peninsular Committee's proposal with scepticism. In Valencia, their delegate made a case indicative of both purist and voluntarist concerns. The delegate for Aragón referred to the struggle that the political parties were waging against the anarchists and averred that 'the political situation has not yet been resolved in such a way as to suggest the abandonment of tactics appropriate for underground activity' and that, furthermore, 'if the FAI is turned

²⁶ Ibid. Tapia Colman attempted to elaborate on the change in his thinking but was cut short by the chair, José Xena, for straying from the agenda of the Plenum.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

into an organisation of the masses it will lose its specific content'.²⁹ Remarkably, despite faithfully relaying the arguments of its affinity groups, the Aragonese delegation put its signature to the position paper elaborated at the Peninsular Plenum in which the new structure was detailed. That it did so may have been in response to pressure exerted by the Catalan delegation, which also reneged on the mandate with which it had been entrusted. This latter delegation, which included Juan Manuel Molina, nominated by García Oliver, and Simón Tapia Colman, of the *Hispania* group, read a statement explaining their actions that the Aragonese delegation also adhered to:

The Catalan delegation, in view of the unanimity of the Plenum, accepts its part of the working group and signs the position paper, explaining its vote by reference to the fact that certain of the organisational procedures that form the new structure are already practised in the region. Its vote is nevertheless conditional upon the final resolutions of the region that it represents.³⁰

The unanimity referred to here was entirely illusory as the Plenum was in fact divided, with three regions, Levante, Andalucía and the Centre, mandated to favour restructuring and two, Cataluña and Aragón to oppose it, representing a total of 615 affinity groups and 775 affinity groups, respectively.

In spite of being rejected at the Regional Plenum in July, therefore, the restructuring of the FAI was returned to the agenda of the Catalan anarchist groups at a Plenum in Barcelona the following month. Once again, prominent figures within the libertarian movement such as García Oliver, Montseny and Rodríguez Vázquez were in attendance. On this occasion, several purists of the JJLL left the hall midway through proceedings, crying out 'Long live anarchy!'. A meeting hastily arranged in Valencia in an attempt to avoid a split took place soon after, with Xena acting as mediator between

²⁹ *Memoria del Pleno Peninsular de Regionales*, pp. 15-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Peirats, a representative of this faction, and Montseny, of the Peninsular Committee, but came to nought.³¹ According to the Confederal press, the sticking point was the freedom of the oppositional affinity groups to remain outside of the restructuring process and therefore not be grouped into larger *agrupaciones* according to locality.³² According to Peirats, however, the problem was rather the new declaration of principles that accompanied the restructuring, which implied that the FAI was no longer committed to a struggle against all states, but only against the establishment of ‘a dictatorship of caste or party’.³³ That this was the crux of the issue for purist anarchists was reaffirmed in an article in *Frente y Retaguardia*:

There cannot remain the least doubt that, on declaring themselves enemies of the ‘totalitarian state’, the ‘neo-anarchists’ also know how to distinguish, as has always been the skill of Marxists and republicans, between the democratic state and the state *per se*... What remains of the classic anarchist criterion that attributes totalitarian properties to every state, considering its supposed moderation as a temporary affair dependent on the degree of resistance or conformity of its subjects?³⁴

The determination of the *comités superiores* to press ahead with the restructuring of the FAI according to these ‘neo-anarchist’ principles resulted in an impasse. No delegation was sent from the Catalan region to attend the Peninsular Plenum of the FAI in August. There the Catalan region’s proposal that a National Congress be held to determine the structure of the FAI was read out. While it was agreed that such a Congress should be held ‘when circumstances permit’, it was nevertheless considered opportune to immediately press ahead with the restructuring given that it was agreed to ‘unanimously by all the regions represented in the Plenum’.³⁵ The illusion of unanimity

³¹ See the recollections of Peirats, *De mi paso*, pp. 346-8.

³² *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 October 1937.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 348. See also ‘Estatutos generales de la Federación Anarquista Ibérica’, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archive (IISG) 49 A.

³⁴ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 1 September 1937.

³⁵ See ‘Actas del Pleno Peninsular de Regionales’, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archive (IISG) 49 A.

once again served to grant legitimacy to a process designed to silence oppositional voices by removing the mechanisms by which libertarian organisations had formerly ensured federalist practices. If radicals could not be silenced by the regional organisations, then those regions would simply be ignored by the national body. The same process occurred in the libertarian youth organisations. The continued opposition of the Catalan JJLL to the National Committee of the FIJL on the question of state collaboration led to the JJLL's right to continue defending and propagating their position being brought into question.

At the National Congress of the FIJL, held in July, a compromise was reached according to which the Catalan JJLL agreed not to participate in national rallies of the youth organisations and that, in the section's press, affiliates would 'do no more than provide an exposition of their ideas so as not to give the impression that we are in disagreement with the rest of the peninsula'.³⁶ The same Congress requested a written document from the Catalan JJLL explaining their position, and on 9 July a manifesto was produced in which the Catalan JJLL stated that the unity of the FIJL must be achieved on the basis of fidelity to anarchist ideas. The manifesto justified the 'purely anarchist tendency' of the JJLL on the assumption that the 'circumstantialism' of the CNT and the FAI was transitory and that it was reasonable to expect 'a return to these [purely anarchist] principles, tactics and objectives in the more or less near future' but that this could only be assured by 'maintaining in the sector most susceptible to reformist contamination the anarchistic spirit that has always informed our libertarian activities'.³⁷ The manifesto thus directly challenged the sincerity of the appeal to circumstances routinely made by the libertarian defenders of state collaboration. Aside

³⁶ See 'Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias. Acta de la sesión cuarta del día 2 de Julio de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 237/1.

³⁷ See 'Exposición ampliada del punto de vista del movimiento juvenil libertario de la regional catalana según la ponencia aprobada en su último congreso de juventudes libertarias celebrado en Mayo', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 238/5.

from such ideological questions, however, the manifesto of the JJLL justified their right to maintain a different line to that of the FIJL as a whole, alleging that the Catalan section had a peculiar character: ‘when the JJLL decided to enter the FIJL they did so on the basis of continuing with their classic structure as the Section of Culture and Propaganda of the FAI... a proposal of autonomy that is perfectly respectable among anarchists’.³⁸

At the National Plenum held the following month, where the need to ‘resolve the Catalan problem’ was openly stated, this question of autonomy was the crux of the debate.³⁹ The General Secretary of the FIJL was now Fidel Miró, the former secretary of the Catalan JJLL whose exit from the latter post was decided at the same Congress in May at which the organisation had affirmed its ‘purist’ stance. At the Plenum, Miró had the backing of the delegates from Aragón, the Central region and Andalucía, all of whom wondered whether the Catalan JJLL accepted the ‘law of majorities’. Peirats, speaking as the delegate of a Catalan section which had declared itself ‘concerned with what is fundamental and permanent about anarchist ideas and not with what is politically convenient’, affirmed that it was federalism that gave the movement its ‘exhilarating uniqueness’, and that this had to be more than just a theory.⁴⁰ Miró countered that ‘above everything else there is a responsibility which has a national character, and therefore one must not confuse a diversity in criteria with a diversity in positions adopted’.⁴¹ The Plenum ended with the Catalan delegation agreeing to call a further Congress of the regional JJLL in order to fix its position.

³⁸ ‘Exposición ampliada del punto de vista del movimiento juvenil libertario’.

³⁹ See ‘Actas del pleno de regionales de JL celebrado en Valencia los días 2 y 3 de Agosto de 1937’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 237/1.

⁴⁰ See ‘Exposición ampliada del punto de vista del movimiento juvenil libertario’ and ‘Actas del pleno de regionales de JL celebrado en Valencia los días 2 y 3 de Agosto de 1937’, respectively.

⁴¹ Ibid. It is clear from his memoirs that Miró did not consider the Catalan JJLL to have been a section of the regional FAI: ‘Although the JJLL were known as the “young eagles [*aguiluchos*] of the FAI”... the reality was that no real organic link existed between them, so that our [the JJLL’s] autonomy was total and absolute and consequently we never acted, even during the civil war, according to the decisions or

Prior to this Congress, which would not be held until 10 October, three new publications appeared from within the ranks of the Catalan youth organisation. *El Quijote* was a weekly produced under the auspices of the affinity group *Los Quijotes del Ideal* in Clot. Purist in tone, its first issue declared its intention to be ‘somewhat removed from the terrible “today” in which we live’.⁴² *Evolución* was the organ of the FECL, edited by Ada Martí, who wrote a critique of democracy in its first issue that would have been anathema to the ‘neo-anarchists’.⁴³ Diego Camacho, a member of *Los Quijotes del Ideal*, recalls being shown the first issue by Martí, who told him that it had a print run of four thousand editions:

It’s not much... but it is important to say what we are saying. It is painful to read the official press of our movement. What is worse: with the commonplace of the circumstances they are justifying anti-anarchism. With our voice and that of others we intend to unmask the falsifiers.⁴⁴

The other new publication to emerge was the revived *Esfuerzo*. Submitted to, and duly decimated by, the state censor, the editorial line of *Esfuerzo* stressed the need for unity among the libertarian youth, a unity that it considered possible only through adherence to anarchist ideas and the rejection of external alliances. Although *Esfuerzo* would publish several articles that were optimistic or voluntarist in their interpretation of the moment, these new publications indicated the growing level of alienation of the Catalan JJLL from the rest of the Spanish libertarian movement.

Having failed in their attempts, alongside other radical anarchists in Cataluña, to alter the trajectory of the FAI, by the autumn of 1937 there was an identifiable tendency amongst purists in the JJLL to close ranks. As an article in *Frente y Retaguardia* put it, ‘Let us set our own house in order, learn those ideas that we extol... let us stand guard

slogans of the FAI and nor did we ask their approval for the projects we organised.’ See Miró, *Vida intensa*, p. 134.

⁴² *El Quijote*, 11 September 1937.

⁴³ See Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ Paz, *Viaje al pasado*, pp. 218-9.

over the purity of our movement.’⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in *El Quijote*, Vicente Rodríguez, an influential member of the JJLL, indicated a preparedness to break entirely from the libertarian organisations:

The organisation as such is worthy of our efforts depending on the quantity of ideas that we perceive in it or are able to inject into it. Organisation for the sake of organisation is no different to violence for the sake of violence... What is more, if our continued presence in a given organisation must imply the renunciation of our own methods in terms of the diffusion or practice of the ideas that sustain us, then we can never justifiably remain in it. The only work that could be carried out in such circumstances would be that of disintegration and discord, a work that is acceptable as long as disintegration and discord is applied to the traditional enemy: authoritarianism. And all those who, having lost faith in the constructive capacity of the masses, shield themselves in their supposed superiority in order to convert themselves into a directing elite, are authoritarians.⁴⁶

Given that radical anarchists were normally at pains to state that they did not want a split in the movement, this article is remarkable for outlining how such a split could be justified. Rodríguez stopped short of openly advocating sabotage of the libertarian organisations, affirming that the Spanish masses, infused with an anarchistic spirit, would oblige them to return to their true path. Whether or not such optimism was truly felt by the author, the article concluded in far less sanguine terms: ‘backed into a corner whereby either the organisation or the ideas must perish, we would always prefer the disappearance of the former over the latter, as ideas give rise to organisation while an organisation without an ideological base cannot give rise to ideas’.⁴⁷ This prioritisation of principles over organisation became something of a commonplace at this time and was a clear response to the attempted homogenisation of the movement according to the

⁴⁵ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 1 September 1937.

⁴⁶ *El Quijote*, 11 September 1937.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

criteria of the *comités superiores*. It would be expressed at the Congress of the IWMA discussed below, and was also at the root of a row between the Catalan School of Activists and José Peirats. Peirats, a close friend and comrade of Vicente Rodríguez, had refused to deliver a talk at the School on the subject of how to organise a Congress, objecting that he would only be prepared to talk about ‘ideas’.⁴⁸

Affirmations such as that of Rodríguez cited above as to the supposedly innately anarchistic characteristics of the Spanish people appeared frequently in the libertarian press, but were somewhat contradictory when enunciated by figures within the Catalan JJLL. On the one hand because they indicated the accommodation of the libertarian movement to the nationalist aspect of Republican state-building.⁴⁹ On the other, because they clashed with the purists’ insistence on the need for education and opposition to organisations of a specifically anarchist character having a mass membership. For if, as one contributor to *Esfuerzo* put it, ‘a profoundly libertarian and individualist spirituality’ was ‘characteristic of the Spanish people’, why would so many of the JJLL express concern both for the lack of understanding of libertarian principles among the organisation’s own members and for attempts to turn the FAI into a mass organisation?⁵⁰ An article in *Frente y Retaguardia* was typical in declaring that ‘Our movement can never be, as is intended, a movement of the masses... How many of the youth in our ranks are ignorant of the ideas!’.⁵¹ The appearance of essentialist tropes regarding the supposed character of the Spanish people within the oppositional anarchist press indicates something of a blind spot among elements of the JJLL as to the role that such myth-making played in the reconstruction of a Republican state that had left these revolutionaries marginalised and vulnerable to police raids, harassment and even

⁴⁸ *Amanecer. Órgano de la Escuela de Militantes de Cataluña*, November 1937.

⁴⁹ On examples of racism and nationalism in the literary output of Spanish anarchists during the civil war, see Baxmeyer, “Mother Spain”, pp. 197-206. On the partial acceptance among anarchists of the idea that anarchism formed an essential part of a specifically Spanish character, see Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español*, p. 254, and Smith, ‘Izquierdas y nacionalismos’, p. 147.

⁵⁰ *Esfuerzo*, 7 October 1937.

⁵¹ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 1 September 1937.

murder. Nevertheless, it may also be the case that appeals to the ‘libertarian spirit’ of the Spanish people were a form of denial brought about by the disastrous course of the war and the disenchantment occasioned by the disappearance of anarchist ideas from the libertarian organisations. As such, they were symptomatic of the retreat from the ‘terrible “today”’ indicated by *El Quijote*.

November 1937 saw the appearance of a new publication of the JJLL, *Faro*, edited by the tireless Juan Santana Calero. Like *Esfuerzo*, its editorial line defended the position of the Catalan JJLL and, as with his previous endeavours, through *Faro* Santana Calero attempted to bring together purist and voluntarist criticisms of the official libertarian movement. What is also striking about this publication, however, is the self-conscious way in which it situated itself within the *international* anarchist movement. Its first number, in a heavily censored editorial, affirmed that:

In the face of perverted adulterations of anarchism, situated in a tendency that is yet to be convincingly refuted, we stand by... the robust ideological content affirmed in the position paper approved at the Extraordinary Congress in May... The JJLL of Cataluña are not determinists. They believe in the efficacy of the will... In a time of confusion and ideological decay typical of sceptics, the JJLL must show themselves to be compact and strong, motivated by a single ambition: to offer their responsibility and rootedness in the ideas to international anarchism.⁵²

In spite of its appeal to ‘will’, itself typical of Santana Calero, *Faro* did not indicate in its pages how acts of will might renew the Spanish revolution or recover for the libertarian movement its former spirit. Instead, its focus was on preserving the integrity of anarchist ideals, a task that, as the above passage indicates, was of international scope. This commitment to internationalism was further demonstrated by the publication’s hosting of articles by Alexander Schapiro and the French anarchist teacher

⁵² *Faro*, 12 November 1937.

Lucien Barbedette, as well as the stridently anti-nationalist article of Morales Guzmán, discussed in the previous chapter.

While *Faro* focussed on the endurance of anarchist principles, to highlight this propagandistic and ‘idealistic’ labour is not to suggest that members of the JJLL withdrew from practical activity. Their continued endeavours in the field of education and in struggling to resist the militarisation of popular culture and children’s activities are also abundantly attested to in the pages of their press:

The free education that children were promised has become a slave of the state... Children are given the same educational materials as before the war. While it is true that they are now proffered material of a coarsely anti-fascist hue it is nothing more than this: anti-fascist... And, in greater numbers, people with neither scruples nor the most elemental of pedagogical sentiment, cultivate, with publications of the worst kind, a war-like spirit in the young.⁵³

In this sense, the anarchists of the JJLL and the affiliated students’ organisation, the FECL, had ‘returned’ to their ‘previous line of conduct’ as they had been urged to by Tomás Cabot in the pages of *Esfuerzo*; fostering an oppositional, parallel culture to that of the Republican state in much the same way as they had done before the war began. In so doing, they were also defending the autonomy of the spaces they had conquered in the summer of 1936, maintaining the spirit of rational education against the encroachments of the dominant ideology of statist anti-fascism.⁵⁴

Although the JJLL’s activity was inspired by what had formerly been the priorities of organised anarchism, by 1937 such activity was no longer conceived of as auxiliary to that of the FAI and the CNT, but as defiant testimony to the continued faith

⁵³ *Faro*, 26 November 1937.

⁵⁴ I am indebted to Hugo García for his insights into the emergence of anti-fascism as a dominant culture in the imagined community of civil-war era Republican Spain.

of the JJLL in anarchist ideas, in conscious contrast to the other branches of the libertarian movement. As a contribution from Benito Milla put it:

Although it may upset those who justify their sell-outs by reference to the Iberian tragedy, we continue to maintain and affirm the practicality and permanence of anarchist conceptions, regardless of the circumstances and opportunism that signify nothing less than the implicit recognition and reproduction of the Marxist concept of the political struggle.⁵⁵

By affirming the anarchist emphasis on will as opposed to fatalism, and associating the latter with Marxism, *Faro* echoed the attacks on gradualism that had been a feature of *Tierra y Libertad* in the early years of the Republic, and attracted contributions from other militants of the CNT and the FAI who had become alienated from or isolated within these organisations, such as Morales Guzmán, former secretary of the Local Federation of the CNT in Granada, and Severino Campos, former secretary of the Regional Committee of the Catalan FAI. In a front page article, the latter made no attempt to hide his scorn for those in positions of responsibility in the libertarian organisations:

Where there were ideas these ideas remain. Those who say that they sacrificed them never had them... They spend their days on a slippery slope. From the centre of the political whirlwind they breathe putrefied air that withers and numbs them... individuals that puff themselves up, believing themselves to be great men that influence 'the realities of the moment' ... are nothing but ambitious and conceited pygmies.⁵⁶

This pessimism as to the leading tendencies of the major libertarian organisations was shared, as we have seen, by many members of the JJLL, with the result that, following their walkout from the Regional Plenum of the Catalan Anarchist Affinity

⁵⁵ Ibid. Benito Milla Navarro was a founder and secretary of the JJLL in the Durruti Column who would remain active in the libertarian movement for many decades, see Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 405.

⁵⁶ *Faro*, 12 November 1937.

Groups in August, the most notable affinity groups associated with the youth organisation would be absent from subsequent developments in the Catalan FAI. In fact, following the Regional Congress of the JJLL beginning on 10 October, where the purist principles agreed to in May were ratified, it was further agreed to break the organisation's link with the FAI, due to the latter's restructuring, 'which provides evidence of a fundamental alteration of anarchist principles'.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, even in the absence of the purists of the JJLL, the attempted conversion of the FAI in Cataluña into a 'movement of the masses' would be bitterly contested. Their absence did mean, however, that it would be the voluntarist rather than the purist current that was most notable in taking up the cudgels against the 'neo-anarchists' in the Catalan FAI. The concerns of these militants were chiefly practical, based on prisoner support and union control over resources, issues linked to the fighting capacity of the affinity groups and defence committees, which they considered necessary to maintain if the fatalist drift of the libertarian movement was to be arrested by action.

'Nothing practical can be done': Autonomous activity and the role of the FAI

Following the abandonment of the barricades in May, several voluntarist anarchists had hoped that a showdown with the counter-revolution could yet be won, and the revolutionary spirit of 19 July recovered. To prevent this, throughout the late summer and autumn of 1937 the security forces dismantled the networks of youth *ateneos* and neighbourhood defence committees that had facilitated the uprising in May, in operations that were consented to by the Catalan Regional Committee of the CNT in a spirit of bureaucratic fatalism. So it was that in July 1937 the Committee rubber stamped the abandonment of the head-quarters of the defence committee of Sants in the Plaça Espanya, which it understood was soon to be the target of an assault by the forces

⁵⁷ See Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad*, p. 38, and *Esfuerzo*, 14 October 1937.

of the Generalitat.⁵⁸ Those militants who considered that the hegemony previously enjoyed by the libertarian movement in Cataluña could yet be recovered by force realised that, sooner or later, the ongoing operations of the security forces would make any such strategy untenable.

Such was the reasoning of activists in the CNT affiliated Transport Workers' Union of Barcelona when in August they prevented police from carrying out a register of their union headquarters. Summoned to defend its actions at a meeting of the Regional Committee of the CNT on 10 August, at which García Oliver, Xena and Dionisio Eroles were all in attendance, Julián Merino, speaking on behalf of the Union's Junta (council), declared that the Union was responding to the provocations of its enemies: 'We are losing our conquests piece by piece. We have lost almost all of the centres of production that we gained in the heat of the revolution.'⁵⁹ The Union, he said, had already handed over garages, cars and tanks to the police, with the result that its functions had been disrupted and its members had gone unpaid:

These and many other abuses have so disheartened the activists, who suspect that everything is gradually being lost and, fearing the moment when defending ourselves will have become impossible, they have risen in anger and agreed to the self-defence for which we are being so criticised. All that the Junta has done is to take on board the agreements arrived at by the majority of the members.⁶⁰

This little-recorded event provides a fascinating example of how individual CNT unions were able to arrive at the kind of bold resolutions that the intervention of the

⁵⁸ See 'Reunión del Comité Regional celebrada el día 8 de julio de 1937', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁵⁹ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día 10 de Agosto de 1937; por el Comité Regional de Cataluña; estando presentes los delegados siguientes, Artes Gráficas, Alimentación, Productos Químicos, Transporte, Secretario, Más, Luz y Fuerza, Eroles, Isgleas, García Oliver, Siderometalurgia, y la Junta del Sindicato de Transporte', CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 39 A.

⁶⁰ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día 10 de Agosto'.

comités superiores had obstructed over the summer at the Plenums of the FAI.⁶¹ But it was precisely this isolation from the rest of the libertarian movement that was invoked by José Juan Domènech, former Councillor of Supplies in the Generalitat and then Regional Secretary of the CNT, when he demanded that the Junta abandon its stance:

Only two options remain: either the attitude of the Transport Workers' Union will be supported by the other unions of the Organisation, and then the Organisation as a whole; or the Union, after this act of violence, will find itself isolated and abandoned by its comrades and therefore outside of the Organisation.

It seems clear that only the second option was conceivable to the Regional Secretary, and the possibility of an armed movement of the whole of the CNT against the counter-revolution arising from the bottom up can only have been disingenuously entertained given the role of the *comités superiores* when faced by such a movement the previous May. In fact, the *comités superiores* dreaded a repetition of the May events, and suspected that the security forces in Barcelona were intent on provoking an altercation.⁶² The intervention of José Xena at this meeting suggests that this fear was far from groundless:

Yesterday the Union was prepared, with arms in hand, to prevent the Civil Guard from carrying out a register [of the headquarters], and the affinity groups and neighbourhood committees were aware of this attitude, and were also prepared to come out in support of this grand movement, something that should have been made known to the Liaison Committee, which is [the organ that] must control all such movements when they are necessary.⁶³

⁶¹ The proceedings of this meeting have recently been referred to in Guillamón, *La represión contra la CNT*, pp. 318-20.

⁶² On the intentions and activity of the security forces in this period, see Godicheau, *No callaron*, pp. 83-4.

⁶³ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día 10 de Agosto'.

More remarkable than the wilful self-deception implied by Xena's suggestion that the Liaison Committee could head up rather than quash any such initiative, is the admission here that the libertarian networks that had mobilised in May had maintained their channels of communication and capacity for autonomous action in spite of the heavy repression they had undergone. The fact that these were the means by which this new mobilisation was to be effected and that Merino, as Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union and the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups, provides a point of continuity between the events of May and those of August, adds weight to the interpretation of the May mobilisation offered in Chapter Three. García Oliver, whose memoirs accord Merino a key role in the mobilisation of May, intervened at length at the meeting in August in a tone of extraordinary ferocity:

At the front much greater events are occurring than here, and any comrade that steps out of line is tried and shot... the Transport Workers' Union was not unconnected to the propaganda carried out against government collaboration... and these tactics are inappropriate and deceive the people. Whosoever inspires these movements is a TRAITOR and if there are ten who are behind them there are ten TRAITORS. The people do not show as much support for us as we would like. If we take to the streets and lose then our loss would be THE GREATEST BETRAYAL OF ALL TIME.... you present us as reformists, but we are no less revolutionary than anyone else... If the situation is as Xena has described, Popular Tribunals will certainly be necessary TO PUNISH THE INSTIGATORS.⁶⁴

This remarkable speech demonstrates, perhaps as much as any other single document, the transformation that the experience of state collaboration and the anti-fascist war had imposed upon the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Spain and the divisions this had given rise to. García Oliver had once been the chief theoretician and practitioner of that impetuous anarchist voluntarism that he now considered an act of

⁶⁴ Ibid. Capitalisation of words as they appear in the minutes.

treachery worthy of the harshest punishments. He went on to ask Merino whether he had any reason to know why Aurelio Fernández, a leading member of the Catalan CNT and former Secretary of the Generalitat's *Junta de Seguridad Interior* (Council of Internal Security), had found himself questioned by the police. The Secretary of the CAP concluded that 'everything that is going on is influenced by our enemies who want to break the alliance or pact between the CNT and the UGT and there is therefore no alternative but to create a Revolutionary Tribunal, and that whomsoever deserves it, let [justice] be meted out to him WITHOUT QUALMS.'⁶⁵

Aurelio Fernández had been questioned by police in relation to an attempt on the life of Andreu i Abelló, President of the Palace of Justice in Barcelona. He would later be arrested, imprisoned and acquitted only to have his release prevented by new charges relating to his alleged role in the murder of forty-two Marist Brothers in August 1936, when he had worked at the head of the *Patrullas de Control* and the Generalitat's Council of Internal Security (JSI). We can only speculate as to why García Oliver brought the subject up at this meeting. Perhaps he intended to insinuate that Merino was, or knew who was, responsible for the attack on Andreu i Abelló. François Godicheau has posited that the attempted assassination may have been undertaken on the initiative of the *Comité Pro-Presos* operating within the *Modelo* Prison in Barcelona.⁶⁶ Merino certainly had contacts in the prison at the time, as one of the inmates that had threatened a hunger strike at that institution in June was Antonio Cristobal Remacha, who belonged to the same affinity group, *Cultura y Acción*, as Merino.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid. In his capacity as Secretary of the CAP, García Oliver would also make vague but equally ominous threats to the oppositionists Santana Calero and Peirats. See Ealham, *Living Anarchism*, p. 112.

⁶⁶ See Godicheau, *No callaron*, p. 74.

⁶⁷ See 'Relación nominal de compañeros que se encuentran en esta prisión celular en concepto de Gubernativos y procesados y que el martes día 22 de los corrientes empezarán la huelga de hambre por las causas que en la ajunta ponencia se expresan', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 842/7.

García Oliver's threats did not have the desired effect, however, as the minutes record that the delegates of the Transport Workers' Union demanded proof of what had been alleged against them and 'remained unconvinced of the need to change their attitude', while Merino, 'deeply hurt by García Oliver's insinuations, demanded that he clarify what he wanted to say in order to clear him [Merino] of responsibility; as he did not want any doubt to remain that he had intervened even remotely in the persecution of Aurelio Fernández; on the contrary he did not want anyone to be imprisoned'.⁶⁸ The meeting ended with the representatives of the *comités superiores* expressing the wish that an assembly of the various Juntas of the Barcelona unions due to take place that afternoon would succeed in convincing the representatives of the Transport Workers' Union to drop their combative stance.

It is likely that this meeting also ended in stalemate, as the state of tension was to continue into the following month, with police raids on JJLL headquarters and anarchist centres culminating in the assault on the building known as 'Los Escolapios' on 20 September. This former religious school was the head-quarters of the cultural grouping *Agrupación Faros*, the Food and Supplies Union and the city centre defence committee. The activists present in the building in the early hours of the morning refused to open its doors to a detachment of Assault Guards, who returned with artillery and tanks. The CAP was charged with mediating between those inside the building and the police, and were informed that the building would be subject to aerial bombardment if it was not abandoned within ten minutes.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, those inside submitted to the demands of the CAP that they abide by 'the agreements taken in previous Plenums' rather than the threats of the police.⁷⁰ While some of those already wanted by the authorities for their

⁶⁸ 'Reunión extraordinaria celebrada el día 10 de Agosto'.

⁶⁹ See 'Acta del Pleno de GGAA', also Godicheau, *No callaron*, pp. 83-4, and Guillamón, *La represión contra la CNT*, pp. 402-12.

⁷⁰ See 'Acta del Pleno de GGAA, celebrado en Barcelona el día 21 de Septiembre de 1937', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1307/7.

involvement in the May days were able to escape from the building, those who handed themselves in were to have their fate decided by the newly formed *Tribunales Especiales de Espionaje y Alta Traición* (Special Tribunals of Espionage and High Treason).⁷¹

The meeting of anarchist affinity groups that took place in the wake of these events saw similar sentiments expressed to those aired at the Regional Plenum of Anarchist Affinity Groups in July and the extraordinary meeting of the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT on 10 August, discussed above. The delegate of the group *Dinamita Cerebral* (possibly Teodoro García of the Metalworkers' Union) denounced the CNT leadership for allowing 'all the conquered positions to be snatched from us bit by bit... Another 19 July is coming and we must prepare ourselves if we do not want to succumb'.⁷² However, there was an increasing sense of desperation in the interventions of delegates and an acknowledgement of a certain amount of impotence and isolation. The delegate of the affinity group *Convicción y Firmeza* noted bitterly that 'we have lost one of the most important strategic points of the city, but it does not matter, because we are a political party.' He had seen, he claimed, 'battle-hardened comrades in tears', but this 'cannot be taken into account because it is the organisation itself that is authorising everything that is happening'.⁷³ Censure of the Regional Committee of the CNT was universal, and there were calls for its removal, with the delegate of the *Móvil* group declaring that it was 'high time that we begin to expel the irresponsible elements', while other delegates questioned the role of García Oliver, Secretary of the CAP. The delegate of the group *Afinidad*, in reference to García Oliver

⁷¹ See Godicheau, *No callaron*, pp. 85-9. The prisoners were eventually released in the early part of 1938.

⁷² See 'Acta del Pleno de GGAA'.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

and José Juan Domènech, wondered whether ‘we are communists’ and that, if not, ‘then we must not allow a certain number of individuals to determine what goes on’.⁷⁴

In the absence of a leadership that would stand up for the persecuted anarchists of the rank and file, the delegate of the affinity group *Humanidad* found it ‘perfectly natural that a defence committee [had] rebelled and acted of its own account’. Noting that the Local Federation of unions had come to an agreement with Ricardo Burillo, Director General of Security in Cataluña, which allowed the police to carry out registers of union buildings, the delegate went on to observe that ‘either the Organisation has been bought off or else it is happy to take on all the responsibility for what is happening’.⁷⁵ The references of this delegate to ‘the Organisation’, meaning the CNT, as opposed to only the *comités superiores* of the organisations, may not be significant in itself, as the terms were occasionally used synonymously, but this Plenum did see grievances aired that suggested that the problems experienced by the radicals were not entirely reducible to the composition of the *comités superiores*.

Certain questions went to the heart of what kind of organisation the FAI should, or could, be. If it were to be the vanguard of the libertarian movement, could the affinity groups of Barcelona remain beholden to regional and national leaderships that quashed any autonomous initiative? The delegate of the *Sagitario* group, protesting ‘the conduct of the Organisation’, declared that it was time for ‘the FAI to act of its own accord and not merely tail the CNT’.⁷⁶ This, however, led to a debate, as delegates defended the traditional role of FAI members with regard to the unions. The delegate of the *Rebeldes* group located the weakness of the FAI in the fact that its activists had:

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ The *Sagitario* group included Martín Gibel, Vicente Serna and Miguel Garrofe (their FAI membership cards can be found in CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1793/1).

... situated themselves outside of the unions, either due to negligence or because the majority of comrades occupy positions in other places. This cannot continue. We must go directly to the unions and take on responsible posts so that we can, in this way, guide the unions according to the perspectives of the FAI.⁷⁷

This was also the position expressed by Merino in his capacity as Secretary of the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups.⁷⁸ However, the delegate of the *Sagitario* group explained that there were difficulties in influencing the unions owing to the ‘continuous offensive that comes from the arrivistes’, saying that he had been elected president of his union but that he was ‘boycotted shamelessly by other elements from the same union’.⁷⁹ In reality, these arguments were not contradictory: the influence of the FAI as a specifically anarchist voice within the Spanish labour movement had been diluted on the one hand by the official duties ‘in other places’ of many of its members and on the other by the influx of new recruits to the CNT after 19 July 1936. It was such circumstances that led to the phenomenon described as the bolshevisation of the libertarian movement, a process that, through the new structures adopted at the Valencia Plenum, now threatened to engulf the Local Federation of the Barcelona FAI.

On 17 October, an assembly was called in Barcelona that was open ‘to all anarchists... whether affiliated to the FAI or not’, in order to constitute the *Agrupación Anarquista de Barcelona* (Barcelona Anarchist Grouping - AAB), in accordance with the new structure of the FAI, in spite of the fact that this was opposed by a majority of affinity groups in the city.⁸⁰ As a consequence, ‘a good number of anarchist affinity groups and individuals’ were present at the ‘Casa CNT-FAI’, with several speakers

⁷⁷ ‘Acta del Pleno de GGAA’.

⁷⁸ This line was consistently enunciated by Merino, perhaps unsurprisingly, given his additional position as Secretary of the Transport Workers’ Union.

⁷⁹ ‘Acta del Pleno del GGAA’.

⁸⁰ *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 October 1937.

commenting on the impressive number of attendees.⁸¹ The assembly had been called by the new secretary of the Local Federation, Alejandro Gilabert, in the hope that a ‘harmonious conclusion’ could be arrived at with the recalcitrant affinity groups. He was to be swiftly disabused of this notion, however.⁸²

Many attendees defended the traditional structure of the FAI based on affinity groups, with the delegate from the *Sagitario* group judging the AAB to be ‘doomed to failure’, while Grau declared that ‘there has been an attempt made to destroy the affinity groups, but in spite of everything these groups remain the nerve centre of our movement’.⁸³ One Martínez averred that ‘perhaps it will soon be the affinity groups who must re-conquer our freedoms on the street’. Iglesias, who also raised the question of insurrectionary activity on the street, declared that ‘Gilabert and other comrades have said that those who accept the new structure do so with the intention of saving our movement’ but he believed that it would have the opposite effect, and that:

... the only means by which the situation might be saved is through an insurrection of workers and soldiers... anarchists cannot collaborate with any Government or political party, as with them we cannot make the revolution nor win the war, and if we want to save the revolution it is necessary to return to the principles that we have abandoned.⁸⁴

Similar sentiments were expressed by Julián Merino, whose resignation as Secretary of the Local Federation and withdrawal from the FAI did not prevent him

⁸¹ In spite of the open convocation, there were questions raised about the credentials of one attendee who was removed from the hall. Following this incident, Julián Merino said that, although he did not wish to believe it, the presence of this undesirable element ‘could be interpreted as a manoeuvre to pack the meeting’, see ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista’.

⁸² *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 October 1937. Merino, who would soon return to the role of Secretary of the Local Federation, had initially resigned his post owing to the divisions in the FAI, see ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista’. By this point, the post of Regional Secretary vacated by Severino Campos had also been filled, by the teacher José de Tapia, who defended the restructuring of the FAI at this assembly. Alejandro Gilabert, who also defended the restructuring of the FAI, was a veteran of the libertarian movement and the founder of the satirical anti-Communist review *Criticón*.

⁸³ ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista’. The individual Grau may have been Generoso Grau of the Food Supplies Union, who would become a prominent member of the CNT during the Franco dictatorship. See Iñiguez, *Esbozo de una enciclopedia*, p. 285.

⁸⁴ ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista’. As with the intervention above of Martínez, the popularity of the name Iglesias makes it difficult to establish who this activist may have been.

from dominating the assembly's first session. As far as he was concerned, the new structure was a manoeuvre of reformists, which had 'the "virtue" of breaking up [the] movement'. In an apparent reference to the Argentinian anarchists, such as José Maria Lunazzi, José Grunfeld, Jacobo Prince and Jacobo Maguid who had arrived in Barcelona under the patronage of Diego Abad de Santillán and who were supportive of the centralising tendencies within the FAI, Merino denounced the 'importation of comrades from abroad who, when they come to Spain, know nothing of our Confederal or Specific organisation but, wanting to intervene and to occupy posts as soon as they arrive, have wrecked the CNT and the FAI'.⁸⁵ Here, Merino used language reminiscent of Rodríguez Vázquez in his denunciations of foreign critics of CNT policy. Earlier in the session, Merino had appealed to such critiques from abroad in support of his rejection of the FAI's new structure. Given that he was at the forefront of attempts to arrest the retreat of the revolution through extra-legal measures, it is unsurprising that Merino laid the blame for what was happening on 'those elements that ensure that nothing practical can be done', but it was inconsistent to draw attention to their geographical origins, particularly when there was no shortage of either foreign-born radicals in Spain or home-grown impediments to the methods favoured by the oppositionists.

Had the supporters of the new structure hoped that an opening up of the FAI to new members might drown out oppositional voices, the minutes of this assembly, which testify to the radical interventions of individuals attending apparently not as delegates of affinity groups, suggest that it had the opposite effect. The newly constituted AAB did

⁸⁵ Maguid had arrived in February to take on the editorship of *Tierra y Libertad*. Grunfeld had arrived in November 1936 and had also occupied important posts within the libertarian movement, including, temporarily, that of secretary of the Local Federation of the FAI. See Juan Ruiz, 'José Grunfeld (1907-2005)' (2006), *Kate Sharpley Library* <<http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/tqjrbp>> [accessed 23 March 2015]. Prince was a representative in Spain of the Federación Anarco-Comunista Argentina (Argentine Anarcho-Communist Federation), and was described by Peirats as 'a sinister figure' who had attempted to manipulate the Regional Congress of the Catalan FAI in August, see Peirats, *De mi paso*, p. 347. On Lunazzi see the previous chapter.

not, in fact, generate much enthusiasm. Formed with an initial number of thirty-seven members, including several of the most notable grandees of Catalan anarchism, it would end abruptly in September of the following year.⁸⁶ In the meantime, the absence of its members from Plenums of the Local Federation meant that there were effectively two FAIs in Barcelona during this period, a fact that was tacitly admitted at one such Plenum in December.⁸⁷ The outcome of this was that, at the same time as the Peninsular Committee of the FAI reaffirmed its commitment to government collaboration, the organisation of affinity groups in Barcelona passed a motion unanimously at that same Plenum that declared its intention to take to the unions the ‘suggestion that the FAI, in accordance with its agreements, withdraw from all political lines and from all the collaborationist organisations, nor intervene in any anti-fascist committee while anti-fascists are persecuted, jailed and massacred’.⁸⁸ It further affirmed its autonomy relative to the national organisation at this Plenum by constituting its own, extra-legal, ‘*Comité Pro Presos*’, ‘constituted as they used to be before 19 July’, in opposition to the newly restructured *Comisión Jurídica*.⁸⁹ The Plenum ended with Merino once again urging his comrades to return to their unions and ensure the influence of the FAI in the workplace. Merino certainly did his best to lead by example in this regard. Within days of this

⁸⁶ Initial members of the AAB included Montseny, Toryho, Miró, Escorza, Abad de Santillán, Grunfeld, Sánchez Saornil and Maguid. See ‘Copia del Acta de constitución de la Agrupación Anarquista de Barcelona’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1437/15. All of the groups to which these individuals belonged announced their withdrawal from the AAB on 3 September 1938. On 15 September, the then Regional Secretary of the FAI, José Xena, wrote to the Local Federation to inform that body that ‘we have received a letter from the AAB in which they have let us know that the groups that constitute the mentioned grouping have either withdrawn or been dissolved’. See CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1335/11.

⁸⁷ ‘Acta del pleno de la Federación Local de Grupos de Barcelona, que se celebra el día 4/12/37’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1307/7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* The position of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI was outlined on 13 December in a circular that ferociously denounced the repression and sectarian activities of the Communist Party, albeit without naming it once. It nevertheless reaffirmed its commitment to anti-fascist collaboration. See ‘Frente al maniobro bajo, La FAI ratifica sus propósitos de colaboración y entendimiento con todos los sectores antifascistas’, CNT (España) Archives (IISG) 49 A.

⁸⁹ ‘Acta del pleno de la Federación Local de Grupos de Barcelona’.

Plenum he was to be found at a Plenum of unions proposing the formation of a ‘*Comité Pro Presos*’ alongside the delegate of the Food Supplies Union.⁹⁰

Bolshevisation Abroad: The Extraordinary Congress of the IWMA

The reversals and defeats suffered by the Spanish libertarian movement had distressed and divided its international comrades. Throughout 1937, the CNT’s official pronouncements, as discussed in the previous chapter, had dealt scathingly with any publicly expressed disappointment in or criticism of the CNT that emanated from the international anarchist press and organisations. The revolution had, of course, initially offered a beacon of hope to anarchists in a world that was everywhere succumbing to reaction. Emma Goldman, perhaps the creed’s most famous contemporary proponent, wrote in July 1937, in the preface to a reprint of *Now and After: The ABC of Anarchist Communism*, that, had the book’s author, her companion Alexander Berkman, lived beyond June 1936, ‘how gratifying it would have been to him to see the Spanish people evince such profound feeling and understanding of *Comunismo Libertario* – how that would have rejuvenated our comrade and given him new strength, new hope!’⁹¹ By December, however, writing from Paris where the CNT had called her to attend the Extraordinary Congress of the IWMA, she reflected sadly: ‘I no longer regret he is gone. I only regret that I am not in his place.’⁹²

Goldman’s qualified defence of the CNT had brought her into conflict with those members of the international anarchist movement whose criticisms she considered too harsh. Prior to the Congress, Goldman had written to one such critic, Alexander

⁹⁰ See ‘Acta del Pleno de Sindicatos celebrado el día 8 de diciembre’, CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1307/5. This meeting also agreed that only activists that had joined the unions prior to 19 July should be entitled to hold positions of primary responsibility.

⁹¹ Quoted in Emma Goldman, *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, ed. by David Porter (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), pp. 272-3.

⁹² From a letter to the Independent Labour Party activist, Ethel Mannin, *ibid.*, p. 303.

Schapiro, one of several anarchists based in France who had been singled out for criticism by the CNT's National Committee, that:

If I believed in the efficacy of prayer I would pray most devoutly that the conference of the [IWMA] will not end in a break up. It would really be a great disaster if our people will not be large enough to set aside their misunderstandings for the bigger issue of maintaining and strengthening morally at [sic] the supreme importance of the CNT regardless of what the committee may be guilty of or not. I dread to think there might be a split.⁹³

It was precisely the 'supreme importance' of the CNT that eventually ensured the effective silencing of its international critics following this Congress, as the organisation was able to wield its financial clout in order to bring its sister organisations to heel. Schapiro, one of several anarchists to perceive the 'bolshevisation' of the Spanish libertarian movement, would witness the process first hand in Paris. Relations between Emma Goldman and Schapiro had cooled considerably after the former accused Schapiro in the spring of 1937 of being quicker to condemn the CNT than he had been to break with the Bolsheviks.⁹⁴ Schapiro replied that it was one thing to defend Bolsheviks when they claimed to do 'anarchist work', and another to defend 'anarchists doing bolshevist work':

...whatever I, or any other Anarchist did or said in Russia, our organisations never gave to anybody any mandates and none of us ever represented them in governments or political bodies... Our experiences in Russia showed us we were right to keep our organisations outside political intrigues and responsibilities.⁹⁵

The Paris Congress had been called by the CNT with the intention of fixing the IWMA's position in regard to the Spanish experience. A lengthy and fractious affair, it

⁹³ Letter to Alexander Schapiro, 2 December 1937. Emma Goldman Papers (IISG), 144.

⁹⁴ See Goldman, *Vision on Fire*, pp. 112-3.

⁹⁵ See the letter to Emma Goldman, 20 March 1937, Emma Goldman Papers (IISG), 144.

would see the CNT accused of using tactics reminiscent of the Comintern in its bid to silence the radical critics of its policy. The delegation sent by the CNT was composed of Rodríguez Vázquez, José Xena, David Antona and Horacio M. Prieto, and was charged with removing Pierre Besnard as General Secretary, obtaining from the international sections a commitment to entering anti-fascist alliances, and securing the continued preponderance of the CNT in the IWMA through a system of proportional votes. The delegation set out its stall from the moment of its arrival, declaring its distance from and superiority to the other attendees in national, political and emotional terms:

As Spaniards we have a different mentality and we are participating in a struggle of a racial character that concerns ourselves alone... What is at stake is the destiny of a revolution, and not personal opinions or the small-minded moaning of refugees grouped in ghost sections.⁹⁶

Such nationalist language had already been subject to critique from veterans of the anarchist movement, both in exile and in the pages of *Faro*, which had served as a platform for both Spanish and international anarchists in the period preceding the Congress.

The affinities between the CNT's internal and external critics alarmed the *comités superiores*. In October, the passage of a motion proclaiming its solidarity with the CNT by the French organisation the Union Anarchiste had been hailed in the pages of *Nosotros*, the formerly radical mouthpiece of the FAI in Valencia now taken over by the Peninsular Committee, as 'giving the lie to those here who boast of the support of libertarians abroad, and use it to continue in their stupidity and dedicate themselves to trivialities in their tedious scrawlings'.⁹⁷ It was thus Besnard's alleged support for the

⁹⁶ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Gimenoólogos, *En busca de los Hijos de la Noche*, p. 492. Two former combatants in the Durruti Column, Charles Ridel and Charles Carpentier, opposed the motion and argued in vain for the Union Anarchiste to criticise the policy of the *comités superiores*.

CNT's internal opposition that was to be central to the case brought by the Spanish delegation against the General Secretary in Paris.

There, the representatives of the CNT attempted to simultaneously maintain that no such internal opposition existed, but that it was nevertheless intolerable for the IWMA to have associated with it.⁹⁸ Rodríguez Vázquez declared to the Congress that it would have to decide between the person of Besnard and the continued affiliation of the CNT to the IWMA. The accusations against Besnard, who obviated the need for any such choice by offering his resignation, were partly based on the fact that he had redirected funds collected for the CNT to victims of counterrevolutionary repression in Europe.⁹⁹ Besnard defended this action by asserting that it had been subject to a referendum of the IWMA and that he had received a letter of support from the Local Federation of Unions in Barcelona, asking of the Spanish delegation: 'Is that what you call being allied to the opposition? And to an opposition that according to you does not exist?'. In fact, the Spanish delegates were far more aware of the extent of the anarchist opposition to the CNT leadership than were the foreign delegates to the Congress. Besnard admitted that: 'I myself know of neither facts nor people that attest to the existence of an organised opposition... There is a diffuse and unorganised opposition, we might say. I do not know its importance or who is at its head.'¹⁰⁰ As a delegate for the Dutch section, the *Nederlands Syndicalistisch Vakverbond* (Netherlands Syndicalist Trade Union Federation) put it, what was at issue for the international

⁹⁸ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'. Antona and Xena disingenuously attempted to imply that the internal opposition was not anarchist in character. The former, in denouncing Besnard, described it as 'an opposition that is half external to the movement. We make it known to all those present that the communists, the dissident communists and the socialists are attempting to come to an accord within the CNT and it is criminal to favour such manoeuvres.' The latter, meanwhile, declared that: 'Even today, there is no opposition fraction among us. Nor is there an absolute unity of perspective; everything is argued over, and for some time we have seen that manoeuvres of a Marxist type have been undertaken to break our unity. The Trotskyists, amongst others, who do not have an organised movement in Spain, attempt to create one at our expense.'

⁹⁹ An account of this affair may be found in Manuel Azaretto, *Las pendientes resbaladizas (los anarquistas en España)* (Montevideo: Germinal, 1939), pp. 153-5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

anarchosyndicalist movement was not the existence of concrete links with the CNT's internal opposition but 'the fact... that the CNT is in opposition to the other sections and the principles of the IWMA itself. No section considers the conduct of the CNT to be correct.' That being the case, the sections of the IWMA could do nothing more than hope that an internal opposition 'might revive the CNT' and cause it to 'cease to be in conflict with all of our principles'.¹⁰¹

It is clear therefore, that although the CNT's international critics had published articles in *Faro*, and radical anarchists in Spain such as Julián Merino had invoked their positions in order to bolster their own struggle with the organisation's *comités superiores*, such connections were limited. Nevertheless, at least one non-Spanish delegate in Paris did have first-hand knowledge of the Spanish libertarian movement's internal opposition. This was the representative of the Chilean *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (General Confederation of Workers), who had attended several of the stormy plenums of the FAI that had taken place over the previous months. As such he was the particular target of the CNT delegation's heavy-handed tactics at this Congress. The Chilean delegate had already complained of being insulted by the Spanish delegates outside of the Congress. Intervening with respect to the question of the internal opposition, he observed that 'it [the opposition] is not the result of the activity of Besnard' but was rather 'a natural reaction against the ministerial activity taken on by the leadership of the CNT'. This prompted Rodríguez Vázquez to object to the continued discussion of the internal opposition to the CNT and threatened the Spanish delegation's withdrawal should the Chilean delegate utter another word on the subject. At this point the latter stated his intention to leave on account of the CNT's attitude towards him, causing a Dutch delegate to address the Spanish section with the words:

¹⁰¹ Ibid. This delegate was probably the veteran anarchosyndicalist and anti-militarist campaigner Albert De Jong.

‘You got what you wanted. You never listen to anyone.’¹⁰² That the Chilean delegate’s pronouncement, which amounted to little more than a banal statement of fact, could provoke such an angry response from the CNT is illustrative of the gulf between the foreign delegates’ understanding of the situation and the narrative that the Spanish delegation was presenting to the Congress. The Chilean delegate, as a witness to the existence of the opposition denied by the CNT, was a particular inconvenience in the context of this narrative. The National Secretary of the CNT went so far as to suggest that the May days provided evidence, not of an internal opposition within the Spanish libertarian movement, but of the nefarious role of the organisation’s international critics: ‘The events of May 1937 were provoked by fascism, but with the unconscious aid of international anarchists, who have sown disorder, favoured the opposition, roused the uncontrollable elements etc.’¹⁰³

This combination of bullying tactics and rhetorical flights of fancy was a constant in the CNT delegation’s interactions with the other delegates, which proceeded from fundamentally different appreciations of the degree to which principles should be sacrificed in the name of anti-fascism, and the entirely different mindset that state collaboration had imposed upon the *comités superiores*. The commitments that the CNT had made in Spain could not but clash with the anti-militarist, intransigently internationalist stance extolled by several sections of the IWMA. A delegate from the German group DAS declared that:

...the ‘International Anti-fascist Front’ can have no other meaning than that of a capitalist coalition of nations in support of the territorial status-quo. We must not accept the principle of the Anglo-Franco-Russian Imperialist Front and make ourselves its agents... An alliance of the proletariat against the [coming] war, this is what we must attempt to develop instead of allowing ourselves to be dragged along by this

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

ideology of war extolled by the CNT and which brings about the liquidation of our tactics and our principles. We are not fatalists who would admit world war as a necessity before which we must bow down... The formation of an alliance of struggle against the war, this must be one of the principal tasks presented to this Congress... and there is no time to lose on the absurd terrain of the anti-fascist alliance... Enough of the literature on the tragedies of China, of Spain and of Russia! Our thinking must be inclined to action!¹⁰⁴

This intervention is of interest not only for its outright rejection of the compromises implied by statist antifascism but also in its identification of, and reaction against, the tendency to read the situation of Spain in terms of tragedy. As we have seen, this had become a commonplace in anarchist writing and public declarations with regard to Spain, but we cannot say whether the German delegation was aware of the extent to which its voluntarist rejection of the tragic reading of the Spanish revolution echoed the sentiments expressed by oppositional anarchists in the press and at Plenums in Spain.¹⁰⁵ Following the German intervention, the Belgian delegate affirmed that ‘no nation or alliance of nations constitutes our enemy, properly speaking. Capital is our only enemy. We cannot take a single step along the dangerous path of making an alliance with one of the existing blocs or “axes.”’ The inevitability of an international armed conflict did not imply ‘that it is necessary to enrol the proletariat... [World war] would possibly mean the material ruin of our hopes, but if we were to adhere in advance to a “Sacred Union” in the coming “anti-fascist” war, we would ensure that this ruin would be aggravated by a moral disaster.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Members of the DAS had been active in revolutionary and anti-fascist activity in Barcelona during 1936 and 1937, and had faced repression due to the active role the group had played during the May days, following which most of the group’s members were either jailed or forced to leave Spain. See Chapter Three. On the increasing estrangement of the DAS from the CNT after May, see Carlos García and Harald Piotrowski, ‘Los emigrados antifascistas alemanes y la represión estalinista’ in Nelles et al., *Antifascistas alemanes en Barcelona*, pp. 371-6.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

Horacio M. Prieto, whose commitment to anti-fascist priorities had led to a revision of principles that would shortly see him openly advocate the formation of a libertarian political party, was so incensed by the preceding interventions that he admitted to not knowing ‘how I have managed to steel myself to listen to them... But if the German comrades had understood something of principles and of the necessity of sometimes altering them, fascism wouldn’t have succeeded [there]... Sacrosanct principles, in the midst of the current struggle, should pass onto a secondary plane.’ Prieto went on to express contempt for the IWMA, an organisation that enjoyed only nominal existence while ‘the attention of the world is on the CNT’. He concluded with a statement reminiscent of the bolshevisation of the Communist International in both its focus on organisational discipline and privileging of the experience of one national organisation:

Every idea requires an organisation in order to conquer the world, not based on a sentimental whim, but forged in a single bloc and maintained by implacable sanctions on indiscipline. Down with the principles and theories that have failed and which lead us to new disasters! New procedures for new times! Regular army, collaboration with the government, renovation of all principles of economic harmony that we considered intangible, it is necessary to know how to discipline oneself, to satisfy the comrades of the UGT, the petite-bourgeoisie etc... We cannot acknowledge the objections of Sweden, of Holland or of Chile. Incomplete experiences prove nothing. Only our experience is meaningful.¹⁰⁷

Unsurprisingly, just as purists in Spain had questioned the prioritisation of organisation over ideas, Schapiro railed against this sacrifice of principle and the associated affirmation that ‘the ends justify the employment of any means’. He decried this ‘bolshevisation of anarchism’, something which had to be rejected ‘so that mistakes

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. The intervention referred to here from the Swedish delegate was made by Albert Jensen, on behalf of the *Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation* (Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden). He had described the CNT as having taken on the role of ‘doctors for a sick state’.

do not become irreparable'.¹⁰⁸ Schapiro considered one such mistake to be the alliance with the Communist Party that the CNT now urged upon its international sister organisations. For radical anarchists, 'bolshevism' had long been both a political insult and the greatest danger, both internal and external, to the anarchist movement. To make an open alliance with this current was, according to Schapiro, 'not a mistake, but a crime... this tactic of alliances has enabled bolshevism to maintain and reinvent itself, when its counter-revolutionary role should have been everywhere pitilessly unmasked'.¹⁰⁹ An example of this counter-revolutionary role was provided by the Dutch delegation to the Congress, who related the attempt of that section to create a Committee for the Defence of Red Spain that was attacked by the adherents of the Third International who claimed that 'criticising democratic Spain was equivalent to working in Franco's favour'. The delegate concluded:

The antifascism of the Second and Third Internationals is a terrible danger... From my point of view, the Spanish proposition [to form alliances with other anti-fascist parties and organisations] is not debatable as such. Its spirit is the same as that of the Third International, which has killed not only our comrades, but all those who maintained a spark of the socialist ideal.

Nevertheless, when the French delegation proposed that the Congress issue a declaration in solidarity with anarchist prisoners, including those in Spain and the Soviet Union, describing Bolshevism as 'the most formidable expression of the political

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. In the second fortnight of December 1937, the Uruguayan anarcho-syndicalist publication *Solidaridad* published an article by Schapiro lamenting the support shown by *Solidaridad Obrera* for the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, accusing it of having become a 'semi-official daily of the USSR'. See the English translation: Alexander Schapiro, 'The USSR and the CNT: an unconscionable stance', trans. by Paul Sharkey, *Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library*, 14 (1998) <<http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/pk0q0r>> [accessed 14 May 2015].

and social oppression of a people', the CNT insisted on removing any such contentious content before the motion could be passed.¹¹⁰

The Spanish delegation was able to block the anti-militarist and anti-Bolshevik proposals of the other sections by threatening to withdraw from the IWMA. The fact that the CNT dwarfed even the most numerically substantial of its sister organisations meant that any such move on its part would effectively sound the death knell of the international organisation. In any case, it was not the intention of the majority of delegates to publicly censure the CNT. Much like delegates to Moscow in the early days of the Third International, the global anarchist movement did not want to impose its own perspectives on the CNT, but rather to resist the generalisation of one national section's experience in new, universally applicable criteria.¹¹¹ As the delegate of the Dutch section put it: 'We do not ask that the CNT renounce its policies in the face of its internal problems. But the circumstantial measures taken by the leaders of the committees and by the Plenums must not drag along the whole centre of gravity of our international organisation.'¹¹² After all, what was the purpose of the IWMA if its role was not to be that of 'supreme guardian of the autonomy of the international proletariat against statism and war'?¹¹³ Thus, the CNT's insistence that the IWMA declare its 'solidarity and approval of the trajectory followed by the CNT' was doomed to failure,

¹¹⁰ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'. The CNT delegates displayed little concern for their members in prison, and still less those anarchists who, having come to Spain from abroad, now faced possible deportation to Italy or Germany. Rodríguez Vázquez stated that: 'As for the victims of the supposed "counter-revolution", there is a large quantity of individual cases and that is why nothing can be organised blindly and from afar. No doubt comrades have been arrested. A few here, a few there. It is not our fault and sometimes it is their own... After all, the foreign comrades have come of their own account; they have come to a country in revolution, and if a little of everything should occur we cannot be held responsible for it.'

¹¹¹ See for example the discussion relating to the '21 Conditions' required of prospective affiliates to the Third International in Wiktor Sukiennicki, 'An Abortive Attempt at International Unity of the Workers' Movement (The Berlin Conference of the Three Internationals, 1922)', in *Revolution and Politics in Russia: Essays in Memory of B. I. Nicolaevsky*, ed. by Alexander and Janet Rabinowitch with Ladis K. D. Kristof (London: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 208-14. Toni Sender, a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, wrote in 1920: 'the question is not "for or against Moscow" but "for or against the conditions," and our answer is: for Moscow, but against the impossible conditions which hinder the revolution': *ibid.*, p. 212.

¹¹² 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

even as its takeover of the General Secretariat was confirmed. As in Spain, so in Paris: the CNT leadership was able to maintain and strengthen its power, even to obstruct and marginalise its anarchist opponents, but it could not convince them.

Conclusions

In order to defend the integrity of their movement, radical anarchists in Spain had to defend the spaces in which they operated. The organisational space afforded by the libertarian movement's federalism, which had guaranteed the autonomy of the affinity group and the Catalan JJLL, was defended against the centralising tendencies within the libertarian organisations. Also under permanent threat of closure were the physical spaces in which anarchist activity had developed in the Republican rearguard since July 1936: *ateneos*, defence committee headquarters and rational schools. In the case of the last of these, libertarian concern was not devoted solely to the threat of eviction but toward constructing a space which could not be encroached upon by the militarised ideology of the Republican state. In spite of the shift that I have identified in this period, from questions of revolutionary strategy to questions of ideological preservation, even the most 'purist' of radical anarchists were therefore forced back to the practical question of how to preserve the revolutionary city against a creeping statist and capitalistic restoration. This struggle would continue into 1938, when the repertoire of resistance narrated in this chapter would be added to by the *Mujeres Libres* in their bid to prevent the Bank of Spain from evicting the 'Casal de la dona treballadora'.¹¹⁴ The armed preservation of space by defence committees and affinity groups, however, had effectively been ended by the surrender of the 'Los Escolapios' building in September 1937.

¹¹⁴ See 'Informe sobre los incidentes surgidos con motivo de la imposición del Ministerio de Hacienda para que cediéramos el edificio del "Casal de la dona treballadora" al Banco de España', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 1049/22, and Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*, p. 196.

Anarchist activity was immeasurably complicated in this period by the absorption of much of the libertarian movement into mechanisms of state control, through participation in the army and security forces, in nationalised or semi-nationalised industries and directly in administrative or governmental bodies. This accelerated what was recognised as the bolshevisation of the CNT-FAI, and led to the increasing bureaucratisation of these organisations, characterised by a proliferation of committees tasked with obstructing precisely the varieties of oppositional anarchism dealt with in this thesis. Thus, as we have seen in this and the previous chapter, the state closure of libertarian spaces was mediated by the libertarian movement itself, through bodies such as the CAP, whose representatives gave their tacit consent to the abandonment of defence committee headquarters and had oppositional newspapers shut down, refusing to countenance that such spaces could exist even beyond the borders of Spain.

The principal cause of bolshevisation was the unfolding tragedy of the Spanish civil war, which shrouded every revolutionary setback in fatalism. In such an atmosphere, the commonplace response of radical anarchists, as we have seen throughout this chapter, was to affirm that ‘anarchism is not fatalist. It is the antithesis of Marxism.’¹¹⁵ In this context, in an article for *Le Combat Syndicaliste* reproduced in *Faro* and addressed ‘to the circumstantialists’, the anarchist Lucien Barbedette echoed García Oliver at the Madrid Congress of 1931 by raising the spectre of Lenin in order to criticise the ‘false security’ that the Marxist belief in a ‘fatal process’ gave the workers:

Lenin threw himself into the fray with passion when the Russian debacle began; he demonstrated practically that the energy of a man plays a highly important role. Socialists and communists propagated their convictions without being passive spectators, intervening in the most important events of the epoch.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Faro*, 12 November 1937.

¹¹⁶ *Faro*, 19 November 1937.

But just as Lenin had gone from extolling the necessity of revolution to helping to stymie its liberating potential, so the Spanish ‘anarcho-bolsheviks’ of the pre-civil war period were by the end of 1937 amongst the greatest intimidators of the revolutionary conscience.

So it was that Julián Merino found himself confronted by Xena and García Oliver in August 1937, the latter insinuating that he should be shot, after undertaking one more in a series of audacious revolutionary measures. While he was neither cowed nor inactive, Merino admitted to his disillusionment at the Plenum of October:

I have read a letter addressed to the comrades from the Secretary [of the Barcelona FAI] who regrets that anarchism has become isolated, and I too am bitter that there isn't a comrade to be found with the necessary perception and courage to defend the ideas.¹¹⁷

For Merino, the limits to revolutionary transformation in July remained a source of frustration: ‘had we wanted to, we could have instituted our ideals on 19 July. Lamentably, we did not.’¹¹⁸ According to Albert Jensen, the Swedish delegate to the Paris Congress of the IWMA, the failure to adhere to its own programme had led the libertarian movement into a trap that might have been anticipated:

It is a fact that with every social movement there is a moment in which capitalism willingly offers its government to its adversaries in order to protect its weakness using the same forces that threaten it, thus managing to separate them from the proletariat. The state had lost consciousness... The state was revived. Now it has passed onto the offensive. It has smashed its saviours.¹¹⁹

José Xena, meanwhile, who had provided the only vote in favour of instituting anarchist ideals at the ad hoc Plenum held at the ‘Casa CNT-FAI’ in July 1936,

¹¹⁷ ‘Primera sesión del pleno anarquista’.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

rejecting collaboration with the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias in Cataluña and advocating, alongside García Oliver, ‘going for everything’, had completely altered, not only his attitude to collaboration, but his appreciation of the revolutionary possibilities that the July days had offered. In reply to Jensen, he declared that:

Had we wanted to make our own particular point of view triumphant it would have been necessary to eliminate, by force of arms, those who struggle together with us against fascism... The Swedish comrade thinks that in Spain, the revolution has not known how to conquer the state and, as a consequence, the state has conquered the revolution. We say that the revolution has not been realised, and it cannot, therefore, have been conquered... What we can say is that our participation in the Government has given it a revolutionary meaning: that with our collaboration a revolutionary government was constituted.¹²⁰

Xena thus re-posed the tragic dilemma that had supposedly faced the Spanish anarchists in July 1936 but which had left him unconvinced at the time: whether to sacrifice anarchist principles through collaboration or to impose a bloody anarchistic dictatorship, adding the significant caveat that this sacrifice of anarchist principles had not damaged the revolution but, on the contrary, had given the Republican government a ‘revolutionary meaning’. Such an interpretation illustrated the gulf between the *comités superiores* and the radical anarchists at the end of 1937.

An alternative understanding was advanced by the purist Amador Franco. According to Franco, writing in *Esfuerzo* at the end of October, the problem of the Spanish revolution could not be solved by a Spanish Lenin, ‘the clichéd requirement of a man of iron will to direct the revolution’, still less a ‘revolutionary government’. The essence of the revolution was defined as ‘a struggle between authority and liberty. Between politics and the people. Between the organisations of labour and those of the State.’ If the revolution were to be anarchistic, it would imply ‘not a transfer of powers,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

but a total change in the way of life'. Franco conceived of the revolutionary process in the following terms:

The expropriation of the bourgeoisie, the disappearance of commerce from our country and its replacement by free exchange, and the mutual understanding of the regions that make up the country through regional councils or other organs not subject to the law, but structured in grand Congresses of the producers through mutual agreement, the annulment of the State... Such are the tasks to fulfil in the revolutionary period.¹²¹

This evocation of grand workers' congresses as the fora through which social life could be organised echoed the programme put forward in 1934 by Valeriano Orobón Fernández, but was nonetheless highly innovative in the context of 1937 and in its recognition that a chief inadequacy of the Spanish revolution was precisely the absence of any such organisation outside of the unions through which workers could fraternise and advance an independent agenda.¹²² While the Junta advocated by the AAD might also have been intended to be read in this light, it is unlikely that radicals such as Franco did so, given the distrust that the 'authoritarianism' of the AAD had evoked among purists.¹²³ Instead, we might see his vision of revolutionary change as an extension of the programmes that emerged as a result of maximalist interpretations of the socialisation campaign, discussed in Chapter Two. Franco's analysis of the revolution's limitations shows the persistence of the anarchist conscience, and further demonstrates that critical reflection on the revolutionary experience was not limited to the AAD in 1937. While his analysis was innovative, meanwhile, his proposals for a change of

¹²¹ *Esfuerzo*, 24 October 1937.

¹²² Orobón Fernández had proposed a minimum programme as a basis for revolutionary unity between the CNT and the UGT at the beginning of 1934. The programmatic basis of his proposal was 'revolutionary proletarian democracy': the socialisation of the means of production, union control over the economy, and the executive power, in all non-economic questions, of delegates elected and subject to recall by the people. He used as a historical precedent for this the Bavarian Soviet Republic of April 1919, in which left socialists, communists and anarchists had participated. See Gutiérrez Molina, *Valeriano Orobón Fernández*, pp. 268-77.

¹²³ See Chapter Two and Guillamón, *Los Amigos de Durruti*, pp. 64-5.

course within the libertarian movement would have been familiar to both the voluntarists and purists of that year:

Only one option remains open to us: the reaffirmation of anarchism, that is if we still have time. To carry this out we need the unanimous will of everyone and the abandonment of ministerial scheming and ‘circumstantialist’ tactics... We must take on all the responsibility of marching forward to new conceptions. We must be worthy of history and of our ideas.¹²⁴

The analysis contained in the publications of the Catalan JJLL in this period, and the fact that they provided a platform to both disaffected militants of the Spanish libertarian movement and veteran anarchist exiles abroad, are indicative of the strength of the libertarian culture in Cataluña, which was capable of renewing itself and whose militants applied their principles to a critique of the movement to which they belonged. The same conclusions are implied by the ongoing capacity of the defence committees to mobilise in Barcelona until at least the autumn of 1937. The resilience of these branches of the libertarian movement is remarkable given the scale of the task that confronted them. In the conclusion to this thesis I will analyse the resilience as well as the limitations of these oppositional anarchists who, resisting fatalism, were nevertheless unable to prevent the consummation of the Spanish tragedy.

¹²⁴ *Esfuerzo*, 24 October 1937.

Conclusion

In this thesis, the radical opposition to state collaboration in the Spanish libertarian movement has been shown to be more coherent, more consistent, and broader than has been understood hitherto. What has also become clear over the course of this work, however, is the scale of the challenge that this opposition faced. This was not only, or even primarily, because of widespread support among anarchists and non-anarchists for the line of anti-fascist unity promoted by the *comités superiores*, but because of the depth and complexity of the process of state reconstruction that the libertarian movement had become implicated in. Governmental participation was only one aspect of a process that absorbed hundreds of activists into administrative tasks, while thousands more worked in industries under state control throughout the Republican territories. The initiatives arising from the activity of the CNT during the revolutionary interregnum of summer 1936, most notably the militia columns and the Barcelona war industries, were also brought under increasing control as the state consolidated itself. Furthermore, state reconstruction was an ideological process that exalted the Spanish nation and re-imposed sexist norms that had been challenged during the ‘short summer of anarchy’, and so in order to be truly consistent and thoroughgoing, radical opposition to the state had also to incorporate resistance to its reconstitution as a patriarchal and racial entity.

In myriad ways, radical anarchists attempted to meet these challenges over the course of 1937, considering the process of state reconstruction to be reversible and inconsistent with their vision of anti-fascism as necessarily internationalist, anti-sexist and anti-capitalist, a revolutionary anti-fascism whose superiority to the anti-fascism of the state had been proven on the streets on 19 July. Their activity in the socialisation campaign, the armed revolutionary mobilisation of May 1937 and the attempts to

reinvigorate the FAI, alongside numerous cultural and educational endeavours, can all be seen to have affirmed this revolutionary and anti-statist project. Worthy of study in their own right, we have seen how these struggles also produced a revolutionary programme and rich theoretical reflections and insight that give the lie to traditional assertions as to the theoretical and programmatic weakness of the Spanish libertarian movement. We can only speculate that had the likes of Diego Franco Cazorla and Juan Santana Calero not been murdered by the Francoists then the mature reflections of two of radical anarchism's most intriguing proponents might have been added to the invaluable voices of those libertarian survivors who attempted to define and defend the anarchist legacy over the decades that followed their defeat.

Although the radicals were defeated this thesis has sought to take their perspective seriously. It is therefore necessary to consider reasons for their failure beyond the wider and intractable problems of the war and those posed by state reconstruction outlined above. In the first half of 1937, the slogan advanced by *Ideas*, 'Socialisation and the people armed!', had become the programmatic basis for concerted action on the part of wide sectors of the libertarian movement. The socialisation campaign granted the radicals the opportunity to enact projects that went beyond the mere assertion of union power and control, while calling for the extension of socialisation to the sphere of consumption helped to foster important connections between the defence committees, the *Mujeres Libres* grouping and the bread queues in Barcelona in the period preceding the May days. However, by relying on appeals to the UGT, it also revealed an important weakness: the continued division of the organised workers and the absence of the kind of extra-union body later envisaged by Amador Franco that could enact socialisation on the basis of a working-class democracy capable of superseding union discipline. Furthermore, many radicals were understandably suspicious of UGT members, particularly in the revolutionary strongholds of Cataluña and Aragón, and considered

the libertarian movement itself to be the guarantee of both the revolution and proletarian democracy.

This consideration could manifest itself in both organisational patriotism and the purist refusal of alliances with non-anarchists. In spite of the commitment of the FJR to the revolutionary process, the appeals prior to and during the May days to the ‘authentic revolutionaries’ of every stripe, and the cases of a common understanding being reached between activists of the JJLL and the POUM during that revolutionary mobilisation, the purists of the JJLL scuppered the developing revolutionary unity between the youth organisations of the libertarian movement and the POUM at its Congress of May 1937. There, the aversion to ‘politics’ in purists such as Peirats and Franco was made to serve the political interests of the regional *comités superiores*, desperate to distance themselves from the dissident communists. Although the importance of the FJR and its dissolution should not be overstated, the abandonment of the POUM not only damaged the revolutionary integrity of the JJLL, it also revealed a preference for purist gestures over the political imperative of maximising the forces disposed to defend the revolution. As much was in evidence again in the late summer and autumn of 1937, when purists in the JJLL walked out of the Regional Congress of the FAI and later completely cut their ties with the specifically anarchist organisation, leaving the voluntarist radicals to stay and fight for the traditional structure and role of the FAI without their help. Even when the FAI in Barcelona split into the Local Federation and the *Agrupación Anarquista de Barcelona*, the affinity groups of the JJLL were absent from the Plenums of the former, resolutely radical, formation.

By contrast to the occasionally wilful ingenuity of the JJLL, Julián Merino, Secretary of the Local Federation of Affinity Groups, is notable for having attempted to unite a fidelity to anarchist principles with a strategic vision for reviving the revolutionary purpose of the libertarian movement. Merino held a key post in an

important union and was involved with the defence committees at an organisational level. As a veteran of the struggle against *treintismo* during the Second Republic, however, it was logical that it should be through the local FAI that he attempted to commit Catalan anarchists to withdrawal from state collaboration. In the statements of the Local Federation of Affinity Groups, at Plenums and in the pages of *Anarquía*, Merino's strategy was to unite the doctrinal preoccupations of the purists with the practical concerns of the voluntarists. This alliance of voluntarists and purists, effected at least in part through the efforts of Merino, was evident from the early spring to the summer of 1937, and it very nearly succeeded in reversing the collaborationist commitments of the Catalan FAI. Additionally, Merino was under no illusions about the need to utilise force in order to defend the revolution from the encroachments of the Republican state. Having played a key role in bringing about the armed revolutionary mobilisation of May, however, Merino did not break ranks to countermand the orders of the newly enlarged Regional Defence Committee to abandon the barricades. Likewise in August, Merino appears to have been forced to back away from unleashing a re-enactment of that mobilisation in defence of the local centre of the Transport Workers' Union.

Merino stopped short of making himself a public figurehead for open revolt against the state when to do so would have meant breaking from the official organisations of the libertarian movement. In May 1937, when he helped to promote an anti-state mobilisation, he did so not in defiance of libertarian organisational norms, but according to the mandate that a Local Plenum of affinity groups, defence committees and delegates of the JJLL had granted in April. Organisational patriotism was not required to recognise that, in 1937 as before, the channels for the organisation of a revolutionary mobilisation were entirely internal to the libertarian movement. Merino worked, therefore, within the limits of organisational discipline, albeit pushing them as

far as they would go. It is also possible that his activity was limited by the *comités superiores* being party to information that could compromise Merino's safety. Although it may be better not to speculate too far as to the causes for García Oliver's insinuations when confronting Merino on 10 August, the knowledge of Merino's key role in the May days – itself sufficient for a charge of treason - may have been enough to bring him to heel. One way or another, Merino found himself forming a part of the Executive Committee of the Libertarian Movement in Spain, formed on the initiative of García Oliver at the beginning of April 1938, a body that could be described without hyperbole as the culmination of everything that Merino had fought against for over a year previously.¹ Days before the fall of Barcelona in January 1939, Merino was charged with organising remaining anarchists or anarchist sympathisers into defence batallions in the name of the FAI.² In the event however, a suicidal, last-ditch defence of the city was not attempted, and Merino crossed the border into France with thousands of his fellow defeated comrades. He died in Venezuela in April 1977.

As in the Russian case, those in Spain who had attempted to maintain their fidelity to the revolution and to what they considered to be its guiding principles found themselves in conflict with the leaders of the revolutionary organisations they belonged to and which were synonymous, even for such oppositionists, with both the revolutionary achievements and the principles that motivated them. Simon Pirani has analysed how workers in the Soviet Union came into conflict with the Bolshevik authorities due to grievances such as the control over supplies, the emergence of new privileged strata and the degeneration of democratic fora into bureaucratic rubber stamping operations. Suggestive parallels emerge with the Spanish case, Pirani himself noting that:

¹ See, for example, 'Informe del comité ejecutivo del movimiento libertario sobre la actitud de la federación local de JJLL de Barcelona y de su comité y sobre su posición con relación al movimiento libertario de Cataluña', CDMH, PS Barcelona, 514/08.

² See *La Vanguardia*, 20 January 1939.

The common features in the Russian and Spanish cases were: a revolutionary breakthrough led to the formation of a government that ruled in the name of the working class; due to the limited scope of the breakthrough, alienated labour was reimposed; the state, even where it was rudimentary, and the workers' organisations, were instrumental in this process; and even in the absence of a capitalist or other ruling class, that state became rapidly bureaucratised, and hierarchical social relations were soon reproduced. While many strands of utopianism were no doubt present, it also seems incontrovertible that, as a result of the civil war, the process of working class formation and development of workers' consciousness were severely disrupted.³

Certain tendencies towards bureaucratisation existed within the CNT prior to the revolution. However, like the Bolshevik Party in 1917, the CNT in 1936 was a heterogeneous organisation with marked regional variations and whose mid-level cadres could not be relied upon to follow the orders of the *comités superiores*. In spite of its 'organisation and mass support' the CNT was not a 'potential state': as in Russia the mass support for this organisation was translated into a revolutionary process that was experienced as an 'interregnum' in which the state's powers were greatly circumscribed.⁴ It was rather the interaction with and inability to overcome the pre-existing institutions of the state during a period of civil war that converted the CNT into a hierarchical body, its *comités superiores* effectively remaining state functionaries even after their ejection from government, carrying out the essential task of imposing discipline on recalcitrant elements of their membership.

State collaboration had been embarked upon through a series of ad hoc responses to urgent situations, beginning with the agreement of the Catalan CNT to participate in the CCMA. During this process, the democratic decision-making procedures of the

³ Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, p. 7.

⁴ On this combination of organisation and support making the mass movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries 'potential states' see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 92-5.

libertarian movement were often bypassed, in part because of the exigencies of the circumstances. This fact alone should give us pause when we consider the oft-repeated claim that the majority of the CNT's membership agreed with the policy of state collaboration. The fact that radical opponents of this policy were able to enact a mass, armed mobilisation in Barcelona in May 1937, backed up by a universally observed general strike, provides further grounds for scepticism. While this thesis has not established that oppositional anarchists had majority support among the wider membership of the CNT, it has made a case for the continuing popular legitimacy of the radicals' anti-state project in the face of state reconstruction. If with hindsight this project seems to have been doomed, it can be readily appreciated why this did not appear to be the case for contemporaries, given the extensive working-class sympathy for radical positions and the ongoing mobilising capacity of oppositional anarchists, demonstrated above all by the May days.

We cannot say with certainty therefore that the majority of CNT members agreed with state collaboration, and several of the *notables* involved in wedding the CNT to this policy also displayed a consistently high-handed disregard for established libertarian norms regarding organisational democracy, not least Montseny, García Oliver, Rodríguez Vázquez and Martínez Prieto. It would nevertheless be an error to dwell on individual deficiencies in this regard. The privileging of the 'old-guard, of absolute solidity' that Schapiro had criticised Rodríguez Vázquez for defending at the Paris Congress was not, in fact, exclusive to the *comités superiores*. Complaints about the quality and 'understanding' of the wider membership of the libertarian organisations were common to radicals as well as their opponents, and neither sector trusted the arrivistes who had joined after 19 July.⁵

⁵ This concern, likewise, echoed the experience of the Bolsheviks. See Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*, p. 393.

Attention to procedure was not what divided the *comités superiores* from radical anarchists but rather their proximity to the state, and this was both an ideological and a circumstantial factor. The common acknowledgement of anti-statism as a defining feature of anarchism did not preclude ambiguity in this regard in both the theory and practice of the movement in Spain, which contained a republican influence. This could be seen in both a narrowly Spanish sense, as anarchists and republicans had shared in both the vicissitudes of exile and the debates and discussions of the *ateneos*, and also in the sense of a broader European Enlightenment tradition stretching back to the French revolution. This informed a strongly progressivist tone that reinforced the gradualism of the moderates and the defence of ‘democratic civilisation’ advocated by Montseny and echoed by Xena at the Paris Congress. There, Xena defended the anti-fascist alliance because of ‘what the fascist danger constitutes! It is not only a threat to the CNT-FAI! It has set out on the destruction of liberalism, of Marxism, of the workers’ movement in general and of all the democratic and republican traditions of the bourgeoisie!’.⁶ Their emphasis on the anti-civilisational nature of fascism was reminiscent of the characterisation in the infamous ‘Manifesto of the Sixteen’ of Germany’s action during the First World War as ‘a threat not only against our hopes of emancipation, but against all human evolution’.⁷ Neutrality in the First World War had helped create the conditions for the initial growth of the CNT, and also shielded the movement from the more traumatic associations that split revolutionary syndicalism in France and elsewhere, leaving organised anarchism abroad much smaller, but also more inured to the appeals of ‘democratic’ militarism. When these depleted currents of international anarchism met the representatives of the *comités superiores* in Paris in December 1937, they could not even find a common ground on which to debate the questions of the day,

⁶ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

⁷ The ‘Manifesto of the Sixteen’ was issued in 1916 and signed by fifteen prominent anarchists, including Pyotr Kropotkin, declaring support for the Allied war effort. See Christiaan Cornelissen et al., ‘The Manifesto of the Sixteen’ (1916), trans. by Shawn P. Wilbur (2011) <<http://libertarian-labyrinth.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/manifesto-of-sixteen-1916.html>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

Rodríguez Vázquez informing them that the presence of foreign anarchists in Spain was not required unless they came ‘with disciplined troops; that is to say, with military discipline, with a military conception and military commanders, because we do not need anything else’.⁸

In his study of the ‘conscience of the Russian revolution’, Robert V. Daniels concluded that the opponents of the degeneration of the Bolshevik organisation and the revolutionary process were ‘westernised’ elements who had ‘assimilated basic western assumptions of socialism’.⁹ It is tempting to draw an inverse parallel with the Spanish case, where the ‘western’, ‘Menshevik’ option of ‘democratic’ collaboration was chosen over that of the ‘Bolshevik’ imposition of the revolution, and the opposition instead came from ‘anti-modern’ ideologues. Such an interpretation would fit neatly with that of some of the leading scholars of Spanish civil war history today.¹⁰ It will not suffice, however, not only because of its unappealing essentialism, but because the radical positions of both the Russian and Spanish ‘consciences’ were in fact strikingly similar. Both opposed ‘state capitalism’ and bureaucratisation and affirmed workers’ control of production and public order. Instead we might consider how questions of ideology were secondary to the process of state reconstruction itself. In both Russia and Spain, the reconstitution of the state proved incompatible with the consolidation and extension of revolutionary phenomena, while civil war, and the urgent assessment of priorities that it entailed, was the means by which the revolutionary organisations became, to a greater or lesser extent, agents of state reconstruction. The taking on of official responsibilities and the experience of wielding authority allowed pre-existing ideological inconsistencies and embryonic bureaucratisation to be accepted as necessary, while war gave their justification moral urgency.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, p. 408.

¹⁰ Helen Graham, for example, considers the May days to have represented ‘the CNT’s own “crisis of modernity”’: Graham, ‘The Barcelona May Days’, p. 523.

These processes meant that the organisational life of the CNT and the FAI was entirely transformed. The former became an important supplier of administrative and governmental personnel, and of directors of the war-time economy, while the latter effectively ceased to exist until reactivated by oppositionists in Barcelona in 1937, its Peninsular Committee forming an extension to the National Committee of the CNT. When Nemesio Galve, the CNT's permanent representative to the IWMA, was censured by that body for simultaneously occupying a role in the press office of the Generalitat in Paris, he declared that: 'If the CNT had applied this rule [of the incompatibility of syndicalist and governmental responsibilities], there would no longer be a single activist of any magnitude left in the CNT! All have been mandated, like myself, with a political posting.'¹¹ As in the Russian case, the absorption of activists into administrative roles exacerbated the growing divorce between those members with official roles and the wider membership, from the 'mid-level' union and defence committee delegates down.¹² So it was that the 'Ministerial anarchists' and their staff in Valencia were entirely taken aback by the May days, their speeches calling for a cease-fire serving to confirm the distance between themselves and those behind the barricades.

The prominent figures in the story of anarchist collaboration with the state were neither traitors to their anarchist ideals nor entirely consistent in their understanding and application of their principles: they were contradictory men and women capable of either aiding or obstructing the revolutionary process. What is clear, however, is that once they had become a part of the state administration their activity and rhetoric became broadly consistent with the logic of state reconstruction. The more prominent oppositionists, by contrast, were drawn from among those mid-level activists outside of official positions and high-level organisational roles, their radicalism generally proportionate to their distance from the state. In this sense, attention to the ideological

¹¹ 'Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París'.

¹² On this phenomenon in Russia, see Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power*, pp. 392-3.

dimension of anarchist state collaboration should be seen to complement rather than diminish an understanding of the significance of the enormous structural and circumstantial pressures brought to bear on the libertarian movement by war-time state reconstruction.

As we have seen, from early in 1937, radical anarchists recognised that, in allowing the chief institutions of the state to survive, they ‘had left the greatest enemy of the revolution standing’, and prepared to make good this error in the revolutionary mobilisation of May 1937. Prior to and after those events, the radicals were also prepared to make the case for prioritising this kind of activity over the military commitments they had contracted. Between the radical willingness to forget ‘for a moment, that fascism is in Aragón’ and the commitment of the *comités superiores* to military discipline at the front and in the rear, however, lay widespread unease among activists that any disruption to the war effort leading to a fascist advance would be blamed upon the anarchist movement. How, then, could the revolution and the war be combined? For Alexander Schapiro, the question rested on a false premise:

In reality, the idea of the ‘revolutionary war’ is a disastrous mistake, the same that led Kropotkin and his friends to the Sacred Union in 1914. There is no such thing as a revolutionary war. What is legitimate is the armed and combatant revolution, which has as its indispensable, essential base the economic transformation of society.¹³

The ‘armed and combatant revolution’ envisaged by Schapiro provides an accurate description of the July days and the early advances of the militia columns prior to the commencement of trench warfare. Whether or not the war had become conventional it would certainly have drained the libertarian movement of energy and resources, but once the ‘armed and combatant revolution’ had surrendered to conventional military discipline the connection between the fighting and the social and economic

¹³ ‘Actas del Congreso de la AIT celebrado en París’.

transformation in the rearguard became harder to sustain. A conventional war appeared to demand a conventional state, and if the radicals were slow to articulate an alternative to this impasse, they were impeded at every turn by the acceptance of this logic by the *comités superiores* of the libertarian movement, who participated in the process of state reconstruction at all levels.

For the radicals, anarchism was ‘the anti-state’, which implied re-organising society in such a way that its inhabitants might be more than the stuff of the factory, prison or barracks.¹⁴ In education and social care, anarchists attempted to apply this world-view in spite of the encroachments of an increasingly militarised state. Their struggle in these spheres has only been lightly touched on in this thesis, but further research would likely prove as illuminating for the study of both radical anarchism and the processes of state reconstruction as has the more broadly political focus of the present work. Likewise, further comparative work would be necessary to establish the extent to which the argument presented here, of state reconstruction as the essential dynamic by which both revolutionary energies are co-opted and revolutionary phenomena shut down, is more broadly applicable. As has been suggested, the example of the Russian revolution offers much potentially fruitful ground for comparison. Nevertheless, it is possible that the particular characteristics of anarchism and the Spanish revolutionary experience gave rise to certain unique features that brought the conflict between the revolutionary conscience and the state into sharper relief than elsewhere. The breadth and complexity of radical anarchism in the Spanish revolution corresponded to the multi-faceted nature of state reconstruction. Through their opposition to every aspect of that process, from militarisation and the disarmament of the defence committees to the domestication of the revolutionary organisations and the imposition of nationalist and patriarchal norms, the radical anarchists were able to

¹⁴ *Frente y Retaguardia*, 1 September 1937.

affirm the broad parameters of the international anarchist tradition and demonstrated the richness and capacity for renewal of its Spanish variant.

Appendix: Recurring personages

José Alberola

A rationalist schoolteacher and member of the FAI, Alberola was a prominent critic of moderation in the CNT in the early years of the Second Republic. During the war he opposed government collaboration and resigned from his post on the Regional Defence Council of Aragón when it was reorganised in December 1936. He later worked as a teacher in Mexico, and was murdered in obscure circumstances in Mexico City in 1967.

Jaime Balius

A member of the editorial board of *Solidaridad Obrera* at the outset of the war, Balius would become increasingly critical of the process of state reconstruction over the course of 1936. A contributor to *Ideas*, the mouthpiece of the libertarian movement in Baix Llobregat, he would help found the AAD in March 1937. Following the May days he was subject to the rumour mongering of the *comités superiores* and the harassment of the authorities. After the war he contributed to the anarchist press in France and sought to defend the legacy of the AAD.

Camillo Berneri

Berneri was an Italian anarchist and anti-fascist exile who was living in Barcelona at the outbreak of the civil war. Highly sensitive to the danger of the Spanish libertarian movement being 'bolshevised', he expressed this fear both before and during the war. Berneri fought at the front in the summer of 1936 but was forced to return to Barcelona on medical grounds. There, he published critiques of state collaboration and the persecution of the POUM. He was murdered by Stalinists during the May days of 1937.

Diego Camacho

A young anarchist active in the JJLL of Clot and in his local defence committee, during the war Camacho was a founder member of the *Los Quijotes del Ideal* affinity group, which criticised the policy of state collaboration from a purist perspective and produced the *El Quijote* review. Under the pseudonym of Abel Paz he would later become an important historian of Spanish anarchism.

Buenaventura Durruti

Durruti won fame as a ‘man of action’ alongside García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso and others in the years prior to the Second Republic. In the years that followed he supported the insurrectionary essays undertaken in the name of libertarian communism. During the war he led the Durruti Column and opposed the militarisation of the militia. He was killed in mysterious circumstances at the Madrid front in November 1936.

Diego Franco Cazorla

Better known by the pseudonym Amador Franco. Only 16 when the war began, Franco fought on the Aragón front and provided some of the more lucid and trenchant critiques of state collaboration. A member of the JJLL and the libertarian student organisation, the FECL, Franco was a regular contributor to the oppositional press. Following the war he remained active in the libertarian movement, frequently crossing from France into Spain on clandestine missions. In July 1946, on one such mission, he was arrested and executed.

Baudilio Sinesio García Fernández

Better known by the pseudonym Diego Abad de Santillán, García Fernández was a leading member of the FAI in the years immediately prior to the civil war and a representative of the organisation in the CCMA from July 1936. He was the leading

member of the *Nervio* affinity group, associated both prior to and during the war with the attempts to introduce greater centralisation and discipline into the libertarian movement.

Juan García Oliver

During the Second Republic, García Oliver was instrumental in the organisation of the Barcelona defence committees and a proponent of ‘revolutionary gymnastics’. From July 1936 he represented the CNT in the CCMA, and from November he was Minister of Justice in the Republican government. Following the ejection of the CNT from central government, García Oliver became Secretary of the CAP and sought to enforce internal discipline in the Catalan libertarian movement.

José Manzana

A former military officer, Manzana would eventually replace Durruti at the head of the Durruti Column and oversee the militarisation of the same. A member of the enlarged Regional Defence Committee that ordered the demobilisation that brought the May days to an end, Manzana was a controversial figure who has remained the subject of rumours regarding the death of Durruti.

Horacio Martínez Prieto

National Secretary of the CNT during the autumn of 1936 when the decision was taken to join the government of Largo Caballero, Prieto was forced out of this post during the scandal that was caused by the removal of the government from Madrid to Valencia. An intransigent defender of collaboration, in 1938 Prieto advocated the formation of a libertarian political party and continued to propagate his variety of libertarian ‘possibilism’ after the war.

Julián Merino

By the beginning of the war Merino was a veteran organiser and leading member of the Maritime Transport Workers' Union. At the front he was involved in setting up the Regional Defence Council of Aragón and on returning to Barcelona he became Secretary of the Local Federation of Anarchist Affinity Groups. Instrumental in the libertarian mobilisation of the May days, he would continue to oppose government collaboration throughout 1937.

Fidel Miró

Regional Secretary of the JJLL until May 1937, Miró was a member of the *Nervio* affinity group before the war and a close associate of Abad De Santillán. Together with Alfredo Martínez, Miró defended revolutionary unity with the JCI. This brought him into conflict with purists in the JJLL, a conflict that would continue following his removal as Secretary, when he was elected General Secretary of the FIJL.

Federica Montseny

A member of the famous Urales family that produced the anarchist review *La Revista Blanca*, in the years prior to the war Montseny was a fierce critic of *treintismo*. From November 1936 to May 1937 she was Minister of Health in the central government, and following the ejection of the CNT became a prominent figure in the Peninsular Committee of the FAI. A defender of collaboration during the war, in exile she returned to orthodox anarchist positions and, alongside her partner Germinal Esgleas, played a controversial role in the splits and recriminations that benighted the Spanish libertarian movement.

José Peirats

A seasoned activist and union organiser by the beginning of the war, Peirats would become one of the most prominent critics of government collaboration, first as an editor of *Acracia* in Lleida, and after May 1937 as a leading member of the Catalan JJLL. A committed anarchist throughout his life, Peirats would go on to become the most important anarchist historian of the CNT.

Joan Peiró

A prominent gradualist on the National Committee of the CNT at the outset of the Spanish Republic, Peiró would serve as Minister of Industry in the government of Largo Caballero from November 1936. Following the German invasion of France, Peiró was extradited at the request of the Spanish government in 1941. He was executed in 1942, having rejected overtures from the Francoists to co-operate with the regime's vertical unions.

Joan "Remi"

The anonymous interviewee of Joan Casanovas Codina whose testimony is contained in the *Fons Orals* department of the AHCB. A member of his local defence committee and of the *Patrullas de Control* in the Barcelona suburb of Sants.

Vicente Rodríguez

The editor of *Acracia* alongside José Peirats, Rodríguez was a founder member of the Catalan JJLL and the libertarian student body, the FECL. A perceptive and coherent proponent of the purist critique of government collaboration and an assiduous contributor to the oppositional press, often under the pseudonym 'Viroga', Rodríguez died of tuberculosis in France in 1941.

Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez

Rodríguez Vázquez was an autodidact and organiser in the Construction Workers' Union of the CNT. Regional Secretary of the Catalan CNT at the outbreak of the war, he would become National Secretary following the removal of Martínez Prieto. A defender of collaboration and internal discipline, Rodríguez Vázquez died in France in June 1939, drowned in the Marne River. The circumstances of his death are considered suspicious because he was known to be a strong swimmer.

Lucía Sánchez Saornil

One of the founders of the *Mujeres Libres* grouping, Sánchez Saornil made a significant contribution to the development of anarchist theory in Spain. Her writings in the *Mujeres Libres* review also include some of the more trenchant critiques of collaboration and capitalist democracy to appear in the wartime anarchist press prior to the May days. Sánchez Saornil later became Secretary of the CNT's international aid organisation, *Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista*, and appears to have become removed from the more radical wing of the organisation, joining the AAB in October 1937. Nevertheless, she continued to insist on the independence and anarchist character of *Mujeres Libres* throughout the war, in spite of increasing pressure for it to merge with the Communist-led Antifascist Women's Association.

Juan Santana Calero

A founder member of the FIJL in Málaga, Santana Calero represented this organisation in the *Comité de Salud Pública* after the defeat of the attempted coup in the city. An opponent of state collaboration, Santana Calero was a tireless writer and editor. After his arrival in Barcelona early in 1937, he contributed to *Ideas*, *Esfuerzo* (in both its incarnations) and *Faro*, amongst others. A member of the AAD as well as the Catalan JJLL, he was the subject of malicious rumours of cowardice, which, it has been

suggested, were the cause of his remaining in Spain after the war, where he died in a gun battle in 1939.

Alexander Schapiro

Schapiro was a veteran anarcho-syndicalist who had participated in the Russian revolution. Exiled from that country in 1922, Schapiro became active in the IWMA and, as its General Secretary, wrote a critical report on the CNT during the Second Republic. As a member of the CGT-SR in France, Schapiro became one of the more vocal critics of CNT policy over the course of 1937, both in the French anarchist press, and at Plenums of the IWMA.

José Xena

A rationalist teacher and member of the FAI, Xena provided the only vote against collaboration in the CCMA at the Catalan Regional Plenum of July 1936, as a delegate of the Baix Llobregat region. A contributor to *Ideas*, the mouthpiece of the libertarian movement in that region, Xena's attitude to state collaboration appears to have been somewhat ambiguous prior to May 1937. On the one hand, he was involved in attempts to socialise the economy of L'Hospitalet; on the other, he briefly occupied the post of Mayor of the town. After the May days he became a defender of the policy of the *comités superiores* and insistent on the need for internal discipline. His activism continued in exile in Venezuela, where he founded a libertarian cultural centre and edited *AIT*, the mouthpiece of the *Federación Obrera Regional Venezolana* (Venezuelan Regional Workers' Federation).

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PS Barcelona

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