

Anarchism in the Catalan-speaking countries: Between syndicalism and propaganda (1868-1931)

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ABSTRACT

This text surveys the course of the anarchist movement in the Catalan-speaking lands from their introduction as part of the Democratic Revolution of September 1868 until the fall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Anarchism was spread by workers to defend worker societarianism and had a trajectory within the ranks of federal republicanism. This characteristic gave it connotations that would remain with it forever: a relationship with republicanism and the primacy of the syndicalist over the anarchist content. It penetrated workers' societies and ended up becoming the most powerful hub of anarcho-syndicalism in the world. In a twofold history, both highly pragmatic union sectors and more radical thinkers without a societarian tradition survived. In parallel, convinced of the value of education and knowledge, the anarchists struggled to imbue themselves with knowledge, and they developed their own culture which defined them as a group.

KEY WORDS: anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, anarchist culture, violence and terrorism, labour movement

Anarchism is one of the most singular features of recent social history which was politically and socially unique in the history of the Catalan-speaking lands, or the Països Catalans, even though this term was never accepted by the anarchists. Ever since it was introduced in Spain, anarchism took root in different ways in the different regions around the Iberian Peninsula, and precisely the Catalan-speaking lands were the prime backdrop for its actions (along with Andalusia and Aragon in the 20th century, and the consistent presence of highly active chapters in Madrid, Asturias and Galicia) and the home to more than half of its members. The widespread acceptance of anarchism in the Catalan-speaking lands meant that the majority of its members, historians, actions and publishers were located there.

As a socio-political phenomenon, anarchism has given rise to a profuse, longstanding historiography, which is not always present in today's academic debates and often does not reflect the uniqueness of Catalan anarchism, which is usually presented as undifferentiated from Spanish anarchism.¹ The rupture entailed by the Civil War and the lengthy Franco dictatorship profoundly marked the history of Spain. From the standpoint of professional research, many issues, such as the one being examined in this article, were interdicted during the first

few decades of the dictatorship, and when they were addressed it was from officialdom and with the intention of clearly pointing to the responsibility of the anarchists – and along with them, the pro-Catalan separatists and communists – in the drama of the Civil War. In contrast, and with the opposite goal, during the same period the anarchist ranks in exile generated a sweeping literature – with the understanding that it should be individualised on its republican and communist sides – of testimonies and analyses, all of which aimed to be exculpatory. Their goals were to leave proof of anarchism's view of its actions during the Civil War, to justify its own faith and to dogmatically define its beliefs.² At the same time, from a completely different professional and political milieu, Hispanists like Gerald Brenan³ took an interest in Spanish anarchism – especially its Andalusian guise, whose behaviours they erroneously extrapolated to the rest of Spain. This camp was attracted by the more primitive elements of “spontaneous rebellion” and “millenarianism” that were frequent in the Mediterranean but had nothing to do with the anarchism that developed in the Catalan-speaking lands. A more professional historiography of the labour movement in general and anarchism in particular, and one that is committed to anti-Francoism, started to develop in the late years of the Franco dictatorship. This historiography, which is the outcome of university research, has continued until this day and clearly differentiates between militant discourse and historical analysis. In this sense, the earliest studies, which are still valid today, examined anarcho-syndicalism with the ex-

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PLICIT goal of laying the foundations for the history of the labour movement.

In terms of publishing, studies on anarchism constantly appeared until the mid-1990s, after which they underwent a clear decline. The preferred subjects were the formation and development of anarcho-syndicalism with its regional peculiarities, rural mobilisations, international relations, the libertarian press and culture, and especially aspects related to the Civil War.⁴

THE EMERGENCE OF ANARCHISM

Anarchism started to be propagated in the Catalan-speaking lands after the 1868 revolution, which put an end to Isabel II's reign, and its history is closely linked to that of the industrial labour movement. The new political regime created a climate favourable to political and union liberties that fostered the development of workers' associations, which had been quite limited until then. The outbreak of anarchism took place at this time through the relationship that the International Workers' Association (IWA) forged with the workers' associations. The founding of the IWA in London in 1864 had triggered a qualitative leap in the European labour movement by proposing

local labour organisations in addition to the progressive and democratic parties, and by giving their social claims an international dimension. When it received word of the political revolt in Spain, the IWA committee headquartered in Geneva sent a message to Spanish workers inspired by Bakunin himself. That resulted in a trip to Spain by the First International member and former fighter with Garibaldi's Thousand, Giuseppe Fanelli, who encouraged the creation of IWA chapters in Madrid and Barcelona. Fanelli arrived in Barcelona in late October, and he participated in a propaganda tour through Tarragona, Tortosa and Valencia with a group of republicans. From there, Fanelli went on to Madrid, where he set up an IWA chapter. Shortly thereafter he returned to Barcelona; on the 2nd of May 1869 he met with a group of workers in the home of painter Josep Lluís Pellicer and together they set up an IWA chapter. However, the contacts that Fanelli had forged were with the Alliance of the Socialist Democracy, Bakunin's sector of the IWA.

The workers of Barcelona had already heard of the International prior to Fanelli's arrival: in 1867 they had sent a message of adhesion to the 2nd Congress of the International held in Lausanne, and the ensuing year a Barcelona worker participated in the International held in Brussels. However, in reality, as mentioned above, word truly began to spread when Italian Giuseppe Fanelli was sent to Spain on an anarchist propaganda tour.

The labour movement, which became the first recipient of anarchism, had a strong federal republican tradition and practised a kind of reformist societarianism from which it was difficult to distance itself. The neophyte Bakuninists who became its first leaders, such as Rafael Farga Pellicer, were prominent members of the Federal Party and did not split off from federal republicanism until October 1869, after widespread disappointment at the failure of the federal republican uprising that took place in September and October of that same year in which the working class of Catalonia and Valencia participated. From then on, the leaders of the Barcelona unions began to mistrust the political route as a way of improving their social plight, and the climate became more receptive to the spread of apolitical postulates.

Prominent figures in the introduction of anarchism include the aforementioned typographer Rafael Farga Pellicer and physician Gaspar Sentiñón. Both met Bakunin in September 1869 in their journey to Basel to attend the congress of the International. Bakunin's influence must have been decisive in reaffirming their distance from republicanism. An epistolary relationship was started, and writings by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Bakunin immediately began to be published in the newspaper *La Federación* insisting on the need for the International to be independent from any political party, a principle that had already been accepted by the neophyte Spanish Bakuninists.

Historically, workers' associations assimilated the republican militancy and the first socialist ideas without too



Figure 1. Explosion of *Gran Teatre del Liceu de Barcelona* in the cover of the newspaper *Le Petit Journal*, 1893.

many ruptures, which resulted in a complex amalgam rooted in egalitarianism and federalism. This explains a specifically industrial labour movement's peculiar adhesion to anarchism. Anarchism was introduced by the Bakuninists, but other thinkers also influenced it, including William Godwin and especially Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who became famous thanks to the translation of his works by the prominent federal republican leader Francesc Pi i Margall,⁵ who introduced elements of his own thinking as well. The first anarchists insisted on acknowledging that they arrived at anarchism after having gone through Pi i Margall's federalism. These origins should be borne in mind when seeking an explanation for anarchism's influence on the labour movement in the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century. Anarchism, which combined millenarian dreams and rationalist elements, had a natural realm of action in a somewhat underdeveloped society with nuclei of incipient industrial growth. This generic fact should be coupled with a factor repeated pointed out by Josep Termes: the combination of anti-statism, as a reflection of general opposition to the state, and federalism, as a reaction to a centralist state.⁶

ANARCHISM AND WORKERS' UNIONS: THE SPANISH REGIONAL FEDERATION OF THE IWA

In June 1870, Barcelona's Centre Federal de Societats Obreres⁷ (Federal Centre of Labour Unions) hosted the first labour movement conference in Spain. There, the Spanish Regional Federation (abbreviated FRE) of the IWA was set up and decided to introduce anarchism into the unions. Ninety delegates from around Spain with a variety of leanings attended the conference, but the majority were from the Catalan-speaking lands (74 from Catalonia, 50 from Barcelona, three from Valencia and two from Majorca). The Bakuninists were in the minority, but they controlled important realms such as the Barcelona newspaper *La Federació* and *El Obrero* from Palma de Majorca. They forged a pact with the unionists, which was the key to displacing other currents and reinforcing the anarchist influence within the unions. Unionism was accepted, which drove the organisation of trade unions in the federal sense. On the political front, instead of totally renouncing political action, the anarchists accepted the apoliticism of the unions, a pact formula that was maintained in the future. With this, they rejected the unions' subordination to any political party while at the same time tolerating individual political activity. With the assimilation of Bakuninism, the Catalan labour movement underwent a sudden transformation and embarked on a route that it would largely follow until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

The FRE grew quickly, and the anarchists consolidated their predominance in subsequent congresses. Two-thirds of the International members were in Catalonia, and the remainder were scattered around Andalusia and

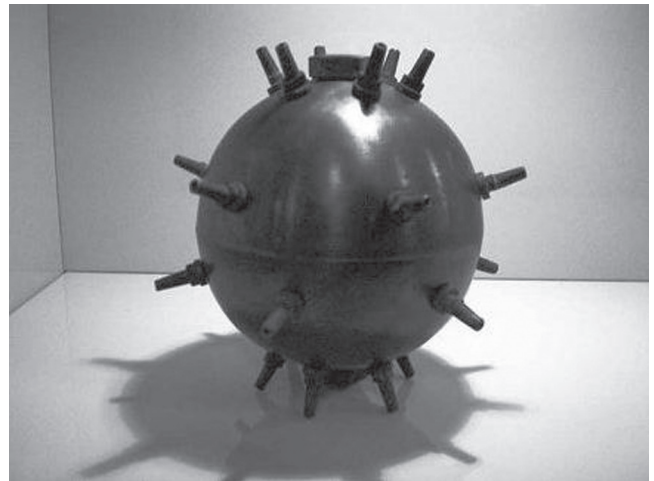


Figure 2. An Orsini bomb. The Spanish anarchist Santiago Salvador threw two Orsini bombs into the crowd at *Gran Teatre del Liceu de Barcelona*. Only one of the bombs detonated, but it killed 22 people and injured 35.

Valencia, specifically in the southern part of this latter region around the town of Alcoy. The Local Federation of Alcoy soon became one of the most important in Spain, the second after Barcelona, the reason the Federal Commission, the top ruling body of the FRE, left Barcelona and moved to this town in 1873.

With regard to the Balearic Islands, anarchism was introduced in Majorca under the influence of, and imitating, the Barcelona anarchists and the newspaper *La Federació*. According to figures provided by Pere Gabriel, on Majorca the anarchist unionists never reached more than 2,000 members, and the labour movement's dependence on republicanism irreversibly kept it apart from anarchism, which it only survived sporadically. Anarchism had a more prominent presence on Minorca, but the Minorcan unions were quite weak.⁸ Generally speaking, the labour movement did not develop on the Balearic Islands until after World War I, when anarcho-syndicalism gained ground as the ideal conditions for advocating a more revolutionary model of unionism arose among the working class population (job instability, tensions, etc.).

The years of the IWA was a time of vast social upheaval, and the FRE was changed by both internal and external causes that weakened it. After the failure of the Paris Commune (1871), numerous refugees arrived in Barcelona and the FRE was the victim of the widespread repression unleashed by this influx. Likewise, as a result of the rupture within the IWA that had taken place in The Hague (1872), in which the anarchists were expelled by the Marxists, the FRE disbanded. However, in Spain, the situation was the opposite: the Bakuninists, who were strong in Barcelona, expelled the Madrid group, which was the chapter in Spain the most open to Marx's thesis. On another front, the political changes that led to the proclamation of the Spanish First Republic affected the FRE, which had intensely participated in the brief repub-

lican experience of 1873⁹ and the first anarchist insurrection. The moderate internationalists, who had a strong showing in Catalonia, supported the new regime, but the more radical factions displayed a combative attitude. The FRE leadership had temporarily moved to Alcoy and was in the hands of the anarchist insurrectionists. Dovetailing with a cantonalist federal uprising, it transformed a general strike that had broken out in the town into an insurrectional uprising against the state which was somewhat reminiscent of the Paris Commune. The failure of the Alcoy insurrection determined the future of anarchism in the middle term: it led the FRE underground until 1881, and the Marxists, who had been expelled from the FRE the year before, seized on it to criticise anarchism's incapacity and erroneous tactics in its leadership of the labour movement.¹⁰ As for Valencia, anarchism only survived in small, isolated cells. Initially, the Bakuninists had found their place, but underground operations and fragmentation led their influence to decline in the late 19th century. This disorganisation ran in favour of the socialists, and the anarchists' isolation did not begin to lift until the early years of the 20th century, when Valencian labour groups¹¹ joined the reorganising efforts influenced by French syndicalism, which meant the Solidaritat Obrera (Workers' Solidarity) movement driven by labour unions in Barcelona (August 1907).

UNDERGROUND OPERATIONS AND REORGANISATION

In the waning years of the 1870s, anarchism was losing ground among labour organisations because of its underground nature and the radicalism that had characterised the FRE in recent years. Being underground certainly aided the endeavours of insurrectionist anarchist groups, which had controlled the movement for years upholding the pathway of insurrection and individual retaliation. They acted in small, highly radical cells. In the realm of doctrine, they never went beyond nihilism; in the realm of unionism, their activity was null. Dovetailing with the wave of terrorist attacks in Russia, the German Empire and Italy, the first frustrated attacks against King Alphonse XII were waged in 1878.

The more unionist-leaning sectors tried to revitalise the movement as soon as the regime displayed a certain degree of political tolerance. With regard to anarchism, in the early 1880s the Catalan unionist sector, which was against insurrectionism and nihilism and in favour of public union action, decided to revive the initiative and spearheaded a new federation. The anarcho-syndicalists, under the same leaders who had introduced anarchism – Rafael Farga Pellicer, Josep Llunas, Antoni Pellicer Paraire, *et al.* – disbanded the FRE's Federal Commission, which had been gradually disintegrating for years from a mix of ideological and organisational pressures, swallowed by both anarchist terrorism and political re-

pression. In 1881 they set up a new organisation, the Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española (Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region, abbreviated FTRE). The new organisation had an approach similar to that of the former FRE, and it encompassed a wide range of ideological options, always under the overarching principle of apoliticism.

The FTRE grew quickly. At first it was led by the Barcelona unionist core, but the Catalans could not win back their hegemonic role of the past. In the early 1880s, most militant anarchists were in Andalusia, and in 1882 the federations clashed with the leadership. The tensions between unionists in favour of collectivist anarchism and those who upheld underground operations and insurrection, identified with the anarcho-communists and opposed any organisational formula, led the FTRE to dissolve in 1888.

As a result of these circumstances, in the closing decades of the 19th century anarchism splintered off into two different ideological positions: collectivist anarchism, inspired by Bakunin, and anarchist communism, propagated by Kropotkin and spread by Malatesta. Both believed in a classless, stateless society, but they diverged in the organisation and the way of achieving it. The collectivist anarchists identified with the anarcho-syndicalists: they relied on the syndicalist struggle to both achieve improved working conditions and trigger a revolution in the middle or long term.¹² They wanted unions that aspired to create a classless society, in which ownership would be in the hand of worker collectives. This was the predominant strain in Catalonia, in fact an extremist form of unionism. The anarchist communist trend, which was strong in Andalusia and had prominent followers in Catalonia, embraced a much more individualistic and radical tradition: it was opposed to unionism (seen as excessively legalistic and not very useful for achieving the ultimate goal of social uprising) and advocated a structure based on small chapters, not trade union chapters but chapters based on ideological affinity whose mission was not the concerns of unions but constant ideological propaganda and the systematic struggle against the factors of the social order, without rejecting direct action and violent propaganda.¹³ This stance was in harmony with the line that European anarchism, largely separated from the unions since it had been expelled from the IWA, upheld and had just ratified in the semi-clandestine congress held in London in 1881.

The leadership of the FTRE, headed by the aforementioned Catalan anarchists, was harshly attacked by the anarchist communists and even reached personal confrontations. The attempts to make peace were in vain, and the organisation began to gradually disintegrate in 1884. The anarcho-syndicalist groups also weakened due to ideological and organisational tensions, devoured by the dynamic of individual terrorism and the subsequent police repression. In this period of disbandment, anarchism on the Iberian Peninsula struggled to avoid becoming ostracised by forcing itself both to participate in the interna-

tional worker forums starting with the formation of the Second International, despite the fact that it was systematically expelled, and by keeping up ties with international anarchist groups.¹⁴ However, we can only grasp the anarchist participation in the worker protests and in the first May Day events within this context. Yet in Catalonia, the first May Days in 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1893 prompted serious disturbances in the public law and order, which resulted in failures in the labour movement. The resulting disappointment and frustration conducted anarchism towards direct action and “propaganda by deeds”.

THEORETICAL REFLECTION

Anarchism developed an intense intellectual activity that cannot be disassociated from the far-reaching republican cultural movement in the late 19th century, deployed through a variety of institutions (casinos, athenaeums, etc.) and in alignment with ideological movements like free thinking and the Free Masons. Theoretical reflection heavily penetrated the anarchist ranks. The anarchist positions in the waning years of the 19th century were discussed by an entire generation of theoreticians, including Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, Joan Montseny (Federico Urales), Teresa Mañé (Soledad Gustavo), Leopold Bonafulla, Pere Esteve, Anselmo Lorenzo, José

López Montenegro, Teobaldo Nieva and others. Although they did not supply anarchism with an ideology of its own, they did help to create a peculiar, important anarchist culture that went beyond the strictly labour movement circles and influenced intellectual movements such as the one that emerged around the Modernist magazine *L’Avenç*.

The press was a major driving force in the theoretical debate between collective anarchists and communist anarchists. Most of the publications appeared in Barcelona. Almost all of them were published in Spanish, although their frequency and duration were quite varied. Some were aligned with the collective anarchist trend, such as *El Productor* in Barcelona, the most important syndicalist newspaper until the advent of *Solidaridad Obrera* in the 20th century, and *El Chornaler* (1883) in Valencia. The Primer Certamen Socialista¹⁵ (First Socialist Gathering) was held in Reus in July 1885, and it featured contributions by the thinkers regarded as the intellectuals of this movement (Josep Lluanas, Ricardo Mella, et al.). The communist anarchists, in turn, published the biweeklies *La Justicia Humana*, *Tierra*, *Libertad* and others, and disseminated translations of the works of Kropotkin, Jean Grave and Errico Malatesta. This ideological strain dominated the Segon Certamen Socialista (Second Socialist Gathering) held in Barcelona in November 1889.¹⁶ However, the spiral of terrorism and repression in the late 19th century put an end to the brilliant blossoming of the anarchist press.

The theoretical polemic between communist anarchists and collective anarchists triggered the emergence of an eclectic group that defined itself as upholding “anarchy without adjectives”, which refused to discuss the agenda and structure of future society prior to any action or organisation. There was an intellectual sector in this milieu devoid of tactical positions which included Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, Pere Esteve, Federico Urales, Teresa Mañé, et al., who facilitated contacts between anarchist unions and “anarchised” young Barcelona intellectuals, such as Pere Coromines, Pompeu Gener and Jaume Brosa, who were also defenders of a Catalan culture in the nationalistic sense.

This is one of the most singular traits of Catalan anarchism. We have already seen how the first generation of anarchists (Rafael Farga Pellicer, Josep Lluanas, et al.) had worked to shape popular Catalan nationalism. They were the same union leaders who upheld moderate unionism and were related to the field of typography and the graphic arts. They went from federal militancy to become anarcho-unionist leaders and then representatives of the union intellectualism of the day. They contributed to publications that upheld progressive Catalan nationalism and at the same time were the driving force behind outstanding unionist-anarchist publications such as *La Tramontana* (the only one written in Catalan) and the aforementioned *Acracia* and *El Productor*.

In the 1890s, there was yet another convergence between the neophyte ideologues of anarchism and young



Figure 3. Anselmo Lorenzo (1841-1914). Sometimes called “the grandfather of Spanish anarchism”, he was one of the original Spanish anarchists and highly active within the movement from his meeting with Giuseppe Fanelli in 1868 until his death in 1914.

Catalan nationalist intellectuals which lasted until the end of World War I, with the exception of the period of the Montjuïc Trial. In this phase, the ones who acted as a nexus between both currents were no longer the former federals seduced by Bakuninism but young students, the offspring of middle-class families attracted by anarchism and seduced by a more Nietzschean than Bakuninist ideology which allowed them to be rebels and modern and to act – intellectually speaking – against a society that they rejected. This sector's attempt to get in touch with the more active nuclei within the working class followed the rationale of modernity and freedom of expression, yet also the conviction that Catalan nationalism was unfeasible if it turned its back on the new industrial society.

PROPAGANDA BY DEEDS

Parallel to this intellectual activity, there emerged a sort of terrorism revolving around individual action, which was mixed with the activism imposed by the communist anarchist movement. Its proponents promoted organising into clandestine groups and preached “propaganda by deeds”, convinced that peaceful propaganda would be unable to arouse the masses to social revolution. This phenomenon was related to the terrorist references of French anarchism and Russian populism with their practice of nihilistic methods.

“Propaganda by deeds” was the outcome of a lengthy theoretical debate about the need to affirm anarchist principles through revolutionary actions. Ultimately, the use of violence as a revolutionary tactic was debated at the international anarchists' meeting in London in 1881,¹⁷ dovetailing with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. The phenomenon of terrorism, which had gestated the collective feeling of frustration in a veiled way, arose from each group and/or individual's interpretation of the resolutions from the London Congress and from the importance they attached to the use of dynamite as a revolutionary tool. The Russian nihilists' methods exerted a considerable influence.

Terrorism, concealed under the subtle name of “propaganda by deeds”, had reared its head back in the early 1880s in Europe, which was disturbed during the 1890s by the deadly explosions of terrorist attacks, the tragic expression of anarchist individualism. These attacks had become more widespread in the 1800s. In Barcelona they began around the same time; initially they were just fire-crackers set off at the doorways of textile factories in Barcelona and its surroundings; they left no victims in their wake and the authors of the deeds were not identified. However, they became especially virulent starting in 1892, and the organised labour movement was able to do nothing to stanch this tide. Syndicalist publications like *El Productor* and *La Tramontana* repeatedly condemned the violence that was besieging Barcelona at the time. It was the age of the Ravachol bombs in France, of the insur-

rectional uprisings of the *fasci* in southern Italy, and of August Vaillant's bombs against the Chamber of Deputies in France.

After the failures of the May Days, disorganised communist anarchism kept gaining momentum, which believed very little in the virtues of unionism and the advantages of mass action and instead wanted spectacular actions that would kill off bourgeois society. The terrorist actions conducted outside the unions set anarchism apart from the working masses and strengthened the governments, which approved exceptional laws against anarchism virtually all over Europe.

In 1892, the prominent Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, a proponent of communist anarchism and insurrectionism, visited Spain on a propaganda tour and contributed to making anarchism veer off towards individual forms at a time when large numbers of French and Italian individualists upholding this tactic were living in Barcelona as refugees (one of them, Paolo Schicchi, who had published *Pensiero e dinamite* in Italy, published *El Porvenir anarquista* [The Anarchist Future] in Barcelona in 1891). The anti-terrorist protests in Lluçanoves del Prat's *La Tramontana* and in *El Productor* were futile. Lluçanoves had to close *La Tramontana* in 1893 and cease actions. Bonafulla, in turn, abandoned ship and emigrated to the United States in 1892.

A state of siege was declared in Catalonia in June 1892. A constant string of bombs was planted. On the 24th of September 1892, Paulí Pallàs, an anarchist worker emboldened by Kropotkin's *La conquista del pa* (The Conquest of Bread), attacked the Captaincy General in Barcelona. Thus began a spiral of violence that continued with the launch of two Orsini bombs at Barcelona's Liceu opera house during a performance (November 1893), an act of vengeance for Pallàs' execution. This was the bloodiest attack ever waged in Barcelona: it resulted in 22 deaths, dozens of injuries and Dantesque scenes of panic. It was followed by an attack against the religious order housed on Barcelona's Canvis Nous street on Corpus Christi, which resulted in 12 dead (June 1896). This string of attacks culminated with the assassination of the head of government, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (August 1897), and with Ramon Sempau's attack against Lieutenant Porta and a lower officer, considered responsible for the torture inflicted on those who had been imprisoned in Montjuïc castle.

The government used the attack on Canvis Nous Street to embark on a repressive operation against anarchism, and, while at it, against the organised labour movement in Catalonia. Hundreds of people were accused of being terrorists or of inducing terrorism. Constitutional guarantees were suspended, and the repression encompassed anarchist leaders, syndicalists, unionists, republican writers and politicians, anti-clerics, free thinkers and rationalist teachers. Enemies and apologists of terrorism were arrested indiscriminately, and worker centres, newspapers and the like were shuttered by the government. More



Figure 4. Front page of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the newspaper published by the Catalanian/Balearic regional section of the anarchist trade union *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT).

than 400 people were held in the castle-fortress on Montjuïc and tortured as they awaited trial. Afterward a mock trial was held, known as the Montjuïc Trial, and thus began a sweeping legal campaign against anarchism, which had been repeatedly called for by the conservative sectors ever since the attacks had started. The ruling handed down at the trial was harsh: five death penalties, five prison sentences and dozens of people absolved but forced to go into exile. The police spoke about an anarchist conspiracy, and they always regarded the anarchists as a menace to the forces of law and order. Despite all this, the authorship of the attack was never clearly established.¹⁸

The trial was immediately the target of public criticism: the torture and legal irregularities triggered protests from international opinion. The campaign was spearheaded by the condemnations issued by Fernando Tarrida del Mármol, an anarchist sympathiser who had been imprisoned for the attack and published terrifying stories about the torture inflicted in Montjuïc castle and the illegal trial proceedings.¹⁹

Terrorism had been revealed to be inhumane and futile, and after Montjuïc it prompted many workers' disenchantment with Internationalism and put an end to the relationship established in the realm of culture between Modernist intellectuals, frightened away by radicalism, and anarchist unionism. Terrorist actions conducted outside the unions distanced anarchism from the working masses and led many governments around Europe to approve exceptional laws against terrorism.

The bombings resumed in Barcelona between 1903 and 1909, but this latter stage was a lucrative form of terrorism that helped to maintain the control and repression over the anarchists. Joan Rull became the clearest example of this unfounded, profit-driven form of terrorism. Rull, who had been in touch with anarchist groups in Barcelona, used bombs as a way of extorting police officers and manufacturers, which were then presented as and mixed up with anarchist terrorism even though it had nothing to do with the earlier period.²⁰

A CULTURAL WORLD OF ITS OWN

Anarchism established a cultural world of its own. Just like the rest of the labour movement, it trusted in the emancipating power of education, and training became the prime element in its strategy and its socio-political project. Half of the population was illiterate in around 1900, and the figure still stood at 21% in Catalonia even as late as 1930. The priority on education stimulated the creation of a cultural fabric in which athenaeums and a wide variety of institutions took part with the goal of educating the people from a secular, rationalist perspective. This effort was especially noteworthy in Spain, with its endemically deficient education for the poorer classes that was controlled by the Catholic Church. The concern for secular, egalitarian, mixed education was a constant fixture. The best-known example is Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia's Modern School,²¹ which was linked to anarchist and secular milieus. It was a hotbed of anarchist propagandists, but despite having become the best-known referent, it was neither the most interesting educational project nor did it have the most anarchist content.

The gestation and formation of this culture took place parallel to the theoretical shaping of anarchism within the context of an eclectic culture permeated by republicanism, social romanticism, millenarianism, free thinking, pacifism, Naturism and similar strains of thought. The anarchist movement, which was open to diverse alternative cultural currents and had intrinsic difficulties squaring with all sorts of dogmatisms, generated a pluralistic, sociologically extremely broad cultural sphere, which was made visible in its ideological discourse, theatre and literature.²²

The press became the means of disseminating anarchist thinking and conveying the libertarian socio-cultural posture. In the last two decades of the 19th century, a vast number of sociological journals appeared (*Acracia*, *Ciencia Social* and *Natura* in Barcelona). In Valencia, a series of Nietzschean-style journals appeared (*El Corsario*, *Juventud*, *Vida*) in the first decade of the 20th century,

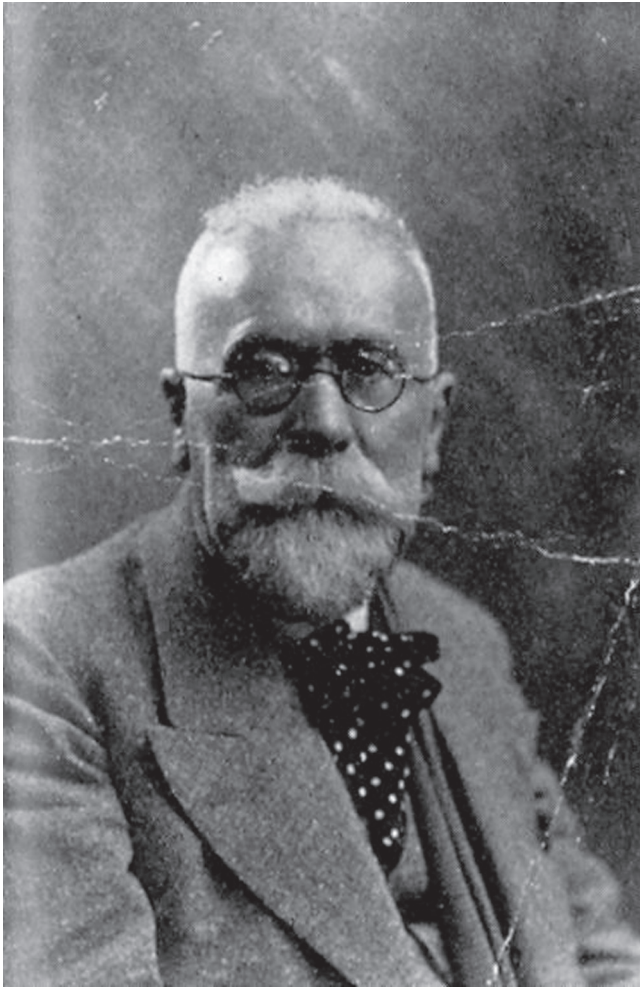


Figure 5. Joan Montseny i Carret (1864-1942). He was a Catalan anarchist writer. In Madrid, under the pseudonym Federico Urales, he started publishing the newspaper *La Revista Blanca* in 1898. The newspaper was shut down in 1905.

and in Madrid *La Revista Blanca* was published, promoted by Catalan anarchists who were living there in exile. In addition to anarchists themselves, other prominent writers also contributed to these journals, including Pere Coromines, Jaume Brossa, Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, all of them young literati and intellectuals who at the start of their literary careers adopted Nietzschean attitudes to a greater or lesser extent and occasionally dabbled in anarchism. In its two stages of circulation (the second in Barcelona from 1923 and 1936), *La Revista Blanca* was the most polished anarchist cultural product. It was the outcome of the intellectual and business efforts of the Catalan anarchists Joan Montseny (who signed his articles under the pseudonym of Federico Urales) and Teresa Mañé (who did so using the pseudonym of Soledad Gustavo). The name of the publication was a tribute to France's *Revue Blanche*, which had publicised the condemnations issuing from the anarchists imprisoned in Montjuïc in 1894.

The last few decades of the 19th century witnessed the outpouring of an extensive literary output that aimed to express a holistic concept of the universe and the fate of

mankind, one that was optimistic and guided by each group's beliefs. Diverse ideological currents were imposed: the ideas and myths of the French Revolution, rationalism, English positivism, Darwinism, pacifism, Büchner's materialism, free thinking, Hegel's idealism, diverse elements from the socialist tradition, Nietzsche's thinking and a radical position on the destruction of the traditional bourgeois and Catholic morals. More infrequently it also supported Esperanto, Naturism and neo-Malthusianism.

The foundation of these latter elements lay, just like in France, in the spread of trends that took place within anarchism starting in the last few decades of the 19th century, in the quest for new revolutionary pathways after the failure of syndicalism as it had been conceived until then. These groups wanted to find the formula to achieve the revolution in schools, Esperanto, science, birth control, Naturism and anti-militarism. However all of these trends, which were excessively inward-looking, often ended up losing their revolutionary content. The ones with the greatest resonance in Catalonia and that sparked the most social interest were Naturism and neo-Malthusianism.

The publication *Natura*, issued in Barcelona (1903-1905), was the clearest proponent of anarchist Naturism from the early 20th century. Likewise, in Valencia there was a longstanding vegetarian, Naturist movement revolving around the journal *Helios* (1916-1939).

Neo-Malthusianism, closely tied to Darwinism, was spread, as seen in the dissemination of theories that sprang up in France and made the social revolution dependent upon the improvement of the species – meaning the working class – both intellectually and physically. It upheld the fact that if workers had fewer children, they could feed and educate them in better conditions, thus avoiding avoid illness and congenital defects and improving the intellectual level of the proletariat. Neo-Malthusianism was linked to the anarchist interest in education, now through the efforts of French pedagogue Paul Robin, and through scientificism, which could be seen in the dissemination of contraceptives. This theory was adopted by some groups and individuals, yet it was also harshly criticised within the anarchist movement. Its philosophy was explained in the magazine *¡Salud y Fuerza!* published in Barcelona (1904), and later in *Generación Consciente* from Alcoy (1923) and in *Estudios* from Valencia (1924). The latter was closely associated with eugenics, and both of them were largely marginalised by the vein of anarchism more closely linked to the labour movement.²³

Beyond the press, the cultural expressions of anarchism found a outlet in theatre and to some extent in popular literature. "Social theatre" was created, a way of inculcating values and stimulating certain social claims. There were publications with an anarchist bent devoted almost exclusively to the theatre, such as *Teatro Social*, the newsletter of the Companyia Lliure de Declamació troupe published in Barcelona starting in 1896.

Novels were another means of cultural dissemination. Generally speaking, the works depicted an idyllic rural life far from industrial society and spoke with a certain degree of candour about an idealised world and chimerical characters, both redeemed and redeemers. There were signal publishing houses that targeted the working class readership, such as Maucci, Sempere and La Revista Blanca (which also published the magazine of the same name). The La Revista Blanca publishing group was the most influential. By imitating the French models, it combined the publication of magazines and literary and militant newspapers (*La Revista Blanca*, *Tierra y Libertad*, *El Luchador*) with collections of stories such as “La Novela Ideal” (which issued around 600 titles), “La Novela Libre” and “El Mundo al Día”. It was a combination of ideology and commercial acumen which very successfully spread a sentimental, teary-eyed sort of novel among the anarchist working class and strove to include elements of social and female emancipation with the purpose of divulging anarchist ideological principles in an educational way. Their



Figure 6. Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia (1859-1909) was a Catalan free-thinker and anarchist. He opened the Escola Moderna (The Modern School) to teach middle-class children radical social values. Following the declaration of martial law in 1909 during the Tragic Week, he was arrested and executed without trial by firing squad at Montjuïc Fortress in Barcelona.

dissemination was far more popular among the working class than any other product with a more cultivated tone.

THE CONFEDERACIÓ NACIONAL DEL TREBALL (NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR, CNT)

Starting in the early 1900s, once the terrorist stage had come to an end, anarchism evolved permanently towards anarcho-syndicalism. In the wake of the wave of strikes in the early 1900s, there were varied organisational and political responses among the workers that strengthened the societarian movement. In Catalonia, the influence within the labour movement was still predominantly anarchist. In Valencia, on the other hand, anarchism had spread especially in the countryside, while the factory workers were mainly inclined towards socialism. This division remained in place until the Confederació Nacional del Treball (National Confederation of Labour, or CNT) was founded. On the Balearic Islands, the labour movement was heavily influenced by the socialists and the republicanism of the Unió Republicana (Republican Union). Anarchism only exerted significant influence in the Federació d'Obrers (Labour Federation) on Minorca.

During this period, anarchism was making international efforts to find a niche that, without contradicting anarchist principles, would ensure the development of the revolution once it had taken place. In 1907, an Anarchist International was created in Amsterdam, which ended up being totally inoperative and vanished with the outbreak of war in 1914, as did so many other international organisations.

In this context, and in the climate of constant growth in the working class population, in 1907 the Catalan worker groups took a major step in the process of modernisation, which was not immune to influence from French revolutionary syndicalism, by founding the group *Solidaritat Obrera* (Workers' Solidarity) in Barcelona. It was heavily influenced by the anarchists. In October of that same year, the group promoted a publication by the same name, *Solidaridad Obrera*, which later became the organ and symbol of the CNT.²⁴ This organisation was indeed the embryo of the CNT, which was officially founded in Barcelona in November 1910 with the goal of spreading all over Spain.

The CNT was founded around a new generation of militants and took shape as anarcho-syndicalist since the union experience in the years of acute political crisis in the regime and major structural changes in the working class population. It was the outcome not of theoretical reflections or doctrinal influences but of the success of the labour movement, with its longstanding tradition of the trade brotherhoods, which managed to articulate the working class. The reorganisation revolved around basic labour sectors. In the subsequent years, two different strains were high visible within the CNT: the propagandists, who wanted to give the new central union organisa-

tion an ideology and a doctrine, and the syndicalist ranks, the union men.²⁵ Within the CNT, very few propagandists were union men, and many of the debates and split-offs that took place in the future were driven by the propagandists who dragged out the union men.

The CNT advocated direct action and gained strength from unions' traditional apoliticism. With them, anarcho-syndicalism took on its definitive shape and served as the conduit of Spanish anarchism until the advent of the Second Republic.

The start of the CNT was largely clandestine. In reality, it remained in a phase of contention until after the International Anarchist Peace Congress (El Ferrol, 1915). The great confederal onslaught started during World War I, in parallel to the overall expansion of the union movement in the Catalan-speaking lands. This resulted from workers' indispensable needs for unitary action and structure, which translated into significant development in the trade federations and unions in general. In the subsequent years, the labour groups gained ground, especially in Catalonia, and spread quickly towards Valencia²⁶ and the Balearic Islands.

In the CNT's formative years, anarchist milieus were quite diverse. A mix of sectors coexisted alongside one another: more doctrinal and theoretical anarchists, other culturally affiliated propagandists, ideologically sympathetic groups which sought worker and social emancipation through pathways different to the one pursued by revolutionary syndicalism, and a sector of young union leaders who wanted to ensure the ties between anarchism and the new unions that they wanted to set up outside the trade federations. Within this context, the leadership of the labour movement shifted into the hands of new leaders. The predominance of typographers in the leadership ceased, and they were replaced by a broader range of trades. This reorganisation was accompanied by an injection of new blood, with the addition of new, young members who were much more activist than discursive, and more speakers at rallies than journalists or authors of doctrinal leaflets (Salvador Seguí, Martí Barrera, Camil Piñón, Sebastià Clarà, Joan Peiró, Joan Viadiu, Ángel Pestaña, etc.). It was a generation of revolutionaries who, though officially apolitical, were profoundly politicised.

A NEW ORGANISATIONAL MODEL: SOLE UNIONS

Catalonia, and specifically Barcelona, became the heart of the CNT. This region's numerical strength had no comparison: in 1915 it had 15,000 members; by 1918 it had almost 74,000; and by December 1919, when the CNT held a congress in Madrid with representatives from all over the country, the Catalan regional chapter claimed to have 427,000 affiliated workers (of a total of 714,000 who were represented). The figures speak for themselves.

A qualitative leap of this magnitude can be explained by the reorganisational effort driven by the CNT in

Catalonia in 1918 at a congress held in the working class neighbourhood of Sants (Barcelona) in June of that same year. There, the CRT²⁷ of Catalonia adopted a new organisational model that ended up being imposed on the entire CNT. The reorganisation enabled the CNT to take a major step forward in solidifying its position as the absolute representative of workers and the sole interlocutor with management. The Sants Congress agreed to preferably exercise direct action and reaffirmed the apoliticism and the anarcho-syndicalist content of the CNT. The most important agreement was the adoption of a new form of organisation that broke with the Catalan labour movement's tradition of association by trade. The organisational underpinning of the CNT became sole unions of industries, local in scope, made up of different sections corresponding to the different trades, as opposed to national trade federations. This centralisation of the labour movement vastly multiplied its strength and its leverage to negotiate and struggle in labour conflicts. The CRT, organised into a regional committee made up of the local and countywide federations, began to operate with organisational regularity given that it thus put an end to the prior ambiguity and inexactness with regard to affiliations and fees. This was the first confederal congress after the reconstitution of 1915. It featured a new generation of syndicalists who replaced both the purist anarchists and those who had guided the CNT in its early years. The new secretary general of the CRT in Catalonia was one of them, Salvador Seguí, who became the most representative man of the CNT until he was murdered in 1923, right in the midst of *pistolisme* (the use of thugs to intimidate active unionists).

As the CRT took on the leadership of the labour movement, the worker mobilisations became radicalised, driv-



Figure 7. Salvador Seguí (1886-1923) at center, with Salvador Quemades (left) and Ángel Pestaña (right). Salvador Seguí, known as *El noi del sucre* (The sugar boy), was a Catalan anarcho-syndicalist in the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). He was assassinated by gunshot in Barcelona at the hands of gunmen working for the Catalan employers' organisation under protection of Catalonia's Civil Governor, Martínez Anido.

en by a process of social protests that had been on the rise since 1916 which was against the intransigence of management, strengthened by the phantom of Bolshevism. The year 1919 marked the peak, the test of strength between the CNT and management: the strike at the Barcelona Traction Light and Power Co., known as La Canadenca in reference to the origin of the company, Canada. It was the mother company of a series of branches that produced and distributed electricity and ran electrical railways and tram lines, including the ones in Barcelona. With the strike, Barcelona was left without electricity and its public services and industrial activity ground to a halt. The conflict went unresolved for five months.²⁸ What was initially a huge success for the anarchist unions ended up with negative political and social repercussions for both workers and the CNT itself; it had indeed shown its strength, and management responded by showing its more radical, fractious side. It imposed a hard line and constantly threatened a union lockout. This intransigence fostered the climate of violence that engendered *pistolisme* and the rise of action groups among the anarcho-syndicalist ranks.

That year, 1919, was a watershed in the history of the CNT. The anarchist groups, allured by its strength, had decided to join the CNT. That was when it began to grow in Valencia, parallel to its growth all around Spain, particularly in Andalusia, and powerful chapters were created in Gijón, Bilbao, Vigo and Madrid. The CNT faced the state-wide congress, which became decisive for its future (La Comèdia Congress, Madrid, 1919), under these conditions. The La Canadenca strike had brought internal conflicts within the CNT in Catalonia to the surface. The more intransigent anarchists criticised the actions of the CNT leaders for their moderation, and they blamed them for the strength that management had acquired. Their strength facilitated the triumph of the more radical elements in Madrid, and the congress developed the theory of libertarian communism. However, it decided to tentatively adhere to the Third International, from which it ultimately withdrew in 1922 in order to join the IWA,²⁹ when the anarcho-syndicalists once again wrested control of the CNT. In fact, anarchism entered into a highly conflictive period revolving around a struggle for control of the CNT, which would determine the complexity of the ensuing years.³⁰

PISTOLERISME³¹

After the hardship and the failure of the strike movement in 1919, management imposed a line of action characterised by harshness. This situation fostered the climate of violence that would engender *pistolisme* and the rise of action groups among the anarcho-syndicalist ranks. In the subsequent years, the labour conflict only grew and radicalised, and between 1920 and 1922 it became particularly bloody.

The business leaders demanded that the government

come down hard with measures such as the suspension of constitutional guarantees, the closure of unions and the imprisonment of unionists, and the Confederació Patronal Espanyola (Spanish Management Confederation) threatened the government to paralyse industry as a whole, first in Catalonia and later in Spain, by declaring a general lockout if it did not remedy the situation. The government dug in its heels: on the 5th of January 1920 constitutional guarantees were suspended in Barcelona, the unions were closed and prominent CNT members were arrested. That was when the Free Unions began to act. They were organisations based on moderate worker groups that positioned themselves as the enemy of the sole unions and aimed to put a halt to the coercion to join them. They were painted as a group that responded to the CNT with violence, and they made themselves available to the military and governing authority, financed by management, to act against the CNT.

Violence was nothing new in Spain. It had always been a factor in political struggles coexisting alongside peaceful, civic demonstrations. In the early decades of the 20th century, this trend was accentuated and extremist groups of all stripes systematically used aggression to impose their will. Since the founding of the sole unions, the CNT had begun to pressure workers to join their respective unions. Under these circumstances, the conflicts among the CNT members of the sole union and workers from other unions or against membership were ongoing: the CNT wanted to force union membership and the payment of fees, and the result was threats, coercion and aggression among workers.



Figure 8. Angel Pestaña (1886-1937) was a Spanish anarcho-syndicalist and later syndicalist leader in Barcelona.

It appeared as the continuation of labour actions that were regarded as insufficient, and the revolutionary ideal served to provide coverage for a kind of violence verging on the criminal.

According to CNT leader Ángel Pestaña, anti-management terrorism emerged in 1916 perpetrated by groups of young, action-oriented anarchists who, in view of the management conflicts, showed their willingness to eliminate whichever factory managers the labour organisation fingered. They did this altruistically, initially moved by idealism. The immediate consequence was that the owners gave them what they wanted. However, later several syndicalist leaders used them, paying them for their services rendered. In response, management began to recruit paid men to act against the CNT: mercenaries, former CNT members belonging to the action groups, members of the Free Unions, etc. The first syndicalist to fall was murdered in 1919. In short, there were two clashing organisations, largely as a result of the challenge to management that the La Canadencia strike had entailed: the CNT and the Management Federation. Both wanted to monopolise representation of their respective sectors, and both required the other to surrender unconditionally. Intransigence thus turned into violence.

In November 1920, around 100 CNT leaders from Barcelona were imprisoned in La Mola castle in Mahon (Minorca), and they remained there until April 1922. In this climate of tension, a constant round of social attacks were committed by armed gangs serving management, by groups serving the unions that opposed the CNT and by members of the CNT itself. It would be erroneous to establish an equivalency between anarchism and *pistolerisme*, but the two did become entangled. In the CNT, the situation had gotten out hand. It was confronted with a reaction of the same characteristics led by the management hardliners with the connivance of the government authorities. The union leaders recognised that the escalation in attacks was harmful for the organisation, but they did not know how to, or were unable to, stop them, and despite their efforts radical action groups always emerged that were willing to respond virulently. The CNT found itself trapped in a vicious circle: the instability of the unions and the lack of management recognition deprived the organisation of the continuity and institutional personality needed for it to free itself from terrorism. Ultimately, this represented a turning point in the CRT that brought the entire CNT with it.

The violence was manifold and extremely bloody; between 1919 and 1923 the streets of Barcelona were dominated by guns. In this dirty war, the victims included Francesc Layret, a lawyer who defended the unionists, and Salvador Seguí, the most well-rounded and popular leader of the CNT in Catalonia. The response from the anarcho-syndicalists was also spectacular: in Valencia they murdered the Count of Salvatierra, the former governor of Barcelona, Eduardo Dato from the same head of government, and Cardinal Segura, the archbishop of Zaragoza. According to the figures provided by Albert

Balcells, between 1918 and 1923, 951 people died in Barcelona alone (143 from management and 201 CNT unionists). Proportionally, more management leaders died in the early years, while more unionists in the latter years.³² The terrorism disappeared with the dictatorship.

The anarchist men of action who began to act in Barcelona included figures who would become prominent during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the Republic, including Joan Garcia Oliver, Francisco Ascaso and Buenaventura Durruti, all of them having come to Barcelona from other parts of Catalonia and regions in Spain. They and other activists were members of the most important anarchist action group in those years, Los Solidarios (Solidarity). They argued that they had assembled into a group in order to defend the CNT from present and future attacks, and they developed another kind of violence, verging on common delinquency: robberies to make up for the union fees that the CNT was deprived of because of illegalisation and police controls. Ángel Pestaña and Joan Peiró were radically opposed to this avenue of action, and they agreed to refuse to let the Confederation help anyone accused of robbery and terrorist acts. Yet their efforts were in vain, and similar groups kept gaining ground, becoming exponents of anarchism.

With regard to the region of Valencia, the situation in Barcelona was reproduced on a smaller scale in Alicante, a traditional stronghold of anarchism. There, theoretical debate was more prominent in a climate of little violence. In the late 1920s, a weekly appeared, *El Comunista Libertario* (The Libertarian Communist), whose goal was to clarify the differences between state communism, which had been imposed in Russia, and libertarian communism, which was socioeconomically grounded. It criticised the anarcho-syndicalist leaders, especially Catalan leader Salvador Seguí, for being overly moderate. The group Espartaco even accused the CNT's leaders of collaborating with politicians and management. In short, this is an interesting critical reflection by anarchist groups on what they believe had been the CNT's policy in the recent years: the predominance of the labour struggle, criticised for being economically driven and oftentimes pragmatic, over the ideological struggle. It stressed reviving specifically anarchist groups and the need to hold a state-wide anarchist congress in order to prevent syndicalism from side-tracking anarchism.

The repression and disorganisation that worked in favour of the action groups were catastrophic for the CNT, which saw its membership dwindle to one-third of what it had before *pistolerisme* got underway.

THE DICTATORSHIP AND THE ORGANISATION OF THE ANARCHIST GROUPS

In September 1923, General Primo de Rivera led a coup d'état, backed by the monarchy and broad swaths of the country's leading sectors. No one fought to defend an im-

potent, discredited parliamentarianism, and everyone accepted a dictatorship that painted itself as a transitory regime that should last only as long as needed to regenerate the political institutions. That was a fallacy, but many sectors interpreted it in this way.

At first, the dictatorship did not illegalise the CNT, but it did place all kinds of hurdles and controls to limit labour action. In Barcelona, the CNT itself decided to shift to covert operations three weeks after the coup d'état. The decision was taken at the behest of the anarchists in order to avoid the police controls, which sought the individuals gathering union fees, accusing them of being swindlers. This deed marked the start of a period of heated internal controversy. Some unions opposed the local Barcelona federation's decision, and a crisis broke out between anarchists and syndicalists. The situation became even more serious after the murder of the executioner of Barcelona the following year, when the government ordered that CNT leaders be arrested, its storefronts closed and the anarcho-syndicalist press suspended. Two isolated points became referents in CNT activity: the newspapers *Acción Social Obrera*, published in the Catalan town of Sant Feliu de Guíxols, and *¡Despertad!* from Vigo. Surprisingly, there was greater tolerance for philosophical journals, and the aforementioned *La Revista Blanca* reappeared in the midst of the dictatorship, which over all those years had a large readership and renewed influence. The CNT had to go back underground, unable to re-emerge until the Second Republic was proclaimed.

The political situation forced many members into exile, most of whom went to France and Argentina. From these contacts with the exiles, two avenues of action emerged that were put into practice simultaneously: the propagation of violent acts to bring down the regime, and the concern with providing anarchists in Spain with an organisation within the new regime. With regard to the former, from France the Grup dels Trenta (Group of Thirty, with prominent figures like Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso) and the Comitè de Relacions Anarquistes (Committee of Anarchist Relations) organised a frustrated attack against the barracks at Barcelona's Drassanes shipyard. Later, the Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Lengua Española (Federation of Spanish-Speaking Anarchist Groups) in France drew closer to the Catalan insurrectionists who prepared a symbolic attempted invasion to bring down the dictatorship from the mountain town of Prats de Molló, also to no avail.

Organisationally, the formation of joint committees with participation by both management and workers, accepted by the socialists, triggered an internal division among the syndicalists in the CNT. Leader Ángel Pestaña and a minority sector expressed their willingness to accept these committees in exchange for the legalisation of the CNT. Another sector, led by Joan Peiró, was against them. In practice, in the midst of the dictatorship the CNT had launched a covert union reorganisation, parallel to the union system's adaptation to the dictatorship. This

decision was crucial in explaining the CNT's quick recovery once it regained its legal status.

The theories of Diego Abad de Santillán, an emigrant to Argentina, and Manuel Buenacasa became popular during the years of covert operations. Since 1925, both had advocated the creation of an explicitly anarchist union movement. The most syndicalist sector (Pestaña, Peiró, etc.) remained faithful to the old anarcho-syndicalist principles of the CNT. They got the former to accept the reality of the unions but were unable to prevent them from struggling to give them a more anarchist bent through a parallel organisation, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, or FAI).

The FAI was set up covertly in Saler (Valencia) in July 1927 by the Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de España (Federation of Anarchist Groups of Spain) and the União Anarquista Portuguesa (Portuguese Anarchist Union). It was the result of the efforts by theoreticians like Abad de Santillán and Buenacasa to shape an explicitly anarchist labour movement, and the outcome of the initiative of the Second Congress of the Federation of Spanish-Speaking Anarchist Groups (Marseille, May 1926). It encompassed a broad range of trends, ranging from activists in terrorism and common criminality to idealists concerned with keeping the anarchist purism of the CNT. It set out to ensure the anarchist component of the Confederation by joint participation in key committees such as Pro-Prisoners and Confederal Defence, and to steer it away from any cooperation with the republicans, even though it did end up collaborating with them occasionally.

It wanted to find a fit with all the groups on the Iberian Peninsula, but some, like *La Revista Blanca* or *Los Treinta*, and *Nosotros*, did not join it until well into the Republic, even though the former was quite similar and the latter was virtually a replica of it. *La Revista Blanca* advocated distancing itself from the unions in order to prevent it from being contaminated with reformism, and *Los Treinta* (the successor to *Los Solidarios*) and *Nosotros* refused to accept any kind of organisational discipline and ended up imposing a revolutionary, insurrectionist attitude.

THE FALL OF THE DICTATORSHIP

The year 1930 marked a pivotal point for the traditional apoliticism of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. The year began with the fall of dictator Primo de Rivera and with the new government's first steps to restore the democratic regime that had governed prior to the military coup. Under these circumstances, the CNT felt the need to get involved in the sweeping political movement that would end up leading to the Second Republic. Contacts with republican politicians were forged, and the Confederation expressed its support for backing a regime change that would allow the legal, ongoing development of the CNT, which entailed an indeterminate rapprochement with republicans, seen occasionally during the Republic.

The CNT's resurgence was quick. During the Second Republic, it was the labour force that experienced the highest growth (more than 80,000 members), but relations with the republicans became more and more conflictive as the anarchist groups opposed to the anarcho-syndicalist leadership gained increasing influence within the Confederation. After displacing them from the organs of management and expression, they developed an intense movement of protest and insurrection. The complexity and heterogeneity of anarchism once again led to a series of clashes and internal crises from which the FAI would emerge as the definitive winner. It ended up controlling the newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* and the Confederation's most influential means. The clash with the anarcho-syndicalist sector that had spearheaded the reorganisation of the CNT led the so-called Trentistes (Group of Thirty) to split off.

From then on, the CNT, now called the CNT-FAI, maintained a permanently insurrectionist attitude targeted at proclaiming libertarian communism, and was enmeshed in constant clashes with the republican government.

In the interplay of prevalent trends in the region of Valencia, there was tension between a kind of anarcho-syndicalism that leaned towards unionism, which would lead to the acceptance of Trentisme as defended by the Group of Thirty and of the unions opposed to the FAI that emerged during the Second Republic, and a more philosophical and cultural anarchism with pretensions of purity and orthodoxy.³³

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- [25] These characteristics are analysed by Susanna TAVERA in “Revolucionarios, publicistas y bohemios: los periodistas anarquistas (1918-1936)”, in Bert HOFMANN, Pere JOAN, and Manfred TIETZ (ed.). *El anarquismo español...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 377-392. Also in Pere GABRIEL. “Propagandistas confederales entre el sindicato y el anarquismo. La construcción barcelonesa de la CNT en Cataluña, Aragón, País Valenciano y Baleares”. *Ayer*, no. 45 (2002), pp. 105-146.
- [26] An overview can be found in Javier PANIAGUA and José A. PIQUERAS. *Trabajadores sin revolución. La clase obrera valenciana, 1868-1936*. Institució Alfons el Magnànim, Valencia 1986.
- [27] Confederació Regional del Treball (Regional Labour Confederation), that is, the regional section of the CNT in Catalonia.
- [28] Soledad BENGOCHEA. *Organització patronal i conflictitat social a Catalunya. Tradició i corporativisme entre finals de segle i la Dictadura de Primo de Rivera*. Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 1994. By the same author: *El locaut de Barcelona (1919-1920)*. Curial, Barcelona 1998.
- [29] The International Workers Association (Berlin, December 1922 – January 1923), set up by the unions that were hostile to all political action, reclaiming the name of the First International. The CNT was the most powerful central union in the new IWA. It was joined by the Unione Sindicale Italiana, la Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA) and Portugal's CGT.
- [30] Albert BALCELLS. *El sindicalismo en Barcelona: 1916-1923*. Nova Terra, Barcelona 1965. A vision of Spain as a whole can be found in Antonio BAR. *La CNT en los años rojos: del sindicalismo revolucionario al anarcosindicalismo, 1910-1926*. Akal, Madrid 1981.
- [31] A phenomenon in Spain between 1919 and 1923, especially in Barcelona. It entailed an armed clash between gangs banked by management and the unions aimed at eliminating the enemy. It left hundreds of victims in its wake.
- [32] Albert BALCELLS. *El pistolerisme. Barcelona, 1917-1923*. Pòrtic, Barcelona 2009, pp. 56 and 80. This is the most recent and comprehensive study of *pistolerisme*.
- [33] Information on anarchism in the Catalan-speaking lands can be found in two encyclopaedic works: Maria Teresa MARTÍNEZ DE SAS and Pelai PAGÈS (eds.). *Diccionari biogràfic del moviment obrer als Països Catalans*. Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 2000, and Diego IÑIGUEZ. *Enciclopedia històrica del anarquismo español*. Asociación Isaac Puente, Vitòria 2008.

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