

## Collectivisations in Catalonia and the Region of Valencia during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939

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### ABSTRACT

The defeat of the military uprising on 19 July 1936 in Barcelona and Valencia unleashed the process of the collectivisation of companies, which came to be managed by committees comprised of their own workers. The anarcho-syndicalists were identified with this change, which the overwhelmed Republican authorities tried to channel. In the region studied, collectivisation was more important in industry than in agriculture. The critical anti-fascist testimonials of the phenomenon allow us to temper the versions of the propagandists, who blamed all the flaws in the process on its adversaries. Decentralised worker management lost ground after the test of strength in Barcelona in May 1937.

**KEYWORDS:** worker self-management; agrarian collectives; social revolution; Spanish Civil War; anarchism in the Catalan-speaking lands

The collapse of the repressive apparatus of the Republican State after the defeat in the military coup on the 19th of July 1936 left business and land owners defenceless. Without this denouement, anarcho-syndicalists and Marxists from different organisations would have never had the chance to impose a collectivist transformation of companies and farms. It is not easy to get a precise idea of how this collectivisation worked and how far it extended in Catalonia and the Region of Valencia after August 1936, despite the invaluable literature that serves as the foundation of this article. However, it is easier if we examine the militant stories by the reporters from that time who had strong ideological leanings and were thus inclined to adopt the role of glorifiers or detractors of this experience. The attractive official organisational charts from that period show a controlled economy which sought to combine worker management in companies with disciplined coordination by the Catalan republican political authorities. But these organisational charts have little to do with a complex, contradictory reality which resists historiographic synthesis, just as in its day it resisted planned rationalisation.

It would be ingenuous to continue to see collectivisations as a spontaneous working-class phenomenon without the intervention the union delegates in companies and the revolutionary committees in the field. The fact

that there was no previous specific programme and that neither instructions nor public directives were issued from the top committees of the trade union federations – CNT and UGT – does not mean that it was a spontaneous process that sprang from the workers.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Barcelona company Riviere and others, the Metallurgy Union of the CNT clearly gave the initial instructions and the workers took it over out of a need for continuity, not to launch a radical change process, thus casting doubt on the thesis of spontaneity. The priorities of the trade union federations were a military offensive which ended up stabilising a front in Aragon and persecuting possible supporters of the uprising in the rear-guard.<sup>2</sup> However, these priorities in no way meant that socioeconomic changes did not come into play from the very start. Even though in this article we will focus on these changes instead of on political evolution, without references to these political shifts we cannot possibly study the evolution in the socioeconomic changes.

Very early on the streetcars and buses of Barcelona wore the red and black libertarian flag on their structures with the abbreviation of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Labour Confederation, CNT). At that point, the anarcho-syndicalists held the city's transports in their hands after the strikes, dismissals, attacks and sabotages that had been taking place since late 1933.<sup>3</sup>

The Generalitat de Catalunya created the Consell d'Economia de Catalunya (Economic Council of Catalo-

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FIGURE 1. In February 1937, a bus from the Barcelona public transport system, which had been collectivised by the CNT, runs in front of the Hotel Colón, in Plaça de Catalunya, a building seized by the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, PSUC), which was a member of the Communist International, with the effigies of Lenin and Stalin and a propaganda poster for the Unió General de Treballadors (General Workers' Union), which was controlled by the PSUC. Author: Agustí Centelles. Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica. Centelles Archive, photo. 3394.

nia) on the 11th of August 1936 in order to provide guidelines, but it was not easy to reach agreement among the other sectors and the CNT-FAI (Federació Anarquista Ibèrica, or Iberian Anarchist Federation), which seemed to have a hegemony at that time with weapons in hand. The Generalitat's Regional Minister for the Economy, Josep Tarradellas, presided over the Council and led the negotiations. On the 24th of October 1936, the decree on collectivisations and worker control over industry in Catalonia was published, a compromise given that it strove to save small enterprises from collectivisation and left agriculture and finances outside the scope of the text. The CNT-FAI had entered the government of the Generalitat on the 27th of September, along with the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, or PSUC, which followed the communist line but was formally independent from the Partido Comunista de España, or Communist Party of Spain) and the Partit Obrer

d'Unificació Marxista (Marxist Workers' Unification Party, or POUM). The revolutionary committees in the towns had been dissolved into the new town halls, which were supposed to have a composition equivalent to what they had had during the first government of Josep Tarradellas, who was now the chief minister and head of government and had presided over the Economic Council from its start. This first step towards overcoming the atomisation of power came prior to regulation of the economic and social changes, even though it was very difficult to coherently implement the decree from the 24th of October.

We should distinguish between the different territories because the role of the political regional authorities was extremely important as a legislating and organising framework. In the case of Catalonia, the existence of an autonomous government, the Generalitat de Catalunya, whose de facto competences were expanded by the war until May 1937, is different to the case of the Region of Valencia, which had neither a regional government nor a statute of autonomy. Prior to July 1936, the Front Popular (Popular Front) organisations in the Region of Valencia had sought to promote a draft statute of autonomy which was, however, frustrated by the war. Power was also atomised in the Region of Valencia. In the province of Valencia, the Comitè Executiu Popular (People's Executive Committee), made up of the parties in the Popular Front plus the CNT and the UGT, which were allies, acted with the autonomous government yet without encompassing the entire region.<sup>4</sup> The collectivisation process went further than the leftist republicans and communists were willing to take on. The arrival of the government of the Republic to Valencia, presided over by the socialist Largo Caballero with four anarcho-syndicalist ministers, led to the disappearance of the People's Executive Committee in January 1937. However, before that, in early December it had approved the bases regulating industrial collectivisations which had been submitted by the Economic Council of Valencia, which was dominated by the CNT and UGT. They followed patterns that were quite similar to those in the Catalan decree from late October 1936, but they were formally more radical given that they stipulated the collectivisation of companies with more than 50 workers. However, the Economic Council of Valencia was enmeshed in a crisis by February 1937 and disappeared in June of the same year.

A collectivisation took place in the eastern part of Aragon, which was occupied by the columns from Catalonia, which the Consejo de Aragón (Council of Aragon), dominated by anarchists and lasting until August 1937, strove to coordinate.

Secondly, we must distinguish between industry and agriculture. While industrial collectivisation was more important than agrarian collectivisation in Catalonia, where individual, family-owned farms continued to predominate, the same cannot be said of the Region of Valencia, where agrarian collectivisation was more important than its industrial counterpart.

Thirdly, we must distinguish between periods, given that the phenomenon of collectivisation embarked upon in the summer of 1936 began to be questioned and to retreat from the summer of 1937 until the end of the war, giving way instead to nationalisation, a synonym for statalisation.

Finally, we should bear in mind the different correlations of forces in the unions. In Catalonia, the CNT clearly predominated. It was led by the most unyielding anarchist sectors, even though most of the adversary syndicalist minority of the FAI, which had split off between 1932 and 1933, rejoined the CNT in August 1936. However, there were a few notorious exceptions, such as the union federation of Sabadell, which went to the UGT. In Catalonia, the UGT, which had been paltry until then, underwent a period of growth that by late 1936 had brought it closer to the CNT in terms of the number of members. In Catalonia, the UGT, under the direction of the PSUC, represented a moderate counterweight to the libertarians.<sup>5</sup> However, in the Region of Valencia, there had always been a balance of forces between the CNT and the UGT. Additionally, within the CNT more moderate syndicalists dominated over diehard anarchists. At the same time, leftist leanings predominated within the UGT in the Region of Valencia, while the socialist union in the countryside had grown more than the CNT. The affinity between both unions was greater in Valencia than in Catalonia, which allowed them to work together more closely in the former than in the latter.

### THE COLLECTIVISATION PROCESS IN CATALAN INDUSTRY UNTIL AUTUMN 1937

We must first distinguish between two means of collectivisation: first, companies collectivised by their workers, and secondly clusters or concentrations of production or service companies led by the unions in the sector, which were generally local but also on a regional scale in some cases. Both kinds were regulated by the decree on collectivisations issued by the government of the Generalitat de Catalunya on the 24th of October 1936, which the anarcho-syndicalists, socialists, communists and unified socialists of the PSUC and dissenting communists of the POUM had joined in late September, in addition to the *Unió de Rabassaires i altres Cultivadors del Camp de Catalunya* (Union of Smallholders and other Farmers of Catalonia, URC). The latter had been present in the Catalan government since late July of that year through their top leader, Josep Calvet, who served as the Regional Minister of Agriculture throughout the entire war.<sup>6</sup>

In theory, we should bear in mind the general economic and political framework of the Generalitat. The economic difficulties stemming from the Civil War often conditioned the success or failure of the revolutionary change. Furthermore, the Catalan economy was faced with the need to transform part of its manufacturing in-

dustry for the war without there previously having been any arms industry in the region, and this primarily affected metallurgy and chemistry. At the same time, it was suffering from the loss of the peninsular markets which were in the hands of the enemies of the Republic, and it was difficult to penetrate alternative markets given the international trade restrictions imposed by governments because of the Great Depression triggered in 1929. It was also quite difficult to import the raw materials and fuels needed – and this primarily affected the consumer goods industries such as textiles – given the government of the Republic's understandable priority to earmark any currency available to purchase arms and basic foodstuffs abroad. Catalonia depended on the acquisition of products from the rest of Spain for basic subsistence, and it was facing an increasingly steep deficit which was only worsened by the entry of a wave of refugees, who came to account for one-third of the population before the war. This influx was later compounded by the arrival of civil servants from the central power who moved to Barcelona with the government of the Republic in October 1937. The situation was even further exacerbated with Catalonia's isolation by land from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula after April 1938. The deprivation became severe and rationing was not enough.

The fact that a considerable part of Catalan industry was devoted to war manufacturing was one of the factors, albeit not the only one, in the inflation that soon devoured the salary increases decreed at the beginning of the conflict, when the Generalitat lowered the workweek to 40 hours and ordered a 15% rise in salaries under 500 pesetas per month. While the cost of living quadrupled over the course of the conflict, salaries only doubled. Industrial production dropped from an index of 100 in early 1936 to an index of 70 by February 1937 and 55 by April 1938. The sectors that were not linked to war manufacturing suffered the consequences of preferential treatment towards the war industry. The imbalances between the productive capacity and the allocation of resources contributed to the spiral of inflation and the steadiness of unemployment rates, which were not neutralised enough by the different drafts called up, even though they did not truly begin until the summer of 1937.<sup>7</sup>

The *Comissió d'Indústries de Guerra* (War Industries Commission, CIG) of the Generalitat de Catalunya promoted the conversion of an industry like Catalonia's into the wartime production, which it did not have prior to the conflict.<sup>8</sup> Around 500 workshops and factories with a total of between 50,000 and 80,000 workers were managed by the CIG, usually without having to be seized.

Collectivisation demonstrated the management capacity and sense of responsibility of some workers, but it also had flaws at first, as explained in an almost official leaflet issued in February 1937 by the secretary of the commission whose job it was to implement the decree from the 24th of October 1936, Albert Pérez Baró, who was a well-informed and somewhat equanimous witness. He stated



that industry had been taken over by a lack of discipline under the belief that everything had already been won. Seeking to enlarge their membership, the unions often let undisciplined members slide, which harmed society as a whole and was at odds with the company councils which protected the interests of the factory they represented. While the Generalitat created an office to pay the wages of companies that were indebted and lacking many guarantees for months, other companies which were perfectly competitive found no official support to purchase the raw materials they needed.<sup>9</sup>

To avoid chaos and to redress the situation, on the 11th of August 1936, the Generalitat created the Economic Council of Catalonia, where the different anti-fascist forces negotiated what would become the Decree on Collectivisations and Worker Control from the 24th of October 1936. This was a compromise with all the advantages and disadvantages of such a transaction, since it strove to guarantee small business ownership while at the same time legitimise and control collectivisation and clusters.<sup>10</sup> Companies with more than 100 workers and those abandoned by their owners and managers were obligatorily collectivised, and their management was placed in the hands of company councils periodically elected by a workers' assembly. Companies with fewer than 100 but more than 50 workers could be collectivised if two-thirds of their salaried workers so wished. Companies with fewer than 50 workers continued to be

governed by their owners, but they were supervised by an overseeing workers' council.

The company councils elected their representatives to the general industry councils, fourteen of which were formed, though the majority not until the autumn of 1937. They were only made up of the representatives of the CNT and the UGT, along with the experts appointed by the Economic Council, but they did not have representatives of the workers in the collectivised companies because of a census issue. The general industry councils, along with the two major unions and the experts appointed by the Generalitat, were represented on the Economic Council, the top steering and planning body. Neither the unionisation of industry – even though the clusters were unions – which is what the anarcho-sindicalists wanted, nor state nationalisation, as the Marxists wanted, existed, but instead grassroots worker management, albeit with supreme direct control. The profits from the collectivised enterprises were not to be privately appropriated; rather, half of the earnings was supposed to be placed in a large official credit fund run by the Generalitat, which granted loans according to the collective interests. It thus became an instrument of discipline because companies that did not follow the general price and salary guidelines and other provisions were excluded.

It should be borne in mind that banking was supervised and controlled but not collectivised. However, the



FIGURE 2. Image of one of the restaurants that was collectivised, located on the corner of the Rambla with Carrer Nou de Barcelona, known as “El Trincall”.

official savings and loan was not created until late 1937. The shortcomings in the system were therefore due not solely to the workers and unions but also to the Generalitat itself. Without that financial body there could be neither order nor harmony in the new collectivised economy. To explain this delay we should bear in mind minister Tarradellas' scant interest in creating this savings and loan, along with the anarcho-syndicalists' reluctance to accept the principle of indemnifications for expropriations which the project advocated. The anarcho-syndicalists' departure from the government of the Generalitat in June 1937 paved the way as the Economic Council lost importance within the government of the Generalitat to the minister of the sector, Joan Comorera, the secretary general of the PSUC, instead of a member of the CNT as until then.

The decree on collectivisations sought to maintain small industrial and commercial enterprises, as well as small farms, and this reflected the determination to preserve the anti-fascist front, which was inter-classist, as stressed by the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia, ERC) and the PSUC. The goal was to avoid social disintegration within Catalonia. Thus, limits were placed on socialisation as it was viewed by the anarchists. It was wise not to break the already delicate balance between small business owners, independent producers and salaried workers.

In reality, industrial collectivisation had gone further than what the decree dated the 24th of October 1936 had established *a posteriori*. Thus, in the cotton textile industry, which was extremely important in Catalonia at the time, 54% of the weaving companies had at most 50 looms, and this meant that the majority of them did not have more than 50 workers and would have thus been excluded from the collectivisation. Nonetheless, a propaganda book from 1937 entitled *Colectivizaciones. La obra constructiva de la revolució* said that only 10% of all business owners in the textile industries remained at the helm of their companies.<sup>11</sup> What is more, there were also clusters or concentrations – not always voluntary – of small business owners under the leadership of their union sector. These groups were legally governed by the same rules as established in the decree dated the 24th of October 1936 for the collectivisation of individual companies.

The Minister of the Economy of the Generalitat who signed the decree on collectivisation, Joan P. Fàbregas, wanted to leave testimony of his stewardship in his book published in 1937 entitled *Vuitanta dies al Govern de la Generalitat. El que vaig fer i el que no em deixaren fer*. He represented the CNT in the Catalan government between the 27th of September 1936 and the 18th of December of the same year. He declared that he had wanted to implement social mobilisation in the rear-guard yet never managed to do so. He viewed it as necessary, in his words, to “restore social discipline and instate a single direction on the economic front”. To win the war, he even sought to temporarily expand the workday. Fàbregas attributed his

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FIGURE 3. Poster which says “Collectivised mattress industry workers” from the Sindicato Único de la Industria Fabril, Textil, Vestir y Anexos (Single Union of the Fabric, Textile and Clothing and Related Industries) of Barcelona, C.N.T.-A.I.T. (1937). 100 x 70 cm. Author: unknown.

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fall and the political crisis of December 1936 to the bourgeois counter-revolution, even though the communists were oblivious to this as they triggered it by excluding Andreu Nin and the POUM from the Catalan government. Nor did Fàbregas manage to carry out an economic census of Catalonia. Fàbregas clung to the thesis that the governing crisis in December 1936 with the exclusion of the POUM at the demand of the PSUC reflected a “family feud” that did not affect the anarcho-syndicalists, a thesis that the events of May 1937 would later contradict.

We could say that until May 1937, the reality of the collectivisation of Catalan industry had gone further than what the compromise in the decree dated the 24th of October 1936 had stipulated. Meanwhile, after May 1937 the process was gradually redirected to become increasingly restrictive and interventionist by the government of the Generalitat, with Joan Comorera at the helm of the Department of the Economy, once the CNT-FAI was outside the governments of the Republic and the Generalitat. After August 1937, Manuel Serra i Moret, a Catalanist social-democrat and member of the PUSC, presided over Catalonia's Economic Council, but he later left the PSUC



after the war. Serra i Moret discussed this experience in his book published in Buenos Aires in 1942, *La reconstrucción económica de España*.

On the other hand, with the decree from the 24th of October 1936, the Generalitat had stretched beyond the boundaries of the Catalan statute of 1932. After the events of May 1937, the Generalitat found itself increasingly inhibited by the government of the Republic, especially after it moved from Valencia to Barcelona in October 1937. At the same time, the Comissió d'Indústries de Guerra (War Industries Commission), created by the Generalitat on the 8th of August 1936, was gradually losing power as well. It was a difficult task to convert an industry that was wholly oriented at civilian manufacturing into arms production, which had never before existed in Catalonia. Without resorting to either nationalisation or expropriation, the War Industries Commission acted as an inspecting body through its commissions in the metallurgy and chemical sectors. By October 1936, 230 production units with 60,000 workers plus 30,000 assistants were working under its charge. However, after the summer of 1937, as the Under-Secretariat of Armaments of the government of the Republic was nationalising these companies, worker management, which was associated with collectivisation, stopped in them and was replaced by a vertical power structure until the militarisation of the war industries decreed in August 1938 was achieved.

The justification of the militarisation of the war industry in Catalonia was to overcome its poor performance. Thus, the delegate of the Communist International in Spain, Togliatti, reported to Moscow that arms production in Catalonia began to be satisfactory during the second half of 1938 thanks to the intervention of Negrín's government. However, a less ideological testimony, yet one as informed as that of Colonel Vicenç Guarnier, reads: "The spirit of absorption of the central government, which moved to Barcelona in October 1937, put an end to that entire organisation without improving it by introducing a huge communistic bureaucracy in the guise of totally ineffectual management teams".<sup>12</sup>

In any event, in 1938 the war was lost for the Republican cause, and in the war industry it was futile to assign blame to any party in a counter-factual historical vein. Those who claimed that if a more authoritarian system had been in place earlier the Republic could have won the war not only ignored a series of other major factors that explained the outcome but also underestimated the effort made by the workers and technicians of Catalonia. In any event, when they returned in 1939, the majority of owners did not find their companies any worse off than they had been before the war, and some of them even got their companies back in an improved state.

By October of 1937, Catalan textile production only accounted for 25% of the monthly average in the first half of 1936, and metallurgy was hardly faring better given that it only accounted for a little over 62% of the production from the same period in the initial reference. Despite that,

metallurgy rallied until March 1938 and seems to have shown positive results until September 1938. Despite the dearth of general statistics, the production figures for MACOSA, one of the largest and most representative nationalised companies, show that in September 1938 its production was equivalent to 80% of the monthly average in the first half of 1936. This figure seems to indicate a positive result from the government of the Republic's nationalising intervention in the war industry compared to the previous system in Catalonia. However, production in this same company dropped to a level equivalent to 40% after October 1938 compared to before the war.<sup>13</sup>

## THE CLUSTERS

But let us go back to the beginning. There were business owners who along with their workers were trying to avoid collectivisation by converting their companies into cooperatives in order to benefit from the advantages and fiscal perks of the 1934 Catalan law. However, the Generalitat ended up assimilating these cooperatives created after July 1936 into the collectives for all monitoring and taxation purposes.



FIGURE 4. Poster of the Sindicato Único de Barberos (Single Barbers' Union) (1937). 63 x 43 cm. Author: Ricard Obiols.

With regard to the clusters promoted by the unions in the CNT, most of them were local, including all or most small business owners in an entire sector, such as the barbers, bakers, carpenters and construction workers in Barcelona. However, there were some regional ones as well, such as the gas and electricity utilities.<sup>14</sup> The clusters strove to implement social security, which did not yet exist generally, on a sectorial basis. The cluster of the textile and clothing manufacturing industry of Badalona, spearheaded by the CNT, encompassed 34 of the 37 local factories in this sector with a total of 8,000 workers. It managed to be legalised, and thanks to the Minister of Defence, it secured imported raw materials and remained in operation until the end of the war.

In February of 1937, the Economic Council of Catalonia received numerous complaints from small business owners who were being coerced into joining the clusters. They were from a variety of sectors, such as the owners of creameries in Barcelona who often supplied milk to the different neighbourhoods in the city.<sup>15</sup>

According to union documentation, the clusters simultaneously achieved rationalisation based on economies of scale to lower the production and service units, absorb unemployment, increase productivity and salaries, eliminate intermediaries and decrease consumer prices. It is difficult to believe that all of these objectives, some of which are formally incompatible with each other, could be achieved at the same time, even in an autarchic economy like that one. The defenders of the clusters have limited themselves to attributing all the difficulties not to internal flaws but to the boycotts by the enemies of the clusters: the ERC and the PSUC. While the Department of Economy of the Generalitat was in the hands of the CNT, 98 clusters were legalised, but this came to an end after October 1937. The Generalitat was willing to listen to the complaints of the small producers who wanted to leave the clusters or resisted entering them in the first place. There were also clusters governed by anarchists who did not want to accept the controls and burdens entailed by the legalisation. In his *Memòries*, Josep Benet explains the case of a barber, a neighbour of his, who had always lived in the flat above his barber shop, but after his trade was made into a cluster he had to work at the other end of the city while another barber occupied his modest business. This barber, who held democratic and republican ideas, awaited the victory of General Franco to back get his barber shop near his home. Jordi Solé Tura, who was the leader of the PSUC before and after the 1977 transition, recounted in his memoirs that his mother, the owner of a bakery in Mollet del Vallès, had her small business collectivised and was reduced to being a mere clerk, while the only worker she had employed started to run the bakery, following the union's decision. In 1939, the situation returned to what it had been before the war.

In the case of Riegos y Fuerzas del Ebro, since "la Canadenca", the largest electricity company in Catalonia,

had foreign capital, its right to indemnification in an undetermined future had to be recognised. The managing technicians had to leave Catalonia upon orders from the management of the multinational SOFINA. This issue of companies with foreign capital was one of the major hurdles in the collectivisation process, with reprisals levelled by the managers of companies that were headquartered in countries that were not under fascist regimes and had not broken ties with the Republic.

After the events of May 1937, and with the CNT-FAI outside the governments of the Republic and the Generalitat, the nationalising trends continued to the detriment of worker management. The inspectors from the Generalitat in collectivised companies, which used to be proposed by the works council and had to be appointed with their agreement, could now be rejected by the Generalitat, which could appoint others instead. A decree dated the 20th of November 1937 allowed the Generalitat to nationalise collectivised companies. By the end of the first quarter of 1938, 15 large companies had been nationalised in this way.

One point that cannot be forgotten in the Economy Council's decisions was the municipalisation of housing. After the 19th of July 1936, rents ceased being paid, advertisements offering flats for rent disappeared, the construction crisis already underway was seriously magnified with a rise in unemployment, and confiscations of commercial spaces and flats by political organisations of the Popular Front and unions increased the uncertainty of the future of urban homeownership. The Generalitat tried to salvage the principle of property ownership through its decree dated the 12th of August 1936 which lowered rentals under 201 pesetas by 50% and those between 201 and 301 pesetas by 25%. However, this devaluation was futile.

The first time that the theory of the municipalisation of housing appeared was in the CNT-FAI/UGT-PSUC agreement from late 1936. The Economy Council did not approve the decree on the municipalisation of housing until the 11th of June 1937, even though different municipalities had already implemented it. The non-factious owners received titles for the cadastral value of their assets to be paid back in 25 years at 4% annual interest. The decree stipulated the exception of houses inhabited by their owners and those regarded as low-income, along with certain indemnifications for the previous owners. A housing bank was created in each municipality to implement the transfer and charge the rent. This led to the de facto syndicalisation of urban property, given that two-thirds of the steering councils of these housing banks were made up of representatives of the two unions: CNT and UGT. No housing bank was ever actually established in Barcelona.

Regarding public urban transport and the water, gas and electricity utilities, the controversy continued between the PSUC's thesis that they should be municipalised and the CNT-FAI's defence of imposed collectivisa-





FIGURE 5. Poster advertising the collectivisation of Barcelona's public transport companies during the Civil War. 100 x 70 cm. Author: Ricard Obiols. 1936.

tions and clusters. The first option was more promising after Joan Comorera, the secretary general of the PSUC, reached the helm of the Department of the Economy of the Generalitat in June 1937. However, the anarcho-sindicalists retained the positions they had achieved.

### A MONOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Monographs on companies are few and far between, though extremely valuable. We have one on the Barcelona-based metallurgy company Riviere, which specialised in triple-twisted grating. This study combines documentation from the company and union with interviews with workers, the latter quite difficult to find.<sup>16</sup> Riviere had around 1,000 workers in its three factories located in Poble Nou, Badalona and Can Tunis. Can Tunis is where the work was the most taxing and the workers' positions the most radical, and it had the highest proportion of immigrants from the rest of Spain. What is more, the office was in Barcelona, where the workers were affiliated with the UGT, while the manual labourers were members of the CNT. The vast majority of Riviere workers passively followed the collectivisation and did not regard the company as more 'theirs' than prior to it. The company worked for the War Industries Commission until No-

vember 1937, when it was requisitioned with others by the Under-Secretary of Armament of the government of the Republic as Factory L.

The initial pact among different inclinations at Riviere can be explained by the need to continue production and to retain mid-level, technical and administrative staff who in practice served as a counterbalance to the more radical workers. The owners' assets were requisitioned and assigned to the company, beginning with six houses with yards, in one of which the one of the owner's sons was found; he was arrested but later released. The owners' belongings were given to the workers after drawing lots, and the product was earmarked as a war donation. During the first half of 1937, the clashes between militant CNT workers and the company board became more heated, leading to interventions by the CNT union. In the summer of 1937, union intervention led to a total predominance of manual labourers and CNT members over office workers and UGT members, with a complete shift in the company board. However, this change was not accepted by the Generalitat, and in September 1937 it imposed a rectification to achieve a greater balance between unions and inclinations. Three months later, worker management disappeared at Riviere when it was requisitioned by the Under-Secretary of Armament, nine months before the militarisation of the war industry factories decreed in August 1938. Those changes did not prompt resistance because the collectivist spirit had lost the momentum it had had earlier and the military situation in the Republic was increasingly precarious. In the case of Riviere, the compensation seems to have been an improvement in the food rations received by workers.

During the war, the machinery, facilities, manufacturing process and physical working conditions at Riviere improved. There was a sense of responsibility, and the workers' capacity was proven despite the union rivalries. The retaliation when the owners returned in 1939 led to the dismissal of the most prominent CNT members, but their more moderate counterparts remained in the factory unless they had been members of the company council. The proportion of dismissals was 18%, with a maximum of 22.5% at the Can Tunis factory and a minimum of 11% in the Barcelona office. The owners found themselves overseeing materials that they had not purchased and improved facilities.

The other set of monographs can be found in a book on collectivisations in the Baix Llobregat.<sup>17</sup> At that time, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, a town adjacent to Barcelona, had 40,000 inhabitants. Half of its working-class population worked in the textile industry, and L'Hospitalet was the home to large companies like Tecla Sala and Trinxet. Around 8.6% of the workforce in the town was employed in the metallurgy sector in companies like Altos Hornos de Cataluña, and only 10% was farmers. L'Hospitalet had a high percentage of recent immigrants from Murcia and Andalusia, and it was a fiefdom of the CNT, which in this town was dominated by the most intransigent anarchism.



In the case of companies in the Baix Llobregat, it has been proven that the employers of the more than 1,000 workers immediately disappeared, and even some technicians left, but there does not seem to have been any major problem owing to a lack of technicians. In the companies studied with 125 to 160 workers, the owners did not flee, and with the exception of two of the cases they participated in running the companies. Even though in most cases they were not allowed to participate in the works council, they did have regular interactions with the members of the respective committee. On the other hand, the representatives of the administrative staff on the works council tended to play the role of representatives of the former owners.

The most serious problems were due to the lack of raw materials, market contraction and the lack of electricity after the spring of 1938. Most of the companies studied in the Baix Llobregat were in the textile industry – such as the Güell industrial colonies in Santa Coloma de Cervelló and the Sedó colony in Esparraguera<sup>18</sup> – and showed a high proportion of female workers. However, female representation on the works councils elected by the workers' assembly was insignificant. The formation of factory workers' committees, which were not stipulated in the decree on collectivisations, reflected two factors: the official marginalisation of the unions in the management of collectivised companies (even though the works councils had union members on them) and the marginalisation of women in the textile sector. There was a committee of this kind in four of the seven companies studied in the Baix Llobregat. In no way was there always a climate of tension and clashes between the elected management committee and the factory workers' committees, and there were even cases of collaboration in the distribution of jobs, as the jobs of the works council were absorbed by everyday economic management. However, the formation of factory committees indicates that there was a dearth of harmony between the less qualified workers and the new worker management of the company, a shortcoming which can clearly be seen in the average attendance figures at the workers' assemblies: never more than one-third of the staff except in extraordinary cases.

The studies that exist on the industry in the Baix Llobregat indicate the incidence of the actions by the unionists who had split off from the CNT in 1933 over discrepancies with its insurrectionist line and the direct confrontation with management and political authorities sponsored by the FAI. For example, until 1936 the Sedó colony was aligned with the local union federations in Sabadell and Manresa which had split off from the CNT. When the workers at the Sedó colony returned to the CNT in 1936, some of them shifted allegiance to the UGT, which thus came to this company quite late, in the middle of the war. They had the example of the federation of unions of Sabadell, which shifted en masse to the UGT in the summer of 1936, four years after having leaving the CNT.

In the early days of the Civil War, there was a trend

among the moderate unionists – most of whom had re-joined the CNT – to work on company boards, that is, in economic management, while the more unyielding anarchists tended to work in the different local committees, militias, control patrols and the Nova Escola Unificada (New Unified School).

In contrast to the salary equity in the agricultural collectivisations, in the industrial ones in the Baix Llobregat studied to date the pre-existing salary hierarchy was respected, even though this caused controversies within companies. The economic continuity was considerable despite the difficulties external to collectivisation. In the case of the Sedó colony, in a 1939 survey the owners admitted that they had not found the company in poor condition but instead the warehoused products enabled the company to cope with the post-war years with some sense of assurance.

Oral history has revealed that to a considerable number of workers, especially female ones, collectivisation was not perceived as bringing a substantial change in their living conditions. Whereas before they worked for one boss, during the war they had seven bosses – the works council – and they even recalled working more than before the war. Some of the more reluctant ones believed that the militants who had been promoted to management were avoiding manual labour and had attained a more comfortable position.

## THE CATALAN COUNTRYSIDE AND THE CIVIL WAR

Just like the Region of Valencia, Catalonia had been left outside the scope of application of the September 1932 Republican law on agrarian reform because its lands were not organised into large estates. In Catalonia the agricultural upheaval was led by the Unió de Rabassaires (Smallholders' Union), which included sharecroppers and tenant farmers, beginning with grape-growers. The Smallholders' Union was under the influence of the ERC, the party that had governed the Generalitat since 1931. The URC was reformist, which is why it was poorly viewed by the anarchists, who had virtually no base in the Catalan countryside and mainly included day labourers. The UGT had an even smaller base.

Agrarian cooperativism had become quite widespread in Catalonia. In 1933, there were 540 agricultural cooperatives with a total of 79,000 members.<sup>19</sup> Cooperativism was developed the most in the counties with a larger proportion of smallholders and intensive rainfed crops (grapevines, olives, almonds), such as the counties of Tarragona. Joint purchases of farm products and the joint manufacture and sale of harvests were beneficial to the farmers. At that time, one-fourth of the active population of Catalonia still worked in the primary sector, even though the secondary sector employed more than half the workers. In comparison, today the primary sector employs only 3% of the active population. In the 1930s, half

of the population of Catalonia lived in towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.

The war increased the strategic importance of agriculture in a country that commonly consumed foodstuffs from abroad but was being forced to become increasingly self-sufficient over the course of the conflict. Agriculture did not appear in the decree on collectivisations dated the 24th of October 1936. The PSUC's influence over the Smallholders' Union rose – for example, Josep Calvet joined this party – but the influence of the ERC did not disappear, so the URC kept its organic independence from the two major labour unions.

On the 30th of August 1936, the Generalitat decreed that farmers had to unionise under a new federation of cooperatives which would become the *Federació de Sindicats Agrícoles de Catalunya* (Federation of Agricultural Unions of Catalonia, FSAC). All farmers had to turn their harvests over to the FSAC at fixed prices, and it, in turn, would provide the necessary foodstuffs at low prices. However, the FSAC was not even able to provide farmers with enough farm products such as rice, oil or potatoes. Thus, coupled with the survival of free trade, they tended to skim off part of the harvests turned over to the FSAC, giving rise to the advent of a black market outside fixed-price rationing.<sup>20</sup> The winter of 1937 was

characterised by demonstrations in the cities protesting the food shortages, and the situation became considerably worse in 1938.

Sharecroppers and tenant farmers benefited from the elimination of rent paid to owners sanctioned by the Generalitat on the 1st of January 1937. The sense that the peasants were suffering less than the workers in the cities from the food shortage in an economy of scarcity increased the collectivists' efforts to impose collectivisation on small and medium-sized independent farmers. However, on the 2nd of September 1936, the leaders of the CNT had agreed that smallholders had to be respected and collectivisation had to be voluntary, albeit not including large estates that could only be farmed by families without day labourers, and banning salaried workers and tenant farming.

We should distinguish between two kinds of agricultural collectives: those which held all the land and farmers within a township, and those that combined collective farming in expropriated estates with private production. In the Baix Llobregat – and in all of Catalonia – the cases of L'Hospitalet and El Prat de Llobregat were exceptions as towns where all the lands were collectivised. The influence of the anarcho-syndicalists and the importance of day labourers in the Llobregat River delta can explain this particular situation. However, in the rest of the county all the other cases studied show a mixed solution, and this reflected the lack of enthusiasm among the farmers in the Baix Llobregat – under the influence of the Smallholders' Union – for the wholesale collectivism promoted by the CNT-FAI.<sup>21</sup>

The military drafts did not seem to have many effects on the agricultural collectives in the Baix Llobregat, apparently due to the fact that they were filled by industrial unemployment or the refugees from the rest of Spain. The salary equity of the collectives in L'Hospitalet and El Prat did not include equal salaries for men and women, but they did have own social security systems. These collectives responsibly did not contribute to the rising food prices, in contrast to the individual farmers who tended to benefit from the black market.

In the counties in the province of Girona, confiscation was limited to the large landowners. The ERC and PSUC chose to divvy up these lands, while the CNT wanted them to be collectively farmed. The peasants who chose to join a collective were in the minority. Almost all the 51 collectivisations documented were located in the plains of the Empordà, Gironés and La Selva, and they totalled around 2,500 people. While the collective in Sant Pere Pescador is an example of voluntary collectivisation, the one in Pau was forced. However, the high degree of voluntary collectivisation of the lands of Girona seems confirmed by the fact that after May 1937, only a handful of members left the collectives.<sup>22</sup> Coordination was virtually non-existent: not even a network of cooperation and distribution among the collectives in the region was achieved.

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FIGURE 6. Poster which says "Comrade: Work and fight for the revolution" (1936). 105 x 75 cm. Author: Àngel L. L. CRAI Biblioteca Pavelló de la República (Universitat de Barcelona).

Regarding the province of Lleida, we know that there was a collective in at least 20 of the 25 municipalities in the county of Les Garrigues, totalling around 3,102 hectares. The POUM had collectivised a large modern estate in Raimat. Exchanges of products among collectives tended to become the norm. However, after September 1937, these collectives were gradually abandoned.

It is not easy to grasp the scope of collectivisation in the Catalan countryside, but it is clear that individual farms continued to prevail. Numbers such as 297 agricultural collectives have been bandied about, and some people accept the CNT's figure of 400.<sup>23</sup> This seems excessive if we bear in mind that in response to a survey of the Generalitat, 66 municipalities declared that they had collectives, while 100 responded that they did not.

The most conflictive region was the southern part of the province of Tarragona. In the autumn of 1936, different towns which could be regarded as part of the Popular Front witnessed clashes. The skirmishes between individualists and collectivists took place in different sites around Catalonia, but nowhere did they reach a collective tragedy the proportions of the one in Fatarella, a village in Terra Alta. The anarchists strove to impose collectivisation in this village, but they were expelled by the farmers, whereupon the town came under siege with the intervention of control patrols that had travelled there from L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. When the farmers who had surrendered on the hill overlooking the town were murdered, the resistance refused to negotiate. From Barcelona, the Generalitat sent a contingent of the Security and Attack Corps there on the 26th of January 1937. Once the town had been conquered, 26 residents were murdered, most of whom belonged to the parties of the Popular Front. The only way to save the others was to arrest 47 of them and transport them to Barcelona. They were not released from prison until after the events of May 1937. Neither the Generalitat delegates nor the public forces were able to fend off the carnage in Fatarella, which undermined their authority.<sup>24</sup> While the anarcho-syndicalist press painted the events as a fascist uprising, the ERC, PSUC and URC condemned the bloody clash and defended the farmers who had opposed coerced collectivisation. Those who were murdered in Fatarella never appeared in the story of "*caídos por Dios y por España*" (those who fell for God and for Spain) written by the victors in 1939, a clear signal that they were considered to be on the losing side of the war. In late February, a clash similar to the one in Fatarella occurred in Centelles (Osona) which resulted in six deaths, but with adverse consequences for those who wanted to impose collectivisation.

In late February 1937, the CNT accepted an agreement that allowed the farmers who had previously been landowners to leave the collectives in El Priorat, Ribera d'Ebre and Terra Alta if they wanted. After the events in Fatarella, the members of the UGT and the PSUC left the control patrols. The decision to disarm the rear-guard and dissolve the control patrols was related to their desire to

avoid a repetition of events like the ones in Fatarella, but this was impossible until after the events of May 1937, when the CNT-FAI no longer held the government of the Generalitat and had lost the competence to ensure the public order, a power that had been seized by the government of the Republic.

The PSUC did not question communal farming in general, even though it was not the main driving force behind it. It was opposed to the independence of the collectives given the anarcho-syndicalists' reluctance to accept the FSAC's control of sales and purchases. The shortage of financial resources parked the collectives at a dead-end even after they accepted control by the FSAC, which had a hard time combatting the black market given that it purchased the harvests at the low official price to export them, while the real domestic prices escaped the fixed rationing prices given the widespread penury. The struggle against so-called speculators became the top priority.

## THE REGION OF VALENCIA AND COLLECTIVISATION

Agrarian collectivisations in Valencia were a smaller phenomenon than what was claimed at the time.<sup>25</sup> The amount of land expropriated in the Region of Valencia during the Spanish Civil War was 13.1% of the net area. This proportion contrasts with 65% of the land in the province of Jaén, 59.6% in the province of Ciudad Real and 33.5% in the province of Albacete. What is more, of the percentage of land expropriated in the Region of Valencia, only 31.5% was actually collectivised, that is, 4% of the net area based on the confiscated lands. There were 356 agricultural collectives, 264 of which belonged to the CNT and 69 to the UGT's *Federació de Treballadors de la Terra* (Federation of Land Workers, FETT), while 20 were managed jointly by the CNT and UGT.

The decree issued by the Minister of Agriculture, the communist Vicente Uribe, on the 7th of October 1936 stipulated that only the estates of owners who had been involved in the uprising against the Republic were to be expropriated. This decree, which was framed as a revolutionary act, was viewed as a step backward by the collectivists.

The process of forming the 356 collectives was neither spontaneous nor as quick as has been claimed. The unions and local revolutionary committees started it in the summer of 1936, but it lasted until early 1938. It was a heterogeneous phenomenon, so each unit was a case unto itself. The cases in which libertarian communism was proclaimed and the entire township was collectivised were few and short-lived. According to the report by Pedro García, Secretary General of the FETT in Valencia, in early 1938 the land area owned by each collective did not even account for one-twentieth of the land seized by the field workers. The structure of small-scale land ownership in the Region of Valencia largely explains this out-



come, while all the forces of the Popular Front also shared power. We should also bear in mind the October 1936 creation of the *Federación Provincial Campesina* (Provincial Federation of Farmers) backed by the PCE and the Republican parties. This new farmers' union encompassed tenant farmers and small landowners who used to be members of the Catholic unions, cooperatives which had served as the electoral base of the now-proscribed *Dreta Regional Valenciana* (Valencian Regional Right).

The Provincial Federation of Farmers put up resistance to collectivisation. The violence that prevailed in the establishment of some of the agrarian collectives explains the subsequent reaction. The individualists had the decree from the 7th of October 1936 in favour of small farms. The tensions between the collectivists and individualists became more frequent in the winter of 1937. The most serious clashes between collectivists and individualists took place in Cullera on the 5th of February 1937, but they were not the only ones. The anarcho-syndicalists' loss of influence stemming from their ministers' departure from the government of the Republic had weakened the collectivists in the Region of Valencia.

However, in view of the threat to the harvests, on the 8th of June 1937 the Minister of Agriculture, Vicente Uribe, recognised the collectives, offered them the aid they needed and halted their attrition. However, this was merely an interlude since the pressures on the collectives resumed during the autumn of 1937 and did not let up until 1938, when the Republican defeat was a palpable threat.

In the summer of 1936, both the UGT and the CNT chose to collectivise the expropriated lands instead of divvying them up, but they also declared their respect for small landowners. This did not mean that they were obeyed or that they did not come upon serious difficulties because of the intense localism which prevailed in the social changes in the Region of Valencia. The new Provincial Federation of Farmers of the Levante created by the CNT did not develop standard bylaws and compatibility rules to unify and coordinate all of its collectives until June 1937. At that time, the anarcho-syndicalists were convinced of the evils being prompted by the lack of solidarity and interaction among the different units, plus many of the most highly trained men were already at the front, and the collectives had a 44% illiteracy rate. The wealthy collectives developed somewhat normally, while the poorer ones remained so throughout the entire war.

Despite the efforts of many collectives to improve and increase production despite the lack of fertilisers and labour, the fact is that wheat production in the Region of Valencia dropped by 290,013 *quintars* (hundredweight) in 1937 compared to the average in the previous five-year period; meanwhile, rice production dropped 837,695 *quintars* and orange production dropped 1,673,535 *quintars* according to the statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture. However, these figures were no different in lands depending on whether they were confiscated or not, or

between individually or collectively farmed lands, so that it is impossible to answer the question regarding the economic results of the agrarian collectivisation process.

The fact that 60% of the agricultural production in Valencia was meant for exports – especially oranges – turned this issue into one that extended beyond regional interests and affected the Republic's ability to secure the currency it needed to purchase the required armaments and raw materials from abroad. The organisation of orange exports during the acute crisis prior to the war included two projects: the union collectivisation upheld by the CNT and UGT and the freedom to export with government control. The CNT and UGT created the *Consejo Levantino Unificado de Exportación Agrícola* (Levante Unified Council on Agriculture Exports, CLUEA), which was charged with centralising orange exports with local committees once the exporting and packaging companies had been confiscated and collectivised. The CLUEA was in charge of inspecting for quality, proposing prices and keeping watch over foreign markets. The large German market had already been lost, and France was in danger of being lost as well. The CLUEA served as an intermediary between the government and the producers when making payments for oranges, given that the government prepaid the CLUEA 50% of the value of exported oranges and gave it the remaining 50% when the product had reached its destination and the currency was in the hands of the government.

The CLUEA wanted to take advantage of the occasion to avoid capital evasion and rationalise a sector which had numerous weaknesses. However, it never reached earlier export levels and was at odds with the export competence of the FPC cooperative and free exports, while Largo Caballero's government mistrusted an organisation in which it was not represented. The CLUEA's publications are extraordinarily frank, a far cry from the overwhelming propaganda of the period. For example, in one inspection it admitted the inefficacy and lack of discipline of 40% of the local committees which were supposed to supply the product, while also recognising their low technical level. It did not manage to make the orange season of 1937 successful because it would have needed more time to solve the problems, but neither the government of the Republic, especially after Juan Negrín's cabinet was formed, nor the FPC or PCE gave it the chance to since they created the *Central d'Exportació d'Agrís* (Agriculture Export Headquarters), thus putting an end to the CLUEA's power and the hegemony of the unions in such a key economic sector.

Industrial collectivisation unleashed fewer controversies in the press in the Region of Valencia than what agrarian collectivisation aroused. However, this does not mean that the number of collectivised companies and worker control was lower, given that they achieved a sweeping predominance in both the four provincial capitals and in towns like Sagunt, Alcoy, Elda, Villena Crevillent, Bocairent and Xixona, as well as in Vilajoiosa and

Benicarló. While we have proof that there was a clear climate of violence around the revolutionary changes in the world of farming, there did not seem to be as many conflicts in the industrial world. It was quite common for the owners to continue working as technicians in family-owned companies. The collectivised companies in Valencia, Elda and Villena were managed by joint UGT-CNT committees. The main difficulties facing industry in Valencia stemmed from raw materials, transports and market contraction.<sup>26</sup>

The textile, metallurgical and paper industries in Alcoy were totally collectivised and trained on the war, while private trade was replaced by a consumer cooperative. With around 40,000 inhabitants, Alcoy was an old industrial nucleus and a bastion of the CNT during the Civil War.<sup>27</sup> The blast furnaces in Sagunt were collectivised by the anarcho-syndicalists, and something similar happened with the Unión Naval de Levante in Valencia, as well as with the city's water, gas, electricity and transport services. Some sources mention 15 industrial collectives in Valencia in November 1937, but this seems like an overly modest figure.

As the anarcho-syndicalist Minister of Industry, Joan Peiró prepared a decree to seize but not nationalise large companies. The State remained as the advisor to the union management; however, the Minister of the Treasury, Juan Negrín, and the communists were opposed to this. Thus, the decree dated the 23rd of February 1937 stated the State's right to seizure, but with a workers' oversight committee in a regulation later handed down by Peiró in March. Negrín did not like this provision, as he called on more power for the government in exchange for financial support for the companies. After the summer of 1938, nationalisation, which nullified worker management, progressed more quickly in the Region of Valencia, just as it did in Catalonia.

In early 1938, the industry adapted for war production included 18 companies in 12 towns employing 7,271 workers. These local companies were joined by those that had been transferred by the government of the Republic from the centre of Spain to the Region of Valencia, such as the bullet manufacturing facility from Toledo and the aviation supply company from near Madrid, which were moved to Novelda and Elx. These transferred industries employed more than 4,500 workers in seven companies located in three towns. In early 1938, 40% of the war materiel factories in the Region of Valencia belonged to the Republican State, while 60% were led by workers committees or their former owners. The proportion held by the State kept rising, but 30% of the local war factories – not counting the ones that had just been created by the Republican government – were not nationalised. There were cases in which the old owners strove to recover control over their companies via their State nationalisation as opposed to the workers' committees, usually from the CNT, that managed them now. This was the case of two toy factories in Dènia which had been converted to producing

armaments. There were also owners who continued to oversee their factories, such as the *Cooperativa Metal·lúrgica d'Elda* (Metallurgical Cooperation of Elda), made up of the business owners, and they continued working for the government without being subjected to workers control or State nationalisation.

In early 1938, around 13,000 people worked in war manufacturing in the Region of Valencia, compared to 60,000 in Catalonia. Even though their output in terms of volume was lower than in Catalonia, their capacity for bullet production was higher and their grenade production was equivalent to half that of Catalonia.

Despite the maritime blockade and bombardments, the industries located in Valencia – especially the weapons industries – suffered less from the trade restrictions than agriculture, especially exports. They also had the materials and labour they needed, given that the workplaces were militarised, while there was no distinction in the case of farmers.

#### COLLECTIVISATIONS AND THE COUNCIL OF ARAGON

As the columns of militiamen from Catalonia commanded by the anarchists Buenaventura Durruti, Antonio Ortiz and Domingo Ascaso occupied eastern Aragon, the CNT was reconstructed in the region, individuals regarded as right-wing who had not fled Aragon in the hands in the enemies of the Republic were liquidated, and collectivisations were encouraged by the libertarians. However, the columns from Catalonia did not manage to conquer either Huesca or Teruel and were halted before reaching Zaragoza. A long front in the guise of a line of trenches and positions was stabilised and remained intact until the Battle of Belchite in August 1937, but this Republican offensive did not manage to break the front. The Republican conquest of Teruel in early 1938 lasted only briefly before it was conquered by the nationals in the month of February.

The anarcho-syndicalists were the ones who promoted collectivisation in Aragon. The majority of those armed apostles were from the cities – even though some had rural roots – and they came nurturing the dream of the purported natural egalitarianism of the countryside. What they proposed and imposed might have been attractive for landless day labourers but was not very suitable for the thousands of small landowners in a region where small taxpayers predominated.<sup>28</sup> Those who voluntarily offered to jointly cultivate everyone's lands together were joined by those who did so under coercion. Just as in other places, the ban on land leasing and salaried work pushed the peasants to join the collectives, although small landowners did not disappear.

Throughout the entire summer of 1936, there was confusion between collectivisation, "comprehensive socialism" and confiscations to maintain the columns of militiamen. As Durruti's column in the newspaper *Frente* said

on the 27th of August 1936: "It is a law of life that armies live off of the land they have conquered".

We should avoid projecting anachronisms. Women's liberation was not part of the revolutionary process. The militiawomen – an image that proliferated in the graphic propaganda from the day – were soon removed from the front and sent to work in the auxiliary services further back or in the rear-guard. Aragonese farmwomen were absent from the local revolutionary committees and from the management of the collectives, even though they kept working the fields. The male breadwinners were the only players in the change process. A minimum wage was set at ten pesetas for men and six for women.

Localism endangered a commercialised economy, and on the 16th of October the Consejo de Defensa de Aragón (Aragon Defence Council) was established in Bujaraloz, with Durruti's consent. It was presided over by Joaquín Ascaso Budría, a worker from Zaragoza, and the composition of this council was exclusively anarchist. Its mission was to coordinate and regulate collectivisation, to overcome the atomisation of power and to put an end to the excesses of the columns that occupied the territory. The Generalitat de Catalunya, which was in charge of the Aragon front, disapproved of it. The government of the Republic, presided over by the socialist Largo Caballero, also resisted official recognition for the Aragon Defence Council. However, with the entry of four anarcho-syndicalist ministers into Largo Caballero's cabinet, recognition of that regional autonomous power inevitably came on the 25th of December 1936. In exchange, representatives of the other forces of the Popular Front joined the Aragon Defence Council, but the anarchists' hegemony remained untouched. Even Ascaso was appointed delegate of the government of the Republic in Aragon, so the anarcho-syndicalists apparently contributed to restoring the power of the Republican State in that region. The municipal councils were remodelled to reflect the same composition as the government of the Republic. The headquarters of the Aragon Defence Council was in the town of Caspe.

To strengthen the collectivisation process, in February of 1937 the Aragon Defence Council called a congress of the new Federació Regional de Col·lectivitats Agràries d'Aragó (Regional Federation of Agrarian Collectives of Aragon). Four hundred delegates from 275 collectives claiming to encompass 141,430 farmers attended. They decided to create a rural savings and loan, and the secretary of the new federation was the schoolteacher José Mavilla. There are no figures on the participation of the UGT's FETT in the collectivisation process in Aragon, but the socialists condemned the fact that the collectivisations were not voluntary while also censuring the total hegemony of the anarchists.

The more radical sectors were opposed to the export monopoly that the Aragon Defence Council wished to have. Oil, almonds and saffron had to be exported in order to secure other foodstuffs needed. The port of Tarragona witnessed the sale of 551,000 kilos of oil, 20,000 kilos of al-

monds and 789 kilos of saffron, and 600,000 kilos of food were imported. The most collectivised county, Binefar-Monzón, accused the Aragon Defence Council of "counter-revolutionary efforts" and strove to act autonomously.

After the anarcho-syndicalists left the government of the Republic, a decree dated the 11th of August 1937 dissolved the Aragon Defence Council and replaced it with a general governor, while the municipal councils were replaced by government management committees without the anarchists. The protest by the secretary general of the CNT, Marià Rodríguez Vázquez, before ministers Irujo and Zugazagoitia was futile. The arrests of anarchists began, accompanied by the dissolution of collectives by the eleventh division, led by the communist Líster. Everything ended in March of 1938, when the Aragon front fell and 40,000 refugees fled to Catalonia, which was also partly occupied by the enemy.

Regarding the issue of collectivisations, since 2013 there has been a 300-page monograph on the village of Queretes in the county of Matarranya, in the province of Teruel.<sup>29</sup> This experiment, spearheaded by the anarcho-syndicalists, which were a minority in the town, began to dissolve in August 1937, but it lasted until December of the same year.

The Republican defeat put an end to the experience of collectivisations in Catalonia, the Region of Valencia and the eastern part of Aragon. The phenomenon, which is inseparable from the Civil War and the exceptional context that it generated, cannot be studied outside of that framework, which conditioned and ultimately determined it.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] The concept of libertarian communism approved by the congress of the CNT held in Zaragoza in May 1936 was worth little on this occasion. At that time, agrarian- and artisan-inspired communalism had been imposed over the attempt to adapt anarchism to the complexity of industrial society, as proposed by the anarchist publicist Diego Abad de Santillán (Sinesio Baudilio García Fernández), who had published *El organismo económico de la revolución. Como vivimos y cómo podríamos vivir en España* in Barcelona a few months earlier. That was the only essay by a Spanish anarchist translated into English and Dutch. Abad de Santillán was a member of the Economic Council of Catalonia during the summer of 1936 and later the regional economy minister in the government of the Generalitat from December 1936 until April 1937. He participated in tamping down the rebels in Barcelona in May 1937 even though he was far from the line of government participation. From the doctrinal standpoint, in Valencia Higinio Noja played a similar role as Abad de Santillán did in Catalonia; Noja published *La obra constructiva de la revolución* in 1937. We should note that neither the communists nor the socialists had a clear pro-



- gramme on the issue of socialising the economy, and they also operated within pragmatic and contradictory parameters after the 19th of July 1936. Some anarchists later said that the reason behind all the problems had been joining the governments while betraying anti-state apoliticism. However, joining the governmental organisations reflected the need to not leave the control mechanisms of the government apparatus in the hands of the remaining anti-fascist organisations and to consolidate the changes in direction. In any event, the ideological contradictions were greater for the anarchists than those experienced by the other forces on the Republican side.
- [2] Until the 30th of October 1936, the death of half of the 8,360 people executed took place in the rear-guard of Catalonia, the vast majority without any kind of trial.
- [3] Walter TAUBER: "Les tramways de Barcelone collectivisés pendant la révolution espagnole, 1936-1939". *Bulletin d'Information. Fondation Internationale d'Etudes Historiques et Sociales de la Guerre Civile d'Espagne de 1936-1939*, no. 2, Perpignan 1977.
- [4] Albert GIRONA: *Guerra i revolució al País Valencià, 1936-1939*. Tres i Quatre, Valencia 1986.
- [5] David BALLESTER: *Els anys de la guerra: la UGT a Catalunya, 1936-1939*. Columna-Fundació Josep Comaposada, Barcelona 1998.
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Albert Balcells is a member of the History-Archaeology Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, where he has served as the President, and he is a Professor Emeritus of Contemporary History at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He has been awarded the Creu de Sant Jordi (Cross of St George) from the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Narcís Monturiol Medal for Scholarly Merit. His first book was *El sindicalisme a Barcelona, 1916-1923* (1965). He is the co-author and editor of the *Història de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (2003-2006). Around 40 of his titles can be found in the United States Library of Congress. His most recent books include *Llocs de memòria dels catalans* (2008), which won the Carles Rahola prize from the Prudenci Bertrana Foundation; *El pistolerisme. Barcelona 1917-1923* (2009); *El projecte d'autonomia de la Mancomunitat de Catalunya del 1919 i el seu context històric* (2010); *Els Estudis Universitaris Catalans, 1903-1985. Per una Universitat Catalana* (2011); *Puig i Cadafalch, president de Catalunya i la seva època* (2013); *La Mancomunitat de Catalunya 1914-1925. El primer pas vers l'autogovern des de la desfeta de 1714* (2014); *Vuit feministes catalanes entre 1889 i 1977* (2015) and finally *La caricatura política a la Catalunya republicana* (2016). He has coordinated the open electronic repertoire Monuments and memorials in Catalonia ([monuments.iec.cat](http://monuments.iec.cat)). Albert Balcells is the editor-in-chief of the *Catalan Historical Review*. He is also the editor and one of the writers for the most recent *Historia de Cataluña* published in Spanish in Madrid in 2006.