

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Antoni Segura i Mas
The Republican Exiles in the French Resistance
2018

Excerpted from “The Catalan (and Spanish) Republicans
under Nazism”, in *Nazi Juggernaut in the Basque Country and
Catalonia*

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

The Republican Exiles in the French Resistance

Antoni Segura i Mas

2018

After the armistice, many exiles joined the French resistance. This meant that, if they were captured, they would be tortured, killed, or deported to a Nazi camp. This was the fate of the brothers Conrad and Josep Miret i Musté, PSUC (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) militants,¹ and Joan Martorell, who created the first guerrilla group in the Mauriac area of Auvergne until he was arrested and deported to Dachau.

Through the MOI (the Main d’oeuvre immigrée, immigrant labor, an organization created in 1926 by the French Communist Party to organize foreign workers according to nationality) many Communists and Republicans joined the Franc Tireurs et Partisans Français (French snipers and partisans, FTPF) and other resistance organizations. Along the southern French border, the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de Es-

¹ Jorge Torres Hernández, “Los hermanos Miret i Musté. Los catalanes Conrado y Josep, organizadores de la Résistance en Francia,” in *Las Brigadas Internacionales: nuevas perspectivas en la historia*, ed. Josep Sánchez Cervelló and Sebastián Agudo (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2015), 364–76.

paña, PCE) organized the resistance in a very wide arc covering the whole of the Pyrenees.²

In April 1942, the PCE created the Fourteenth Guerrilla Corps, the future military arm of the Unión Nacional Española (Spanish National Union, UNE), which aimed to bring together all the anti-Franco forces to fight the Germans and to “reconquer Spain” (its newspaper was called *Reconquista de España*). Shortly before the Normandy landings, the total of Spanish guerrillas in the resistance rose from 6,000 in early 1944 to 10,000 in May.³ Jesús Monzón, the leader of the PCE, believed that the time was right for the reconquest of a part of Spain and for an insurrection that would force the Allies to intervene. In the summer and fall of 1944, the UNE organized an invasion of the Val d’Aran in which socialist and anarchist militants also participated, but which eventually ended in failure.⁴

Before the end of the Civil War, the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the Spanish confederation of anarcho-syndicalist labor unions) had split into two. The resulting organizations were the General Council of the Libertarian Movement, created in Paris in February 1939 and led by the exiled Catalan leaders Josep Esглеas i Jaume (Germinal Esглеas), Fed-

² See the map showing communist resistance in the southern zone in Agudo Blanco, “Los republicanos españoles en la resistencia francesa de la zona sur,” 270.

³ Jean Ortiz, “La epopeya de los guerrilleros españoles en Francia,” in *Las Brigadas Internacionales: nuevas perspectivas en la historia*, ed. Josep Sánchez Cervelló and Sebastián Agudo (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2015), 338.

⁴ Antoni Segura, “La lluita armada: la Guerra Civil continua,” in *La guerra civil a Catalunya: l’exili*, ed. J.M. Solé Sabaté, vol. 6 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2007). The CNT refused to participate in the invasion, regarding it as a communist ploy that was doomed to failure. Nonetheless, some anarchists and socialists took part on their own initiative: Antonio Tellez (Tarragona, 1921–Perpignan, 2005) joined, but left on seeing that the operation had no chance of success. Personal communication with Antonio Tellez, summer 2004.

erica Montseny, Joan García Oliver, Francesc Isgleas, and Fidel Miró, and a National Committee that comprised the federations of the Center and the South where the war continued. The CNT was now not only in exile, but divided. The drowning in the Marne River of the Secretary General Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez (*Marianet*), on June 18, 1939, did nothing to encourage the 80,000 exiled CNT members, who were unsure whether to cooperate with other anti-fascist forces or to pursue their libertarian orthodoxy. The differences were accentuated by the creation of the Delegation of the CNT of Spain in Mexico in June 1941, which sought cooperation with all the Republican parties, including the PCE, while the CNT members exiled in North Africa continued to defend the tenets of anarcho-syndicalism.⁵ For their part, certain CNT leaders who were considered dangerous by the French authorities were interned in the camps of Saint-Cyprien and Vernet and many of them, including Antoni Ortiz (Barcelona, 1907–1996), were finally deported to Algeria, where they enlisted in the Free French Army.⁶

In short, the anarchists who participated in the resistance often did so in cooperation with groups of the UNE, or alternatively in their own initiative and without any coordination. The exception was in Mauriac in the *département* of Cantal, where in 1942 some six hundred CNT members created a combat group that made contact with other groups of libertarian combatants.⁷ Some anarchists who took part in the resistance would later be active in the Catalan *maquis*, such as Francesc Sabaté Llopart, *Quico*, and Ramon Vila Capdevila, *Caracremada*. Anarchists also participated in General Leclerc's army and in the insurrection and liberation of Paris: "the column, of some

⁵ Ángel Herrerín López, "La CNT en el exilio de la organización a la escisión," *Historia Social* 48 (2004): 27–35.

⁶ See the biography in Juan J. Gallardo and José M. Márquez, *Ortiz, general sin Dios ni amo* (Barcelona: Ed. Hacer, 1999).

⁷ Quoted in *Amicale des Anciens Guérilleros, Guérilleros en Terre de France*, 200–1.

160 men, commanded by French captain Dronne, constituted by 146 anti-fascist Spaniards, mostly anarchists. Their tanks bore the names of *Durruti, Ebro, Don Quijote, Teruel, Brunete, Guernica, Guadalajara, etc.*⁸

Spanish and Catalan Republicans could pay a very high price for their participation in the resistance: jail sentences, executions, and deportation to the Nazi extermination camps. In February 1944, there was a revolt at the prison in Eysses (Lot-et-Garonne), between Bordeaux and Toulouse, in which the Vichy government had incarcerated the most dangerous *résistants* since 1943. Inside the prison a resistance group had got hold of some weapons; on the night of February 19–20, the inmates took the prefect, a subprefect, and several dozen prison guards hostage, but the help they were expecting from outside never materialized; with the help of the Germans, the French authorities regained control. The reprisals were ferocious: twelve prisoners were executed, among them the Catalans Jaume Serot, an anarchist from a town near Lleida, and Domènec Serveto Bertran, probably a PSUC member. Among other Catalans involved in the revolt were Jaume Ballester (L'Ampolla), Ramon Buj Ferrer (Barcelona), Lluís Canadell (Barcelona), Joaquim and Modest Canet (Girona), Josep Capella (L'Ametlla de Mar), Josep Comabella (Ponts), Rafael Laborda (Girona), Joan Martorell (Barcelona), Amadeu Pons (Borges Blanques), and César Zayuelas (Barcelona) as well as the Valencians Josep Cardona, Guardia Fernández, Miguel Portolés, and Antoni Turiel. On May 30, 1944, 1,200 prisoners were handed over to the Gestapo and deported to Dachau.⁹

The Nazi repression of the population and the exiles also includes episodes that were not related to the resistance. Four

⁸ Ortiz, "La epopeya de los guerrilleros españoles en Francia," 339–40.

⁹ Daniel Arasa, *50 Històries catalanes de la segona guerra mundial* (Barcelona: Laia, 1998) and Montserrat Roig, *Els catalans als camps nazis* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1977; Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2003).

days after the Normandy landings, a unit of the SS Division Das Reich carried out a punitive operation against the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane, near Limoges. Just after two o'clock in the afternoon, a column of soldiers entered the town and divided the population into two groups: the men were shot, and the women and children were locked in the church, which was then set on fire. More than six hundred people died, 38 percent of them women and 32 percent children. The list included nineteen refugees of Spanish or Catalan descent. Entire families were murdered, like the family of Juan Telles from Zaragoza and Maria Domínguez from Barcelona and their three children, two of them born in Barcelona and the youngest born already in exile in Limoges; the family of José Serrano de Purchena (Almería), a teacher, and Maria Pardo from Murcia and their three children (two of them twins) born in Limoges; the Gil-Espinosa family from Alcañiz, with two twin daughters; Antonia Pardo from Murcia and her nine-year-old daughter Nùria, born in Barcelona; and the Massachs sisters from Sabadell.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Town Hall of Oradour sur Glane has an incomplete list, with some additions from the families of the victims: static.blog4ever.com