

Anarcho-Syndicalism in the Spanish Revolution

Helmut Rüdiger

1938

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For this month's session we're sharing a translation of Helmut Rüdiger's "Anarcho-Syndicalism in the Spanish Revolution", a text which, as far as we're aware, was previously unavailable in English. Rüdiger was a German anarcho-syndicalist and co-president of the IWA office in the CNT-FAI headquarters during the war. As a survivor of the German revolution, editor of Der Syndikalist review, and friend of Rudolf Rocker, Rüdiger occupied a prestigious role within the international movement. The text below originated as an internal report for an IWA conference, which the CNT leadership subsequently published with a brief introduction by Mariano "Marianet" Rodríguez Vázquez, a young Romani builder who led the CNT during the war years. We're sharing Rüdiger's report as a counterweight to the general ultraleft line on the CNT, represented for example by Paul Mattick's "The Barricades Must Be Torn Down", one of the primary readings for this month. In the aftermath of the war, as what remained of the exiled CNT collapsed into mutual recriminations, the collaborationist position defended by Rüdiger was buried under denunciations, despite having once been the majority perspective within the union. Whether you find Rüdiger's arguments convincing or not, it's only by actually confronting them that we can begin to fully reckon with the disaster in Spain.

A special thanks to JMCA, who recommended Rüdiger's report and provided background on its publication.

The London Workers Councils & Autonomy Reading Group, January 2023

Foreword

The pamphlet which we present today to the Libertarian militant was not written by the author, comrade Rüdiger, for publication in any form. The text is a recasting of small chapters of a report which our comrade submitted to the organisation as an account of his work in one of the adjunct secretariats of the IWA.¹ One of those surprised will be the author – and more than anyone else, no doubt – to see in a propagandistic pamphlet some new and daring ideas which were intended for the privacy of the international anarcho-syndicalist movement...

We refer to them as new because, in reality, there has never been such an objective and coordinated critique of the libertarian trajectory in the revolution since July 1936.

The writer's thought goes straight to impartial analysis and the drawing of conclusions, leaving aside literary style in order to give greater emphasis to the descriptive clarity and comprehensiveness of his work as a whole.

For the avoidance of misunderstandings and the provision for militants of a firm basis for reasoning, when it comes to polemising about what we should have done and what we have done, as well as about what we should or can do in the future, Rüdiger's pamphlet sets an invaluable standard.

It is desirable that it should be read and disseminated in our Spanish milieu; but it is even more desirable that it should be disseminated abroad, where many comrades focus on, from a dislocated and false angle of vision, a mental projection of negative criticism which does more

¹ IWA, (International Workers' Association, in Spanish: AIT, Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores), an international federation of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, founded in 1922, of which the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, in English: National Confederation of Labour), the Spanish section, was the largest section.

harm to anarcho-syndicalism than the tendentious campaigns of all the bourgeois and Marxist parties.

We hope that our wishes will be heeded, and that both Spanish and foreign militants – including the author here – will be able to forgive us for our work, since we have been inspired by a healthy purpose of propaganda for ideas. The reader will find that the defects in the assembling of the documents of the report will be compensated by the unity and substantive nature that can be observed in the relationship and scope of this robust critical compendium of the Spanish Revolution and of the libertarian conduct followed in it.

The National Committee
Barcelona, 1938

The particularities of the libertarian movement in Spain

Anarcho-syndicalism in its international expression is the emancipatory movement of the working class in general. The ideas of workers' syndicalism as the basis of social reconstruction are either internationally imposed or they will not be realised in any country in the world. Due to special conditions, a very strong libertarian movement developed in Spain, which must devote special interest to anarcho-syndicalism as an international phenomenon. Of course, nothing can be achieved by reproaching the foreign movements for their small membership. It can be admitted that the movement has had its faults and weaknesses in all countries; but in general terms it must be said: the smallness of the German, Dutch, American and other movements is not the fault of the comrades in those countries, just as the influence on large masses in Spain is not due to the merit of the Spanish comrades, however great and admirable the sacrifices of the militants over some three quarters of a century. One has to think historically, on the basis of ethnic, political and economic conditions, even if one is not a Marxist, to explain the differences that exist between anarchist influence in different countries. The ethnic structure, the history, the social tradition, its present economic situation and its special psychology, have made possible in Spain a development of the workers' movement for which the natural conditions were lacking in the rest of the world.

Thus, the Spanish libertarian movement can hardly be compared with the movements of other nations. While in almost all countries social movements had to be directed against national traditions, and especially anarchism expressed itself in a constant struggle of small nuclei of idealists against the whole conventional life and popular mentality, in Spain anarchism was nothing else than the expression of the same federalist and individualist tradition of the whole nation. This explains the great influence of Spanish anarchism and the fact that in Spain Marxism has not been able to absorb the libertarian movement as in other European countries. But here one important thing must be noted: this Spanish anarchism was based on a mere popular instinct, which was both its strength and its weakness; its strength, because the great popular movement was not the fruit of abstract discussions or of theories cultivated by a few intellectuals, but a social dynamism of a sometimes truly volcanic power, whose libertarian content could always count on the sympathies of hundreds of thousands or even millions of the country's inhabitants. The anarchic sentiment of this nation saw in the libertarian tendencies something common to all the Spanish oppressed. But it is a general mistake on the part of the foreigner to believe that in Spain all that is called anarchism is conscious anarchism, theoretically founded in the sense

of the great thinkers of our ideas. All that existed in the great masses was, and is, the general libertarian will, the instinctive negation of authority and the conviction that the workers' trade union organisation is the most suitable place for the defence of workers' interests. This is a lot, and the revolutionary struggles of dozens of years, waged by Spanish anarchism against capitalist exploitation and state tyranny, demonstrate the militant values of this popular movement. But its shortcomings were to be shown at the moment when this movement had to build, after three quarters of a century of destructive struggle, of pure criticism and protest, at the moment when a considerable part of the responsibility for the fate of a whole country and the victory or failure in a totally unexpected war fell on this movement.

In such a critical situation, the weakness of the movement had to show itself as well, which was that the building, organising and thinking capacities did not exactly correspond to the greatness of the militant drive of the masses in the country. To say this is not to belittle the confederal² cause in Spain, on the contrary: it is admirable what this movement was able to do in the first moments of the struggle and the social reconstruction, and it is not strange that there were partial failures when the economic and political situation of the country became more and more complicated.

Let something else be borne in mind. Spanish anarchism was a pure workers' movement; the intellectuals of the country, with rare exceptions, did not join it. But the level of the Spanish worker in general was much lower than that of his brother in other European countries. In most Spanish regions feudalism still reigned, and the workers did not earn even the minimum necessary to live humanly. There were no social institutions, illiteracy was widespread among the Spanish working class. The minority who knew how to study and write was always small, and these few thousand comrades suffered a life of continuous persecution and eternal privations which had nothing to do with the idyllic bureaucracy of the workers' movement in the other European countries in the pre-fascist era. The militants of Spanish anarchism spent half of their lives in prisons. The movement never had the possibility to live legally for a long time in order to carry out an educational and constructive work in the organisation. The organisation's publications were continually interrupted by clandestine periods or simple police and government arbitrariness. Spain did not know democracy and what existed from 1931 to 1936 was not a regime with all the possibilities of free development for the workers' movement and propaganda, as it existed for example in Germany before Hitler, in France still today, etc. We could talk about the lives of thousands and thousands of unknown and known militants, and without giving special importance to an individual case which is only symbolic of thousands of others, I would like to mention the life of the present secretary of the National Committee, comrade Mariano Rodriguez Vazquez:

In the period of his active militancy in the CNT and the FAI³, during the democratic regime, not under the fascist yoke, in the space of time from 1931 to 1936, he was arrested six times and spent more than twenty-nine months in prison. The prisons of the Republic were always full of confederal militants. Even during the time when they were not in prison, the militants could not live quietly and devote themselves to theoretical studies and a peaceful life of ideological propaganda, forming clear doctrinal conceptions in public controversy with other tendencies, as was the custom in the countries of Central Europe. Also in these periods of its life, the militancy

² i.e., the cause of the CNT

³ FAI, Federación Anarquista Ibérica.

had to live under the eternal threat of arrest and often also in continuous forced unemployment, without the right to any official aid. Spain has always been the country of freedom, that is to say, the nation with the strongest mass libertarian tendency in Europe; but this nation, practically speaking, has never been able to enjoy a long period of real freedom to develop organically, but always found itself in open struggle against a police regime and a system of blatant exploitation which had no equal in other European countries. How was it possible in these circumstances to deepen theoretically and form a generation of militants accustomed to systematic organisational and educational work, as was possible in other countries, where anarchist movements were in a position to cultivate theory, but, unfortunately, not to win popular sympathy or mobilise the masses against the thrust of fascism?

Much has been said about another peculiarity of the Spanish movement: its “nationalism”. This word should not really be used, modern nationalism being an aggressive and imperialist theory of an expansive character, whereas the so-called nationalism of Spanish anarchism was nothing other than the fruit of its long isolation from the world workers’ movement, an isolation which was only the expression of the fact that the whole country, for some dozens of years, had ceased to play a role in the international politics of the European nations. This isolation had allowed the Spanish people to preserve their federalist tradition without it becoming a victim of corruption by mechanising and centralising capitalism, like the working class movements in other countries, especially in Germany, where the libertarian essence of socialism was lost under the sign of the stupid admiration of the so-called capitalist progress which is part of Marxist ideology. Unaccustomed to judge on the basis of theoretical conclusions and to formulate abstract ideas, but familiar with a more sentimental expression of their ideas and under the impression that anarchism was something Iberian – given the fact that it practically only exists on the peninsula, while the masses in other countries were Marxist, the reaction against the ideological invasion of Bolshevism in Spain from the beginning of the current year came quite naturally, opposing the national tradition of the workers’ movement to the centralist influence which was apparently foreign, not out of logical necessity as we militants from other countries know, but practically in this case. But this empirical fact determined the way the Confederation reacted against communist influence. One can wish that the movement would get used to thinking and expressing itself more in accordance with the international theory of the emancipatory movement of the workers of the whole world; but whoever knows the character of Spanish anarchism, cannot misinterpret this phenomenon, comparing the mentality of the CNT, on this point, with that of the fascist imperialisms.

In order not to be one-sided, I would like to mention a fault which has been committed especially in the foreign propaganda of the CNT-FAI from the beginning, a fault for which we foreign comrades who have been collaborating in this foreign propaganda since July are also responsible. This propaganda of the first months was carried away by an exaggerated optimism and did not realise how complicated the problem was in its twofold social and military aspect. Moreover, the propaganda was confined almost exclusively to Catalonia, where victory was believed to be in the bag. All this led the foreign comrades to believe that the Social Revolution had already advanced much further than it really was. The internal propaganda of the CNT has made the same mistake, which it must now pay dearly for.

The lack of an internationalist atmosphere had been noticeable in the CNT for a long time. In reality, the CNT has never recognised the foreign influences that have been exercised in the formation of the Spanish libertarian milieu. It was the French Proudhon, the Russian Bakunin

and the Italian Fanelli who exercised a profound influence in the period of the formation of the movement. Later, the ideas of French syndicalism penetrated the peninsula, and from 19 July⁴ the confederal movement accepted many forms of syndicalist organisation and tactics which it had previously rejected.

But it was not these imported ideas that caused the growth of the Spanish libertarian movement, rather the psychological conditions found among the people who welcomed the new ideas with a natural understanding which unfortunately did not exist in this form in other countries. All of us international anarchists have always rejoiced that a whole people had such a spontaneous understanding of ideas in their psychology, although at the same time we always realised that the Spanish movement relied too much on these natural conditions, neglecting the factor of the formation of a well-founded theory capable of being taken to other countries. On the contrary, a certain national exclusivity developed in the Spanish movement, which has been very detrimental to it.

After its lack of theoretical culture, due to the brutal repression in which it has always lived, as well as its national isolation for many years, another aspect of Spanish anarchism must be taken into account: its revolutionary extremism, which took no account of the complexity of modern economic structures or of the network of social relations between people, but was content to have declared war on all tyranny and exploitation, which it wished to replace by a regime of complete freedom – libertarian communism -, basing this conception on a boundless optimism and the belief that the proclamation of freedom would suffice to turn man into a kindly being in spite of having lived for many centuries in social systems whose basis, in reality, was not only class struggle, but, rather, the eternal struggle of all against all. The so-called putschism of the Spanish movement was the expression of the revolutionary will of the people and kept alive the spirit of revolutionary resistance which was so magnificently manifested in July 1936; but examined from the point of view of the social realisations which were projected in the various popular uprisings which took place under the influence of anarchism, this mentality suffered of an almost unbelievable oversimplification. The organising tendencies of anarcho-syndicalism already appeared as pure social-democratism and political reformism, of which the movement wanted nothing at all to do with. The ideal of freedom was everything. (I am the last person who wants to underestimate the importance that this conception, perhaps primitive but also creative of enormous combative energies, had for the preparation of the atmosphere which led to 19 July). However, this spirit was not enough for constructive preparation in the case of real possibilities for a social transformation.

This great libertarian movement, such as it was and perhaps precisely because it was no different, made possible the first resistance which fascism encountered in its hitherto triumphant career throughout the world. Without any systematic tactics prepared, without any theoretical culture, without being accustomed to pathetic phrases of international solidarity, and almost without any fixed organisation, this movement was able to act at the decisive moment of the greatest danger by putting itself decisively in the front rank of the global militant proletariat, by the use of direct action against fascism, an action which initiated the greatest anti-fascist struggle that has ever been waged up to now. Afterwards, however, the consequences of the organic weaknesses of the movement, which every connoisseur of Spain should have borne in mind

⁴ Date of the nationalist uprising of 1936 in Barcelona and Madrid which began the Spanish Civil War.

after the first moments of general enthusiasm, made themselves felt again, and in my opinion inevitably so.

Moreover, the Spanish people and anarchism have to act within the limits set by the international situation of the moment, the main features of which are the impotence of the Marxist workers' movement and the non-existence of an international anarchist movement corresponding to the Spanish one. If we approach the problems from this point of view, we shall soon be convinced that the counter-revolutionary phenomena in Spanish anti-fascism cannot be combated by accusing a few hundred Spanish militants of incapacity or treachery, but only by means of a real help to Iberian anarchism which will enable it to surpass itself, by undertaking a new development which has hitherto been impossible for it.

The situation outside Spain must also be carefully studied in order to bring about a change favourable to the CNT as far as possible.

The evolution of the CNT over the last twenty years

The history of the CNT is an eventful one. From its foundation, it was already in a very different situation from the other anarcho-sindicalist movements in Europe. From its very beginnings, it was an important factor in the social life of its country, despite its pronouncedly anarchist character. Let us take a quick look at its evolution. The revolutionary epoch, initiated by the Russian Revolution in 1917, found its echo also in Spain. But while this revolutionary epoch in Russia soon took an entirely authoritarian course, with the formation of a new, omnipotent dictatorial state which then entered as a power into the game of the other European capitalist states, the revolution in the countries of Central Europe led to a series of partial failures followed by a strengthening of reaction which then developed into fascism of various kinds, the latter advancing in a few years triumphantly from the South to the North. Spain also had its epoch of dictatorship between 1923 and 1930, but in reality this dictatorship was unable to restrain the revolutionary thrust of the masses, Spain being thus the only European country in which, from 1917 to 1936, the revolution was in an upward march, in complete contradiction with the countries of the post-war revolutions, where the masses, after very few years of struggle, had gradually retreated before the fascist thrust until the shameful collapse of the German Marxist movement which crowned all this development.

During these twenty years, the CNT undertook an endless series of revolutionary struggles. Many of these were enterprises of the CNT alone against the political parties and also against the UGT⁵, which almost always, together with the Socialist Party, collaborated with capitalism; but at the same time vain attempts were made to attract the UGT and to act together with it. These attempts at cooperation brought several big failures, and the UGT remained in its reformist and collaborationist line, until from 1933 onwards a change began to be noticed in the tactical conceptions of the left wing of Spanish socialism, a tendency which led to the profound divorce which is taking place in the Spanish movement in these years.

The tactics of the CNT in this period always showed a certain elasticity and adapted to the circumstances. In 1916 there was the first joint CNT-UGT action against the rise in the cost of living. The action was a failure and relations between the two organisations worsened again. Looking

⁵ UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores, in English: General Union of Workers. Aligned to the Socialist Party (PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español).

for international relations and revolutionary allies outside the country, in December 1919 the CNT congress in Madrid agreed: "The CNT adheres provisionally to the Third International, because of the revolutionary character which presides over it, while the international congress is being organised and held in Spain which is to lay the foundations by which the true international of the workers is to be governed." This entry of the CNT into the Third International was typical for the whole mode of action of the CNT. Naturally, no Congress of the Moscow International was held in Spain, and the CNT withdrew from it to join the new IWA.

While the tactics of the movement in international questions were hesitant, due to a lack of knowledge and a relative inability to interpret well what was happening outside the country, at home the CNT was able to stick much better to the conditions of the general situation at the time. This is a problem which must be understood by all those who are concerned with the present situation of the CNT. Let us take for example the position taken on parliamentarism and elections. No one can doubt that the CNT was always 100% anti-parliamentary. This means that it always fought against the idea that through parliamentary politics it was possible to obtain improvements in life for the working class or even to introduce a regime of social justice of freedom. The CNT recommended direct action organised by the trade unions and practised it. However, its position in times of elections was not always the same. The organisation gave up its abstentionist propaganda – but never its propaganda for direct action and against the politics of being unable to do anything for the workers – in elections, which had a certain character of a popular plebiscite or public demonstration against a regime of oppression, as in 1931 and 1936, but made an abstentionist propaganda in the autumn of 1933, when it believed it could lead left socialism onto the road of revolutionary insurrection. These vacillations in tactics, conditioned by changing situations, have never affected the libertarian and social-revolutionary line of the organisation, which has always remained the same. This true libertarian tendency of the movement found its expression in a series of revolutionary uprisings which were inspired by anarchism. The uprisings of Figols⁶ and 8 January 1933⁷ were still of a purely putschist character, while in December of the same year the CNT already believed it could unleash a general social-revolutionary movement, drawing in the masses of the UGT. In Asturias⁸, for the first time, there was a revolutionary movement of a popular character, in which both organisations took part, and this time the organic deficiency of the CNT was shown in a tragic way, which lay in the fact that in reality it was only a very loose union of regional unions; that they all pursued their own particular policy and that at the decisive moment they acted without a common plan, as had already happened twice in 1933.⁹

July 1936 was the first time that the CNT had known how to act at a time when it was able to drag a whole nation behind it, especially in Catalonia. In the year that followed this glorious date, the Confederation recovered in giant steps much of what it had been unable to learn for twenty-five years. Only now is a real National Confederation being formed which is trying to work out a general tactic for the whole movement and to make all militants responsible to the organisation. It was very much a question of creating a tactical discipline and a unique rhythm in propaganda, which had previously had exclusively the character of the individuals who carried it

⁶ The Alt Llobregat (Catalonia) insurrection of January 1932.

⁷ The anarchist insurrection of January 1933, which took place across Spain.

⁸ The Asturian miners' revolt of October 1934.

⁹ The first insurrection of 1933 was the previously mentioned insurrection of January, the second insurrection was the Anarchist insurrection of December 1933 located principally in Zaragoza.

out, fighting capitalism and the state in general, but without specifying immediate and practical objectives for the action of the masses. The CNT, previously romantic anarchist, full of a spirit of abstract absolutism¹⁰, very idealistic but not very practical, began to think politically, that is, to analyse at each moment the whole political-social situation of the country in order to establish an ever clearer collective position regarding the situation determined by the general development.

19 July in Catalonia was the first date on which the CNT won a resounding victory. It was the expression of a general popular will. The secret of this great success lies in the fact that then the CNT did not fight against all the other sections of the people, but together with them, interpreting the will of all, instead of opposing it or general indifference, as it had done in its previous struggles, which could never lead to a victory. Bear this in mind; 19 July was the first stage of the Spanish social revolution. The second will begin at the moment when the CNT can once again place itself at the head of a general popular movement, becoming the interpreter of a general feeling that palpitates in all the people and not only in the impatience of the anarchist militants. Until this moment comes, the mission of the CNT is to remain faithful to the great common task begun on 19 July, in spite of all the difficulties and hardships, preparing in the meantime the atmosphere for another progressive revolutionary social future corresponding to a general popular need such as the direct action of the CNT in July 1936. This is the problem of the present situation in Spain.

Today it is clear that what began on 19 July was not the definitive social revolution, but only a first step of it, the beginning of an anti-fascist struggle, a defensive action which naturally brought about a series of social achievements by the workers, but which could not lead to a totalitarian¹¹ revolution because of the situation determined by factors outside of the will of the CNT and more powerful than it.

In Barcelona it was the workers of the CNT-FAI and the organs of the Republic, i.e. the police, who together took up the struggle, although under the initiative of the former. This was the fundamental condition for victory.

In Madrid, one of the first acts of the CNT was to officially place itself at the disposal of the authorities of the Republic. The same thing happened in the other regions. The external propaganda made by us from Catalonia did not highlight these facts in the proper way (and thus reflected only the special errors of the tactics of the Catalan branch of the CNT). However, at the critical moment of 19 July, among all the more radical "extremists" of the FAI there was a general conviction that the time had not come for totalitarian actions, since the people were facing a very hard test in the struggle against fascism, which would be much more difficult than the victory on the streets of Barcelona. They were persuaded that in no case could the revolution be the work of the CNT alone, nor could it be carried out by a people subjugated to the will of a single organisation, such as the CNT. The struggle had to be a work of broad popular strata and even a common work of proletarians and petty bourgeois, despite the contradiction of their economic interests and despite all the dangers and difficulties of such an alliance. The experiment had to be made if the country was not to be handed over to Franco. The CNT took this step. It gave up the fruits of its victory, which it could easily have turned into its own dictatorship in Catalonia. The CNT did not do this and in the constitution of the Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militias even gave

¹⁰ Translator's note: In the sense of an unconditional adherence to political principals.

¹¹ Translator's note: In the sense of excluding other political parties, which was how the term was used in some speeches of Gil-Robles.

parity of seats to the Catalan UGT, which perhaps had a tenth of the membership of the CNT. The immediate consequences of this sacrifice were tragic for the CNT if we look at them closely.

I am convinced that one day history will judge very differently the tactics of the Catalan CNT at that time. It will have been the first time in the history of revolutions that a victorious revolutionary organisation renounced its dictatorship. This act of libertarian ethics will only have its consequences in the future.

We will show, moreover, that it would be madness to want to pursue a purely Catalan policy without taking into account the rest of Spain. The tactics of the CNT in Catalonia were the first decisive step in the preparation of the workers' alliance throughout the country, although in Catalonia itself the first consequence was a diminution of the CNT's own influence, with the UGT becoming the domain of petty-bourgeois counter-revolution. But this fact is relatively unimportant, for if there had not been a UGT in Catalonia that could be exploited by the counter-revolution, the latter would have found some other expression. The conflict between the Catalan working class and the petty bourgeoisie of the region is old, can appear in many forms and will not end easily. If the UGT had not been granted parity in July 1936, the internal situation in Catalonia would be exactly the same as it is today; there would only be different names for the parties in struggle.

The anti-fascist revolution was bound to have a very different character from the idyllic conceptions of the revolution that a good part of the militants had made. The revolution did not begin with the proclamation and realisation of general welfare, but with sacrifices from the very first moment. While in the early days the POUM¹², according to the old method of political parties that want to win popular sympathy, published a series of "demands", such as reduction of rents and working hours, increase in wages, etc., the Barcelona Local Federation, already in the first moments of the struggle, in July, gave a completely different interpretation of events. In essence, it said in its manifesto distributed in Barcelona immediately after the struggle: "We are not asking for anything, nor are we promising anything; this is not the time for improvements in life, but for sacrifices in order to be able to continue the struggle against fascism".

Indeed, in July there was no possibility of benefiting the masses economically. The real task was to increase production and to prepare for the consequences of the war. Certainly, the line of conduct of the trade unions was not always fully conscious of this, although in general the movement foresaw this immediate future in its first acts after the struggle on the barricades.

If the CNT decided to renounce a totalitarian revolution in order to play its part, helping in the constitution of a broad general anti-fascist front together with the UGT and the left-wing political parties, this was nothing more than the logical consequence of the fact that the defence against the fascist rebellion had also been a common work of different forces, especially outside Barcelona. And this defence against the common enemy had to be, more and more, a work of broad popular strata, including many political sectors outside the CNT, because the war was taking on forms which made necessary a concentration of human forces far beyond the possibilities of the CNT alone. That this alliance, with outside forces and with organisations whose social value had always been rather dubious, could not be very easy to maintain and that it would lead to many upsets and enough tragic disagreements, this was foreseeable. We must not only look at the details of this anti-fascist front to see whether or not it is of value for the revolution, but

¹² POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, in English: Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). A centrist Marxist party roughly analogous to the British ILP, which also included Trotskyist elements.

first of all we must realise that it was born as an imperative necessity and that there was no other solution at the decisive moment. Having admitted this, there is no other possibility but to endure, with gritted teeth if necessary, the many inconveniences that this political line must bring with it and to maintain as best as possible the unity and fighting strength of the libertarian organisations themselves, defending their dignity and increasingly stabilising their organic structure on a basis of inner cohesion which can guarantee the success of the movement in future struggles for its own ends and the present work of economic reconstruction, within the limits given by the needs of the war and of collaboration with the other working class sectors and the petty bourgeoisie.

The CNT knows very well that, especially after the Russian intervention in Spain, the danger is great for the libertarian future of this country and that, after the defeat of white fascism, a red fascism threatens, which would mean a greater danger than a temporary predominance of the petty bourgeoisie and democratic republicanism. But once it was recognised that it was necessary to wage war against fascism together with other social sectors in order to exhaust all possibilities of victory, this danger had to be confronted as well. The fascism of Franco and Mussolini would mean the immediate extermination of all militants of Spanish anarchism, while a certain advance of state communism can again be contained by an intelligent and cohesive reaction of the CNT, whose trade unions have too old a tradition to be annulled within a few months. The attack of state communism against the power and influence of workers' trade unionism cannot be as violent as that of white fascism, for Bolshevism has to keep up the appearance of being a popular movement, at least for some time. Between the certain and rapid death of the movement under fascism and the danger of seeing the power of the movement temporarily reduced by a growth of authoritarian tendencies in the anti-fascist camp, the choice was not difficult, and, let it be said once and for all, this was the opinion of everyone in the early days of the struggle; also of those who today find pleasure in externalising the discontent and impatience which in reality all militants feel.

Would it have been possible to take another position in the days of July? Naturally, the movement could have attempted a totalitarian realisation of its aims, at least in Catalonia. But this would have been something like a double murder: heroic suicide of the CNT and surrender of the whole people to the murderer Franco. The CNT militants, victorious on the streets of Barcelona, could turn against those on the barricades beside them, and perhaps in Catalonia it was easy to win in this struggle as well. But since this struggle had logically and inevitably spread over all the terrain in which the rebels had just been defeated, such an attitude was bound to have tragic consequences for the country, facilitating a quick victory for Franco. In this way the last chances of the workers' movement, not only in Spain but on the whole continent, would have been destroyed for half a century or more. The CNT was not accustomed to think politically and to analyse coldly the historical situation in which it found itself; nevertheless, it took a tragic and energetic decision, unanimous and clear. She was driven to this decision by her revolutionary and realistic instinct. Let us judge this decision from a historical point of view. Let us not mourn the consequences, certainly partly tragic, which the CNT now has to endure in order to be consistent with itself. It is a question of not losing one's nerve and one's breath, of keeping one's eyes fixed on the future, of having a distant perspective instead of losing one's head in the mess of the inevitable inconveniences of the daily struggle against allies who are not very honest, but with whom the movement itself is bound in life and death, at least at this stage of the struggle.

In 1936, on the initiative of the Barcelona Secretariat, an IWA delegate was sent to Germany, who visited the militants of the German underground movement there. He brought us interesting

reports on the ideas of those comrades who, under the most terrible dictatorship of our times, had managed to remain faithful to our ideals. This news confirmed what we had already heard earlier about the position of our illegal comrades in Germany. They were convinced of the necessity of going against fascism, together with all the popular forces that were ready to fight. They declared that they understood the tactics of the CNT. I am convinced that all those who know fascism, who suffer under its repression, are ready to fight against it, allied to all possible sectors, despite the great divergences that exist within so-called anti-fascism. Nobody can refuse this necessity. The number one public enemy today is fascism. Once it is defeated, other enemies will be found – who can doubt this? – and the struggle will continue. But in no case can anarchism take the responsibility of facilitating the victory of fascism. The people would not understand it and the libertarian movement would lose the last possibility of contact with the people, not only because of the physical destruction of all its militants by fascism, but also, and above all, morally. There are those who claim that the CNT has harmed the cause of anarchism by not sticking to the letter of the programme as we had it drawn up before we had any chance of using it anywhere. I believe, on the contrary, that the CNT has given a new reputation to world anarchism and it only remains for us to systematically and intelligently exploit this situation in order to give new impulses, in the libertarian sense, to the international workers' movement.

I believe that many comrades who today criticise those decisions of the CNT, which are the basis for the events of the last fifteen months, do not feel the full gravity of the situation. I cannot repeat enough times that, in the first place, we must recognise the absolute necessity of renouncing totalitarian experiments which existed in July and still exist today, and that this Spanish revolution, in its present stage, must necessarily be a regime of sacrifices and privations, whose organisation is no easy task and whose life is very fragile, and cannot be exposed to violent experiments. We are told that the allies of the CNT have no such delicacy and that they, for their party demands, have often already endangered the cause. We all know this. But should the CNT's mission be to imitate them? Does the irresponsibility of others give me the right or oblige me to sacrifice my own concepts of responsibility? Doesn't anarchism have the obligation to show more common sense, a morality superior to that of others, without haggling over sacrifices? The CNT is still on its way, and I repeat that only later will it be possible to judge the value of its stoic attitude for the social history of our century. Later it will be seen what some anarchists do not want to see now: that what is important was not the letter of the anarchist programme, but the ideal, the spirit of freedom, tolerance and equity which is practised by the CNT, even if it sometimes renounces privileges and rights of its own organisation, but remains faithful to its libertarian path.

I will quote a practical example of this spirit and this interpretation of things. I refer to statements made by Comrade Blanco, an Asturian comrade, Councillor for Industry in the Independent Council of Asturias, formed during these tragic days of the desperate struggle of our brothers in the North against the fascist invader. This comrade declared, according to the Confederal press in September: "In Asturias today all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five are mobilised for the front, with those between forty-five and seventy being assigned to the fortification battalions. For rearguard work, a selection was made of the most professionally qualified men. There is no longer an eight- or ten-hour working day, but only as much work as is necessary". And the comrade continues: "We have not yet convinced ourselves that the struggle has to be harder and harder every day, that every hour that passes imposes greater sacrifice, that we have to work harder, that we have to get rid of the pruriences of philosophy and dignity, most of

the time misunderstood. A misunderstood totalitarian concept can be the cause of the greatest of catastrophes". So speaks a Spanish anarchist of those who are now in the place where the struggle has taken on the most tragic forms and after fifteen months of anti-fascist war.

In 1931-33 the UGT was frankly collaborationist, like the German reformist trade unions and others. In 1933 an opposition current began to form in Spanish socialism. The CNT then staged its uprising in December, the failure of which gave many people food for thought. The central branch published a manifesto calling for a rapprochement between the CNT and the UGT. At the beginning of 1934, in *La Tierra* of Madrid, appeared the historic articles of Orobón Fernández on the need for the Alliance, declaring that for the moment it was impossible to fight for pure libertarian communism or for state socialism, and that the two tendencies should unite to carry out a common programme in the struggle against fascism. Orobón spoke of the need to structure a revolutionary and socialist workers' democracy. This formula of Orobón, who was undoubtedly the most cultured head and the most clear-sighted man possessed by the present militant generation of the CNT, indicates the only path that the CNT can practically follow. The true Workers' Alliance was first realised in Asturias in 1934. In Catalonia, especially, all this was much more difficult, for there it was the enemies of the proletarian revolution and politicians of all kinds, from the *Esquerra*¹³, through the communists and socialists to Maurín¹⁴, who seized on the word Alliance to form an anti-revolutionary anti-confederal bloc. It was difficult to impose the slogan of the Alliance and to give it a purely revolutionary meaning; but it was necessary.

To understand this need, one has to look back a little. Naturally, it was the ideal of the CNT to unite one day the whole of the Spanish workers, or at least such a majority that every other organisation, next to it, would be rendered meaningless. This is also the ideal of our foreign anarcho-syndicalist organisations; but not even in Spain, the classic libertarian oasis, was the realisation of this dream possible. I cannot speak here about the causes of the phenomenon, but it is a fact that the UGT survived in spite of all the cenetist¹⁵ propaganda and that it maintained its influence over half of the organised Spanish workers. What could the CNT, which wanted a popular socialism, not imposed, but realised by the people themselves, do? At first, consequently, the absorption of the UGT was considered. The CNT Congress in 1919 gave a very clear expression to this idea. The problem of a merger between the CNT and the UGT was discussed and the following was agreed upon:

"Considering that the tactics and ideological content of the CNT and the UGT are diametrically opposed and are fully defined and, therefore, not ignored by anyone, the signatory unions understand that the merger of the two organisations should not be pursued, but rather the absorption of the elements which make up the UGT; Firstly, because the Confederation represents three times the number of members, and secondly, because, as stated above, the tactics followed by the Confederation are known to all, and the elements of the General Union having been invited to this Congress, by not attending it they have shown that they do not agree with these tactics and that it would be useless to hold another Congress, since they would not have convinced us to adopt their methods of struggle. Furthermore, the proposers ask the Congress to draw up a manifesto addressed to all the workers of Spain, granting them a period of three months to join the National Confederation, declaring those who do not do so to be yellows".

¹³ Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, a Catalan nationalist liberal party which formed part of the Republican forces.

¹⁴ Joaquín Maurín, leader of the POUM.

¹⁵ i.e., of the CNT

This was agreed; but the UGT was not dissolved, and even the proportion of members was changed in the sense that a few years later the UGT was stronger than the CNT, even before the bourgeoisie partly sought refuge in it, as happened in 1936. The CNT was thus forced to change its tactics vis-à-vis the UGT. In its uprisings in Figols in January and December 1933, it was also unable to drag the UGT workers along with it; this was only achieved when an alliance had been made for the first time, albeit still with many shortcomings, in Asturias in 1934. This is the way of the future: either the national CNT-UGT alliance is realised or fascism wins. The tactic of the famous “And if you don’t want to be my brother, I’ll break your head” cannot be employed by an organisation that claims to be anarchist. A common basis must be sought with the other workers’ organisation, which cannot be destroyed.

Let us leave aside the different stages in which the idea of the Alliance took shape among the CNT workers and highlight only the resolution of the conference of the Catalan trade unions held in January 1936 and the prelude to the CNT Congress in Zaragoza. The Catalan branch of the CNT was in the most difficult conditions to be able to recognise the value of the Alliance. Catalonia always had a special situation in this respect: a Confederation stronger than anywhere else, but also a class of petty bourgeoisie stronger than in other regions and an alliance of all the enemies of the CNT against it; conditions which almost always led to a situation of extraordinary violence in Catalonia, as it exists again today, while practically the Catalan branch has to keep pace with the CNT of the whole country, a contradiction which always results in disadvantages for both sides, Spain and Catalonia. However, the resolution of Catalonia shows that the alliance idea had won over the entire CNT, because in Catalonia its realisation was more difficult. This resolution states:

“The Organisation of Catalonia, by a large majority, by almost unanimous agreement, accepts in principle a draft pact from an exclusively revolutionary point of view with the UGT. The fundamental bases for the draft pact are the following:

1. Recognition by the UGT that only by revolutionary action is the emancipation of the workers possible, it being understood that in accepting this pact, it has to break all political and parliamentary collaboration with the bourgeois regime.
2. For the Social Revolution to be effective, the present social regime which regulates the economic and political life of the country must be completely destroyed.
3. The new regime of coexistence born of the triumph of the revolution will be regulated by the expressed will of the workers publicly assembled with complete and absolute freedom of expression on the part of all.
4. For the defence of the new social regime, the unity of all efforts is indispensable, regardless of the particular interests of each tendency.”

A practical initiative with the intention of alliance was taken by the CNT on 19 July. We have already spoken of the basis of its alliance policy. This is the perspective that takes the CNT beyond the war. The UGT-CNT alliance must be the firmest foundation for victory over fascism, but at the same time it means the construction of a broader popular base than the CNT alone, as a building factor for a future social renewal more profound than that which began on 19 July and which today almost exclusively serves the structuring of a mere war economy. If the CNT

achieves this objective – the creation of a truly majority proletarian bloc – then it will be possible to speak of the construction of a libertarian and anti-dictatorial socialism. But the sine qua non of this future is victory over the hordes of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. Any precocious attempt at a totalitarian realisation of the CNT could only take the form of a confederal dictatorship, which would have to reckon with many difficulties, but which above all would not live long because it would be the death blow for the resistance force of the people against Franco. Of course, the Spanish workers, in order to be able to see a meaning in their sacrifices, must know that they are finally fighting for a new society and not for the rotten parliamentary democracy which is the ideal of the CNT's allies in this war. But this guarantee lies precisely in the alliance policy, and who could deny that this policy has already had its successes? Remember the reaction of the left wing of the UGT to the formation of the Negrín government¹⁶, and the formidable struggle within the UGT between revolutionary socialism and bourgeois conceptions. Here a proletarian front is being formed which will one day be a factor in the revolutionary social victory of the people.

The second revolution, then, is not a problem of acts of violence at these times, but a question of tenacious constructive work and preparation, for which the forces of the Confederation must be contained instead of being spent without a plan, as the provocateurs wish. The CNT believes in its mission, in a better future for Spain, and has its instinct for preservation. Certain foreign anarchists advise it a policy of catastrophes, telling it that it is all the same – white or red fascism – and that it is only necessary to be consistent with the letter of the programme, whether this leads to success or suicide. The CNT is right not to listen to such propaganda. It bears the responsibility for the life of a people who want to save themselves and see in the CNT one of the guarantees of their life. One day, if the European workers start to move and a new wind of rebellion blows in other countries, Spain will be able to resume its struggle for libertarian communism, and it will do so, once again in the front rank of the European nations, as on 19 July.

Today, the most vital, the most 'revolutionary' part of the Spanish people, which is the CNT, must do everything to make the anti-fascist victory possible, even if it is not yet the victory of the social revolution. To this end, it is important that all possible levers be brought into play and that pressure be exerted wherever possible to create the most favourable situation possible for loyal Spain. For the realisation of this plan it would be necessary to consider the whole of international politics and social life, as well as the workers' movement of other tendencies, given the fact that a mass movement of CNT tendencies does not exist abroad. Such a political line for the CNT is its alliance policy. The CNT is in a different condition than, for example, the Bolshevik party before it came to power in Russia. For a state communist party it is a question of taking power, nothing else, in order to organise a new economy from it. For Marxists, this is the mission of a political minority, but not for the CNT. For the CNT – something which most critical anarchists have forgotten – it is a question of wanting to structure a popular socialism from the bottom up, based on the economic organisations of the working class itself. The free will of the majority of the workers must therefore be available in order to realise socialism in this non-dictatorial sense. This is only possible through the alliance. There is no other way if the CNT does not want to become what we are all fighting against: a Bolshevik party.

¹⁶ Juan Negrín, PSOE politician and prime minister of Republican Spain from May 1937 until the end of the war in 1939.

The May Days and the Opposition of the CNT

The reasons why the CNT could not make a totalitarian revolution either in July 1936 or in May 1937¹⁷ are also to be found in the international situation. We anarchists are accustomed to a certain absolutism and to underestimate reality, which sometimes leads us to abstract propaganda which does not correspond to the possibilities of the moment.

Profound social revolutions can never take place in one country alone. In our times, the interdependence of countries is even closer than it has ever been. Certainly, in a general revolutionary situation existing in several countries, the proletariat of one country can strike the first blow, setting in motion the revolutionary energies of other countries which were only waiting for a signal. But we must get rid of the abstract concept of revolution which we have had up to now and on which most of the criticism of the CNT is based. Its outbreak is not a question of courage alone.

But what was the international situation in 1936-37? I have already said several times that Spain lived completely separated from the rest of Europe and that its development lacked any parallel with that of other countries. Europe had little influence on Spain; and Spain's actions had no consequences on the other side of the Pyrenees.

The revolutionary situation in Spain is in a sense an anachronism in present-day history, for the dynamic trend in Europe is unfortunately not proletarian revolution, but fascism. Let us not deceive ourselves! The whole of Central Europe is fascist. Fascism has won triumph after triumph; the proletariat has lost everything. The democracies are becoming more and more authoritarian, and the working class of the European countries is not inclined to exchange its reformist mentality for a new revolutionary dynamism.

The revolutions in Central Europe failed after the war, and Russian state communism ceased to be a factor that promised to quickly bring about world revolution, and instead became a nation state with all the characteristics of a modern imperialist state.

Fascism has become the heir of the lost revolutions, and the working class finds itself in complete passivity. Had this not been the case, the first sparks of the July struggles would have had to produce a formidable reaction among the workers of all countries, which would have had to take forms already threatening to European fascism. This did not happen. It was impossible. The European workers do not think of social revolution. The only thing they can understand at this moment, the only thing they feel is the necessity to defend themselves against fascism. They anxiously turn their eyes to Spain, but unable to act themselves, they expect everything from the workers of that country.

1936-37 has completely different characteristics from 1917-18. Naturally there existed in all European countries circles of revolutionary proletarians who criticised the reformist development of the workers' movement, the imperialist policy of Russia and capitalism in all its forms, opposing it with the idea of proletarian social revolution. These were the syndicalist, anarchist and communist opposition movements which acted as best they could everywhere, but all of them without contact with the masses, and without any immediate hope of achieving this. This says nothing at all against the ability, the courage and the right to live of these small movements. Their historic hour has not yet come, that is all; but it will come. All these movements have used the social revolution in Spain for their propaganda, but without any result. To believe that these

¹⁷ The May Days were a period of clashes between different factions within the Republican forces in Catalonia, which ended in a reduction of influence of the CNT and the outlawing of the POUM.

little groups in various countries could have produced a real revolutionary current in Europe if the CNT had acted in a more totalitarian sense is utterly ridiculous. I was even told one day that if the CNT in Barcelona had made the revolution in July or May, then – perhaps – the sailors on the German, English, etc., warships in the Mediterranean would have revolted and joined the revolution.

Such a feud is certainly the height of that abstract and sterile absolutism of the anarchist movement, without which we would have done a little more than we have been able to do so far. The small revolutionary movements in Europe, with their newspaper circulations of 3, 4, 5 or 10 thousand, would not have been able to support a revolutionary action such as the CNT's; and the reputation of Spanish anarchism in Europe, thanks to the slanderous campaigns of Marxism for 70 years, is so bad that the proletariat would have reacted in a very different way from what we would want.

The CNT had never studied the European situation before 19 July, and itself lived in an absolutism even more extreme than anarchism outside of Spain, if that is possible. But when on 20 July the militants found themselves victorious on the barricades with weapons in hand, they let themselves be guided by an instinct that was right. Who dares to say that it was cowardice that guided those men at the very moment when they had done the greatest thing in their lives?

I have said before that in July the CNT was able to win because it did not fight for its own organisation, or on the basis of some plan worked out only in the heads of the militants, but because it did what everyone felt had to be done. In May 1937, the situation was very different. Of the state of mind of the militants of the CNT and FAI I shall speak further in the chapter on the problem of the so-called opposition. It is true that impatience and indignation against the treacherous attitude of the so-called communists had produced in a part of the militants a state of agitation which expressed itself in the events of May, and in the belief that it was possible to go for revolution at this time, while another part of the militants maintained the interpretation of the facts which the CNT had adopted and made its own at the beginning of the war. Let us not forget that the Catalan Plenums and the National Plenum, after the events, approved the attitude of the Committees by an absolute majority. I do not deny that a minority in the movement had a different opinion. But this minority, in my opinion, still thinks as the CNT thought before 19 July, when it believed that the problem of the revolution was a question of the courageous action of a few thousand men and nothing more. This is, in short, the revolutionary conception of the anarchist movement of the 19th century.

If the CNT had finally carried out its armed movement in May, it would have been an action similar to those of December 8, 1933, or even to earlier subversive movements, that is to say, a movement of rebellion of a minority against the indifference of one part and the resistance of another part of the working people. In no way could the CNT have placed itself in a position similar to that of 19 July. We shall return to this problem later. At this point, I feel the need to say something more about the situation in May 1937. The statement has been spread everywhere that the CNT at the time of its "ceasefire" had already won. This is not true. It is nothing more than one of the many cases of self-deception so common in anarchist circles.

It is true that certain military operations within the city, although not as easily as some claim, could have been carried out favourably for the CNT. But it was only afterwards that the real difficulties would have arisen. The fighting had to be generalised throughout Catalonia, the troops from Valencia were on the move, and the air force and ships were in port, while the ammunition for a fight lasting several days was lacking. The Confederal forces would have come from the

front, and Franco behind them, of course. Let us make no mistake; the CNT had not won at that moment. It had allowed itself to be provoked and taken to the field where the enemy wanted to keep it. That is all. But the mission of the CNT is precisely to go the way it has set itself after a thorough examination of the situation and with a view to the future, instead of being at every moment the victim of all the petty provocations of the adversaries who want to fish in troubled waters. The tactics of the CNT must be determined by the CNT itself collectively, in a historical perspective, and without reacting arbitrarily at all times. Naturally, these requirements of organisation and disciplined tactics, without which the CNT would condemn itself to death, did not easily enter into the mindset of some of the militants. As anarchists they were accustomed to an unlimited individualism, dealing in their propaganda and actions almost exclusively with all the small resistances which capitalism and the state immediately and uninterruptedly opposed to them, and in propaganda, the comrades were content to protest continually in a general way against all the deficiencies, evils and crimes of capitalism, and without any system of practical cases which were offered to demonstrate the general thesis. Today the situation is different. Anarchism cannot be satisfied with a literary struggle against everything bad, ugly and unpleasant in this world, with a description of the good that social revolution would bring for all, but must give slogans for a mass movement, slogans that are immediately applicable and correspond to the real possibilities. These slogans must come out of a continuous common analysis of the situation, and the organisation must abide by them. This is new for the organisation, but it is necessary. It is a question of taking the decisive steps from individualist, purely ethical anarchism to the anarchism of realisation, constructive, creative, and of a mass organisation.

The CNT had to try to perfect its organisation in the midst of the struggle; and the absence of this new form of organisation and collective discipline in the first months has determined many of the so-called concessions to the adversary. Of course, in the anti-fascist front there are tensions and internal struggles which never end and can never end. But the CNT has to be careful not to overstretch themselves in these varied struggles. That risks breaking the common front, which is the only possibility of continuing the war. The CNT is totally committed to the war and would, in Durruti's words "renounce everything except victory".

That this war has led to a growth of communist influence while in reality a communist movement in Spain does not exist is a problem incomprehensible to many. The key to the enigma is the role of Russia in the Spanish war. Practically all the important weapons, the ones that made the continuation of the war possible and without which Franco would have been in Valencia and Barcelona, are Russian. We are not talking here about the fact that this help came too late and that Spain has to pay dearly for it and that Russia, moreover, is trying to interfere in Spanish domestic politics by doing the same thing to anti-fascist Spain as Hitler and Mussolini did on the other side of the trenches. But let us bear in mind that with the weapons came specialists and officers who knew how to use and coordinate them. The Spaniards lacked all technical practice in modern weaponry and all contemporary military science. These are things that cannot be learnt in twelve months but can only be the result of long training and in-depth special studies. All this was brought to the Spaniards by foreigners, and among them first of all by the Russians. Modern weapons have their logical consequences in terms of military organisation. Militarisation was necessary in this respect.

Of course, it was very difficult for the Spanish militants of the CNT and the FAI to understand this problem in time, in order to be able to counteract the danger of the development of the war. If a militarisation under the initiative and the direction of the CNT and the FAI had been carried

out when the time was ripe, everything would have been better. But in reality, the Confederal militias were opposed to this tendency; and with the iron logic of the organisation of war, militarisation had to be imposed on them from above and from outsiders. I am not accusing anyone; I am only speaking of facts. I know very well how, by a long and systematic work of sabotage, the centralists had exhausted the nerves of our militiamen on the Aragon front; they were in a state of deep agitation and indignation in which they wanted nothing to do with any militarisation, until the centralists of Valencia found the occasion for a definitive blow against this front. It is well known, however, that the greater part of the Confederal militia is still on this front and has its heroic part in the offensive of these weeks; but had it acted distinctly, in time, I believe that the CNT in Aragon could be much more powerful than it is. But it is the same case as that of May: the Marxists employed their refined tactics of pin-pricks until they had the Confederals where they wanted them so that they could easily attack them. It is the eternal problem of anarchism, which always again becomes the victim of politics, because it itself knows only the spontaneous reaction conditioned by the moment, but has no political line and perspective of its own. Certain parties of opposition Marxism are today interested in the CNT for the simple reason that they think it will be possible to deform the CNT in their direction, and make it a prop for their more or less Bolshevik ideas. The friendship of some Dutch Trotskyist party, or of an independent workers' party in England, must be taken with great caution. The refined Marxist politicians who lead this movement are a little more politically adept than the CNT, and it would be catastrophic for the CNT and the international movement to allow themselves to be influenced and exploited by them. We fight Bolshevism, but we must avoid any influence on the CNT from opposition Bolshevism or Trotskyism, which are nothing other than that. Already in Spain, in certain propaganda and slogans of the so-called Friends of Durruti, and also in other media of ours, one can clearly see how the comrades, for lack of clear anarcho-syndicalist conceptions, allow themselves to be carried away by certain POUMist clichés.

But if this is the case in the international arena, it is even more dangerous.

Is there an opposition? That is to say, is there a current in the CNT which forms an organic bloc with its own programme and which has a complete view of the facts and a political and social perspective which can serve as a starting point to give another direction to events in Spain?

This is a question that can only be answered with a very detailed knowledge of the situation within the CNT. There was talk of an opposition in the CNT as if it were an organism which would even be capable of forming a new branch of the IWA in Spain, in case the CNT withdraws from the IWA. This detail is proof that some comrades abroad have a completely incorrect view of Spanish reality, and also of the mission of the IWA at this moment. Indeed, it seems that certain anarchist media abroad want a split in the CNT and encourage it, whereas, in my opinion, this danger does not really exist in Spain itself. Moreover, it would be madness and a crime to work in this direction in the war in Spain.

Let's go into the details. After the militarisation in Aragon, some groups of confederal militiamen were formed who were concentrated in Gelsa, who were opponents of it [militarisation], and for the most part left the front, doing precisely what the enemy of the CNT wanted, that is, to weaken the CNT militias numerically and morally. Here are the origins of the group which later became known as "The Friends of Durruti". After the month of May, they began to publish a newspaper entitled *El Amigo del Pueblo* (The People's Friend). The group first clashed decisively with the organisation when, during the struggle in May, it published a clandestine leaflet which was in contradiction with the slogans of the committees, this leaflet expressing, roughly, the po-

sition of the Trotskyists within the POUM. Practically, the opposition – if one can speak of such a phenomenon – is the product of the influence that the political-dictatorial ideas of oppositional Bolshevism exert on the syndicalist and federalist ideology of the CNT, albeit sporadically and in minuscule cases.

Before commenting on what this current calls its programme, I will point out a few more causes which gave rise to this attitude of certain comrades. In addition to *El Amigo del Pueblo*, two other clandestine sheets appeared in Barcelona, *Anarquia*, and *Libertad*. These are distinguished from the first by the fact that they do not give themselves the patience of wanting to be a programmatic opposition, limiting themselves to using a different tone and greater frankness in their propaganda, expressing ideas which in reality everyone feels, but which cannot be published in the legal newspapers because of censorship. These are especially critical considerations about the communist party and more or less sensational revelations about some of its leaders, things which in part could not be published in the official organs of the movement even in the absence of censorship, because they are obliged to maintain the general anti-fascist line which is the basis of the war. But here is one thing that explains the unfortunate fact of the existence of this press and also the critical attitude of other newspapers such as *Acracia*, *Ideas*, etc: The rather colourless character of certain official organs. There are newspapers in which it is noticeable not only that journalists with no knowledge of our movement and its ideas contribute to them, but even the absence of responsible comrades and the lack of a real ideological culture and wide experience in the movement of those who write them.

What is needed is a propaganda with a clear political vision of the moment, which at the same time is in tune with our ideas. The CNT has a gigantic mission in the task of familiarising hundreds of thousands of new workers with its ideas, who have no revolutionary or libertarian basis whatsoever. These are the latest entrants, the great mass of the CNT, who some foreign critics believe to be the revolutionary base of the CNT and who find themselves in opposition to the supposedly reformist leaders. If one looks at the confederal press from this point of view, it is unsatisfactory. But is it possible to blame anyone? No. What causes the deficiencies we are talking about is the lack of militants in the CNT. In the present period, the Spanish organisation needs thousands and thousands of comrades for the combats, and for the responsible positions in public life it occupies, for the management of companies, for its newspapers etc. and it turns out that the demand is much greater than the possibility of satisfying it. The colleagues who are at present in the responsible positions of the movement are not only irreplaceable, but they are also insufficient to fill all these positions. So in many places there are comrades whose ideological or technical skills do not correspond to the demands of their position. Of course, one can be exchanged for another, there can be personal changes, and sometimes it is necessary to make them in order to improve the distribution of the militants on the posts where they have to work. My considerations only refer to the present militants as a whole and to all the needs to work in responsible positions that are presented today. The old anarchist militants of Spain are today in the leading positions of the movement, with very few exceptions. Personal reasons, lack of understanding of some basic needs of the line of the movement at this time, fatigue, disillusionment and partly understandable disappointments, cause the passivity or critical attitude of the few militants who are on the fringes of the activity of the committees. But it would be completely wrong to believe that, in addition to the active militants, there are opposition militants capable, numerically and intellectually, of taking the place of the current leaders.

All this is not to say that within the active militants, that is, in the cadres of those who are so superficially and mechanically baptised from abroad, there is a dead and colourless uniformity of conceptions. To suppose this would be an offence to the Spanish movement, and no one who has known it since before July can seriously believe in anything of the kind. No; in reality, within this organism of “leaders” there are nuances, there is discussion, there are continuous changes of impressions and a feverish process of compensation and interpenetration of different interpretations, a process from which at every moment is born anew what is called, in a not very happy word, “the line of the movement in general”, which is not the dictate of a few, but the organic and ever-evolving result of the thoughts and feelings of thousands and thousands of militants. Their ideas are certainly not the product of theoretical abstractions, but at every moment are the result of the synthesis between the revolutionary and libertarian instincts of each militant and the thousand realities of practical life that occupy him, realities that had not been sufficiently foreseen in the old theory. This says absolutely nothing against the theory, against the principles. I only mean that the moment principles are used for the first time, they always undergo a certain change, a certain widening; they begin to live, whereas on paper they were a dead letter.

To a certain degree, divergences within the movement are also caused by different temperaments and by the natural discrepancy of expression between the young and the older generation. One must look at things psychologically and consider the whole complex of causes which form the different interpretations of a moment. Let us imagine that all the members of an organisation are more or less convinced of the need for a circumstantial collaboration with other sectors even if they have a very different ideology. Then there will be some difference in the way of expressing oneself between those who occupy positions in the organs of this collaboration, considered necessary by all, and those who happen to work in the organisation of their own movement, without the latter being the opposition of the former.

The conviction that the CNT has to collaborate with other sectors, not only in the sense of the trade union alliance but also politically, has only since a few years ago begun to impose itself on the militants, and within the last fifteen months it took shape in the reality of confederal life with an unexpected rapidity. It is quite natural that this collaboration brings a lot of unpleasantness, that the necessary sacrifices strains the nerves of some militants. After almost a century of heroic but sometimes quixotic struggle against all, the need to collaborate with other sectors that were previously fought against, in whose social convictions one cannot have great confidence, is naturally difficult. There is a lot of discontent which in some cases takes the form of opposition. Foreign colleagues who do not know Spanish psychology and the Spanish movement well, could talk to many comrades and hear from their lips harsh and desperate words regarding the collaboration and the sacrifices of their own ideology which the CNT imposes on itself..., and they would surely consider as oppositionists many who would later reveal themselves as members of a responsible committee, who know very well that in these moments the CNT cannot be guided by vague feelings, nor by hatred against its adversaries, but that reason and the reality of things must also be consulted. In the breast of every good militant there are “two souls” in this sense; and precisely he who knows this from his own experience cannot despair of the Spanish movement and knows for sure that the libertarian instinct lives on forever and is stronger than ever in these times, when the CNT has to give itself a political direction and work out a collective tactic, which, after so many decades of unconditional struggle, cannot but be a little difficult and give rise to the clash of different temperaments.

In no case should it be thought that the somewhat critical but unclear attitude of certain militants is the expression of the spirit of the so-called rank and file against the so-called leaders as a whole. Some anarchists believe that the rank and file is always revolutionary. In our case, the opposite is the case. There may be certain strata of the rural population in which there is an extremist revolutionism, even in the milieus which have recently come to the Confederation; but this is by no means the case in the cities and in the big trade unions. A large neutral mass has joined them, which is an enormous burden for the CNT and which must be educated, but which does not yet feel the ideas, nor is it ready for a struggle which would cost it sacrifices. There are trade unions which should be the head of the CNT and which are the opposite. Think of the big cultural unions which before the July movement had a few dozen or a few hundred militants and which today group together in some towns all the people in the trade, such as the Barcelona Public Performing Arts, Liberal Professions and others, which in no way guarantee an evolution in the direction of our ideas and which are sometimes even conservative, the professional spirit in them being opposed to all the attempts of those who want to put the union at the service of ideas and revolution. Indeed, here we come up against contradictions in our federalist conceptions and we have to commit acts which seem to be in opposition to them. The National Committee considered it necessary to intervene by one of its delegates in several federations of newly created industries and on the basis of new recruits, in order to guarantee work in the direction of ideas and to prevent routine professionalism from dominating these new organisations. In Barcelona, a German and an Argentinean militant founded a people's theatre, the first revolutionary rehearsal of a theatrical character, which was tenaciously opposed by the conservative elements of the trade union, the same trade union which at the same time was staging a play of little artistic value, but with more or less communist tendencies, to whose premiere the Russian consul was invited. If the above-mentioned theatre of the people was able to live a little longer than the union would like to grant it, this was due to a strong personal intervention of comrade Vazquez near the Local Federation of Barcelona, that is to say, an intervention of the supreme "leader" against the rank and file. This is just one example, but it is a symbol and should give an idea of the real problems of the present structure of the CNT. The most foolish thing, the easiest thing to do to satisfy one's own pride as an infallible revolutionary, is to accuse a few responsible people instead of dealing with the heart of the matter.

But let us return to the comrades who today believe themselves to be the opposition in the CNT. In issue no.5 of *El Amigo del Pueblo*, we find an editorial which starts from the thesis – a very good one – that it is necessary to have a revolutionary theory in order to be able to act in a revolutionary way. As a revolutionary programme, the article proposes the creation of a revolutionary junta and the economic predominance of the trade unions. The junta must surely be composed of the POUM and the "Friends of Durruti", even if this is not said; it cannot be different. But what these unions would be, that should exercise economic predominance, is stated in the programme published in issue no.4 of the same newspaper, where it clearly and simply demands: "forced unionisation". It has already been said that the CNT in its present form is an organism burdened with the weight of a mass which still has to be educated to reach the level of the old, smaller movement. Now, all workers would be forced to join the CNT; they would be obliged to do so. Naturally, such forced unions – I am only using the terminology of the 100% anarchists – would not be able to run themselves, but would have to be led by leaders who would be controlled by the POUM – "Friends of Durruti" junta. The same would happen if the workers could choose between the UGT and the CNT. If one wants an immediate revolutionary

development in these forms, one must see to it that the “forced unions” in question, CNT or UGT, have the leadership that does what the junta commands. All this would have nothing to do with anarcho-syndicalism, nor with anarchism or libertarian communism. It corresponds one hundred per cent to the ideology of the POUM. This would mean establishing a dictatorship and nothing else. Besides, naturally, the declaration of open war on communists, socialists and republicans. The brigades of different ideologies which today hold the front against Franco would lead arms against each other; so would the revolutionary workers and those who do not yet understand the necessity of revolution, or the organs of the state under more or less counter-revolutionary command, respectively, in the rear. The inevitable consequences of such a procedure have already been discussed above.

In many details it could be seen that the opponents in reality have no concrete programme and that the whole tendency is nothing more than the quite understandable expression of discontent and revolutionary impatience of a part of the militants, who, out of their quite understandable hatred of the enemies of the Confederation, are so carried away that they forget not only all the commandments of tactical prudence, but also the very anarchism in whose name they are acting, that they frankly demand the proclamation of their own dictatorship.

I would still like to quote one of those significant details which tell us more than the programme of the “Friends of Durruti”. In the organ of this grouping, no.6, it speaks of diplomatic problems, and says: “The same representatives that our democratic and workers’ Republic sends abroad continue to make pacts under the slogan of democracy with governments that only represent the interests of reaction.... Why do they persist in their positions? Let us send abroad representatives of revolution and not of democracy. Let us send them close to our class brothers and sisters and not to the governments”. This could mean either the use of diplomatic posts for revolutionary propaganda, or else collaboration in obtaining these posts, or else that Spain, in this counter-revolutionary epoch, must break with everything and send abroad only propagandists of the CNT, of the FAI and the POUM, who, of course, could not get in touch with the workers in any European country, because the governments would know how to prevent it; and the European workers are in a state of passivity in which they still practically listen to their former reformist leaders and follow them blindly. Do not believe that a few Spanish revolutionary militants, who could perhaps enter France clandestinely, would be in a position to bring about a profound change in the present psychology of the world working class. This psychological change, so necessary and desirable, can only be the result of a long process and of some great political or social catastrophes abroad; but, in the meantime, Spain must still remain in official relations with the outside world as it is, otherwise it would not be able to buy a single rifle.

Those of us who are abroad should not deceive the Spanish comrades about the real international situation. It is therefore false to demand a new revolutionary advance from them in order to awaken the workers in other countries. The real process of revolutionary progress must go the other way round: the European workers must move, they must go into action so that the Spanish workers, who have already done something almost incredible in revolutionary action, can advance still further. We have, then, the unique mission of studying the political and social conditions outside Spain in order to be able to change them. And it is precisely as responsible militants from other countries that we should say to the critical and sceptical spirits within the CNT: comrades we understand your uneasiness, your restlessness, your impatience, your anger against the allies who deceive you; but do not let yourselves be provoked, for this is what they want in order to weaken our great CNT. We abroad base our propaganda on what the CNT is

doing in Spain; but it is necessary that this CNT be a united and well-cohesive movement so that the workers of the world understand its values. And an “anarchist” Trotskyist dictatorship in Spain would in no case meet with the sympathy of the European workers. Do not allow yourselves to be dragged into continuing that line of catastrophic politics which has already so often harmed Spanish anarchism. On 19 July, the workers of the world had to be convinced that the much maligned Spanish anarchism was a factor of anti-fascist struggle such as did not exist anywhere else in the world; and today we must demonstrate something else: that it is a movement which also has a political prudence and which knows how to obey the needs of the moment and to work in a systematic preparation of its own achievements.

It is natural that within this Spanish movement, especially in the ranks of the old militants, there are disagreements; but these should not be brought to international publicity, but should be decided within the Spanish movement itself, which does not prevent them from being discussed abroad but within the organisations, instead of in the eyes of the adversary.

What must be known in any case is that there is no opposition in the sense of a closed bloc representing the mass of the CNT in opposition to the committees, whose policy is opposed by another concrete programme. The programme of the “Friends of Durruti” has already been defined, and the rest that exists in critical manifestations, in reality only refers to the form, in which the CNT is to collaborate in the anti-fascist movement, but collaboration itself is not rejected. See, for example, an article of ideas of 27 August, which fights against any new participation of the CNT in the government, but which says: “The National Confederation of Labour... will not allow any of its members to be imprisoned, any collectivity to be assaulted..., and will propagate the fact that the constituted government will not have in it an obstacle to continue the armed battle against international fascism; but if it fails, the National Defence Council will be constituted with only the CNT and UGT”. This programme, although it is wrapped up in many harsh words, criticising the collaborationism of the CNT, does not reject collaboration either, but, at most, demands cooperation in other forms. For it must be understood that from support for the government’s war policy to the tendency to exercise a share of control by occupying certain positions of responsibility, despite the dangers that this entails, the road is not far, and that there can be no question here of disagreements which would justify a split. And it is interesting that the CNT-UGT workers’ alliance is also mentioned here, and it seems to be recognised that dissolving the UGT and forcing its members to join the CNT would not be anarchist or even practically possible, if the UGT is not taken as a reality to be reckoned with. But this is what is decisive for the present line of the CNT, which in reality everyone recognises, with the exception perhaps of those who really propagate “forced trade unionisation” which has nothing to do with the principles of the IWA, and anarcho-syndicalism.

I think, then, that the opposition that is noted only concerns the details of collaboration in the anti-fascist front, and the details of the defence of the workers’ gains against the bourgeois elements and Bolshevism. Nobody, with the exception perhaps of a few madmen who do not express themselves publicly, nobody says that the CNT must sink the anti-fascist bloc, and nobody, with the exception of the “forced trade unionists”, denies the necessity of arriving at an understanding with the UGT. Well then: it must be recognised that the rapprochement with the UGT is a long and difficult process which presupposes certain changes within the UGT itself, changes which cannot be forced; nor can they be encouraged by publishing articles shouting that Largo

Caballero¹⁸ is just another politician, but can only be encouraged and stimulated by carrying out a well thought-out policy of attracting sympathy. But as long as this alliance is not a reality, and as the CNT alone cannot take up the public cause, the anti-fascist front must be taken as it is. What should be the amount of energy which, without endangering the basis of the war, can be used to defend the revolutionary and libertarian cause within the anti-fascist front? I believe that this problem must be decided among the militants of the CNT themselves. To intervene in these conflicts – from the outside – can only lead to giving them a gravity which in Spain, in spite of the sometimes very unpleasant forms of discussion, they do not have.

Now, a few words to show that all the comrades of the CNT realise the difficult situation and know very well that the action of the Spanish movement's present political line has not yielded very satisfactory results, that mistakes must be corrected and that we must act more wisely. At the Congress of Spanish Anti-Fascist Action Committees, held in Nîmes on 21 and 22 August 1937, Comrade Mascarell, the French delegate of the CNT, said: "We have to fight many battles of a political nature. We have fought one and lost it. But losing one does not mean that we have lost the possibility of total victory. What do we have to do? To work intelligently, tactfully and skilfully, to seek the causes that have led to the loss of this battle; and when we have made this study and have all the elements of judgement to be able to undertake the offensive, we will go on the offensive to win the lost ones and conquer superior positions". It can be seen, then, that defending the necessity of political work on the more or less obligatory line of collaboration within the anti-fascist front does not mean declaring the CNT and its committees infallible. The responsible comrades themselves do not do this. Here I would only like to stress that the necessary decisions in this sense must be made in Spain itself, among the comrades of the CNT, and that it would be aggravating their tragic situation to want to determine the Spanish tactics from outside and to deepen the tactical discrepancies that may exist in Spain.

Economic preparation and style in propaganda

The Spanish anarchist movement has always set a special example to foreign movements in connection with the eternal discussion about the relations that should exist between anarchists and the economic organisation of the proletariat. Anarchism is a social ideal which embraces all the ramifications of life and whose expansion is not satisfied with participation in the class struggle and in the preparation of the economic bases for a new society. But, indeed, this participation in the economic struggle is imposed on everyone as a fundamental duty. The Spanish anarchists, despite all the specific tendencies that existed within their movement, have always understood this basic necessity for anarchism. Action on the economic base was for them always indisputable. The trade unions were the field of action of anarchism, and, thanks to the interpenetration of the two principles – syndicalism and anarchism – the trade unions of the CNT have never been in danger of becoming a reformist movement. Immediately after the struggle in Barcelona, which brought so much glory to the CNT and the FAI, I felt once again what I had always observed in the CNT, and which was still typical for the Spanish movement: certain almost tragic discrepancies between its spontaneous combativity, its courage in open struggle and its organisational capacity, its political ability to profit from the fruits of its own victories.

¹⁸ Francisco Largo Caballero, leader of the PSOE and UGT. Prime minister of the Spanish Republic September 1936 – May 1937.

In politics, where honesty and openness are of little value, the CNT has less chance than on the barricade. But there is more. I had to note that the lack of economic and social preparedness which manifested itself in the CNT was and is a matter of the anarcho-syndicalist movement in general. We have clear conceptions on certain general lines of our libertarian programme; but we lack a concrete vision of many important details of the social problem, of which I now want to speak on the basis of Spanish experiences. These experiences have confirmed for me all the thinking on constructive problems which, as some people know, I have been holding for more than ten years. The economic ideas of most of the comrades were limited to the following main ones: expropriation of land and instruments of labour, abolition of money and proclamation of the free right of consumption. The first part of this programme must be made concrete, the second part is based on a series of illusions and is of no value for revolutionary practice, it is pure subversive lyric which can only harm us.

In our programme there was no detail regarding the problem of the petty bourgeoisie. If we want to avoid a proletarian dictatorship, in more or less brutal forms, we must have a line of conduct which allows us at least to neutralise the petty bourgeoisie and the small rural landowner to a certain extent. But what would be the economic relationship between the workers' union which manages big industry and big business, and the sector of the economy which is in the hands of small proprietors who have few workers or only work with their own families? What would be the concrete form of the economic system based on these two factors? What would be the coercive means to force the petty bourgeoisie to work in the new order if it does not volunteer, or if it starts to sabotage?

How would the products be valued, how would they be distributed among the consumers, how would the raw materials and working tools be secured at the places of production, how would the workers be compensated, how would a certain equality of living conditions be guaranteed to all working people and small proprietors who work?

It must be said that many anarchists, in trying to answer all these questions, speak as if the world were still in the Middle Ages. The experiences that have been made with communist experiments in purely agricultural districts, where the needs of the consumers are still very small, cannot be taken as a measure and model for the great task of organising on the basis of freedom and justice the supply of a modern people in an industrialised country which, moreover, lives in part on imported raw materials and on the export of a part of its production.

Let us say frankly that the CNT had no programme in this direction; but let us admit just as frankly that in all the other sections of the IWA there is no clarity on this point either. But whereas the foreign sections could easily suffice themselves with the propaganda of the general lines and principles of a libertarian socialist regime, a critical rather than a constructive mission, the CNT had to face the practicalities, which proved a little more difficult.

What the trade unions found, after the expropriation of the workshops, was a typical exhaustive economy, both in production and distribution of raw materials and finished products. Then came the difficulties. The management of the factories, by the trade unions themselves, is not yet socialism. Socialism means an organised production, which is in fixed relation to an equitable distribution of the finished products. Moreover, the problem of socialism, already in normal times and even more so in wartime, is linked with the problem of the redistribution of the workers over different industries and the necessity to increase production considerably.

Much has been said about the so-called leaders of the CNT and their alleged incapacity. What an anarchist way of looking at the problems of a social transformation! The question of whether

the responsible “leaders” of the CNT have made too many concessions to political opponents has been discussed. It is very difficult to say anything definite about this problem and, moreover, it is not the details that are interesting, but the general line of the anti-fascist struggle adopted by the CNT at the beginning. But if concessions have been made, if within the anti-fascist front the position of the CNT is not what one would wish, this is only a reflection of the economic position which the trade unions, i.e. those at the base of the organisation, have been able to conquer and fortify. And in this respect, has the CNT achieved a satisfactory result? Publicly we have always emphasised the constructive merits of the CNT. Indeed, something great has been achieved. For the first time the workers’ trade unions of a large country have taken charge of the economy, or at least of important parts of it, and have begun to build the foundations of a new society on hitherto unknown foundations – an experiment of undoubted value after the failure of so many attempts at state-directed, top-down economics. But can we be happy, and is everything going well? I say, frankly, no. Reality has undone a number of things. Reality has unravelled a number of over-idealistic notions we had of the capabilities of the working class.

The simple seizure of a factory and its management by the workers does not automatically produce the wonder of making responsible, capable and good workers out of all those who make up the workforce. Moreover, it has been shown that the horizon of many workers ended where their own factory ended, and that they completely lacked a general vision of social needs. This may not sound good in the ears of many illusionists, but there is nothing more dangerous for a revolutionary than to live on illusions. Well, although many good things were done in administration and for the improvement of production, the overall result was not satisfactory, especially because there was no overall plan of production, because the principle of private profit was not duly abolished, and because a plan for reasoned and efficient distribution of food and basic necessities was not worked out in time.

The internal order of the factories and workshops in many cases left much to be desired, lacking in them the necessary work discipline to guarantee the increase in production that was needed. Although there are many reasons to explain these deficiencies (for example, the fact that a good part of the most active and intelligent men had gone to the militias and another part had become part of the many steering committees, also outside of production itself, in political, municipal, cultural life, etc.), it must be said that the unions have not achieved the understanding of all the workers with that spirit of socialism and solidarity that can only guarantee a truly just economy. And this has caused a counterattack of the economic reaction, has given arguments to the former privileged and the political parties that defend them and that, naturally, had an easy game in opposing the old methods of economy and administration, already routine, to the deficient experiments of the workers. A natural reaction to a certain degree, but one which also caused difficulties for those who held leading positions in the political life of the country. Without denying that the political inexperience of these comrades may have caused many errors, I would like to emphasise that the real problem to be discussed is a problem of trade unionism, of the rank and file, and not of leaders or politicians. To prove that these words do not have only an abstract value and that I do not express with them a personal opinion, mere impressions of general character, here are some facts that speak eloquently.

In *‘Fragua Social’*, 28 September 1937, I find an article entitled “An inflexible economic direction to save the revolution” in which it says among other things:

“In the countryside, the majority of the day labourers are paid low wages, while those in factories and workshops often earn 700 pesetas a month for non-technical workers. It is this lack of tact that

causes hardship, and not the attitude of the peasants who mirror the cities. A revision of behaviour is necessary to avoid the failure of the proletarian economy based on the trade unions. If necessary, an economic dictatorship is necessary to bring all the egoists to heel, and, in view of the results, they will be convinced that the path of individual egoism was not the best one. To let everyone go his own way, detached from the general discipline, is to prepare the ground for a daring man to proclaim himself dictator and kill the spirit of the revolution. Before this happens, the workers' organisations, by reason of their economic postulates, must be the ones to lead the way in saving their principles. If the exigencies of circumstances impose this conduct, it can and must lead to economic, social and political freedom, a trio which is in danger of death because of the ambition of the selfish and the unconscious, stimulated by those who have an interest in the failure of the workers as one of their destinies. This is a new aspect which must be studied by the two trade union centres, coinciding in principle in this aspiration of the proletariat to unify action, combining peasant interests with industrial interests, proceeding in an appropriate manner against those who might become undisciplined."

And he added that it is not only a question of the relationship between town and country, but also that between factory and factory and between producer and consumer in general. If the CNT, i.e. its trade unions, its rank and file, had been able to achieve complete and convincing success for all in the economy, the so-called leaders would have been able to embark on the path which corresponded to the economic strength of the Confederation; but this was not to be expected. Now it is easy and not very anarchist to accuse a few leaders instead of studying the basic causes of the phenomena and recognising that the failure belongs to all of us who were not properly prepared in the sense of the ideals we defend. For me, certainly, recognising this absolutely does not mean that we should allow ourselves to be dragged down by pessimism. It just suggests to me that we were not realistic enough, that we must strive to be more realistic than ever. That we have made propaganda and criticism too easy, without training ourselves, as was necessary for revolutionaries who so strongly criticised everyone else.

Destruction alone is no guarantee for new construction, and the change of ownership does not guarantee social justice, even if there is a willingness to do so. It is necessary to know the economic process, to know how to analyse it, to study in detail the processes of production, the path of the product from the producer to the consumer and the real needs of the population, instead of building castles in the air and elaborating poetic descriptions of a better future, and painting people as angels, which they would be after a thousand years of anarchy. What we must concern ourselves with is to know men and their environment. And as they are, to count on them, to prepare with them, and for them, the first steps that could be taken on a new path towards a future of complete freedom, based on their real capacities and needs, rather than on what we wish them to have. Learning this method is the important thing. We must all learn it, those of the CNT and others. I just have to say that our CNT, forced to do so by circumstances and necessity, which are sometimes the best teachers, is already making up for what it lacked, partly with fantastic speed, without anyone noticing it among those who think they are called upon to criticise it. Instead of criticising, we should help. And I am sure that then relations between the CNT and the foreign comrades would be better.

The CNT has had to learn once and for all that certain libertarian fantasies have nothing to do with the economy of the twentieth century in which we live. How much has been said about free experiment and the possibility of allowing many different forms of economy to exist side by side, without realising that the modern economy is a complex network of social relations between men in which each must fulfil a minimum of duties required of him for the good of

all other producers and consumers! In the specific case of Spain in 1936 it was a question of ensuring a maximum of work for the feeding of the population and of a war which, like all wars, swallows up economic values without producing new ones. These requirements, which are categorical and vital, oblige the maintenance of a binding economic order for all and exclude all arbitrariness which many confuse with socialist freedom. One day comrade Peiro wrote in *'Solidaridad Obrera'* an article which raised a lot of dust, which was misunderstood by many, and by others intentionally misinterpreted, but which contained one of the fundamental, if bitter, truths of the Spanish experience. Peiro said (I am obliged to reconstruct from my memory, as I do not have the newspaper with me):

"A concentration of the most important industries to a national extent is necessary. The needs of production demand it. This national organisation must in any case be carried out either by the trade unions or by the state. If the CNT does not have the necessary organs, i.e. the federations of industries which were already agreed upon in 1931, but which have not yet been realised, the state will have to intervene. The UGT already has its federations of industry; the CNT still lacks them and it is urgent to organise them, if the CNT does not want to lose the ground it is entitled to."

We want freedom to be the basic factor of social reconstruction, the constituent element of socialism, the first stone of the new society and not the last, as the Marxists who want to start with the 100% totalitarian state think. Well, but this will oblige us to translate it organically, that is to say in a well-articulated and cohesive trade union organisation which corresponds, piece by piece, to the real needs of modern economic life.

The foreign sections of the IWA in former times often demanded from the CNT to do more in this direction. In the old days, it made sense. Today, there is a formidable international discussion on the situation of the CNT and nobody takes the trouble to develop their ideas on the basis of the positive aspects of the present process of the CNT's growth. Let us confine the discussion to those facts which mean progress and a promise for a new stage of the revolution in the future, in which the CNT will be able to do better what was insufficiently done last time, because certain experiences were lacking in which, it seems, it was necessary to learn to apply the theory in real life. The creation of the federations of industry due to the realisation of reality, due to the sad experience of the many partial failures, is the most important factor of this progress. In mid-September, a national Plenum of the CNT agreed:

"to hold shortly a Plenum of Regional, County, Local, National and Regional Federations of industry to deal with a specific economic agenda and to study the planning of industries and the intensification of production."

I have come to a project of great importance. It would be desirable that the problems of distribution, which are just as important as those of production, should also be studied in depth. The agreements of the Catalan Regional on the structuring of the industrial unions which *"begin in the cultivation or extraction of the natural product or raw material and end in the distribution of its products"*, adopted at its Congress in February 1937, already show the road to be taken by the whole organisation. As I do not have all my documents now, I cannot point out further details of the economic development of the CNT; I only want to mention its efforts to educate technicians, which it lacked for production as well as to be able to fill certain technical posts of political significance, for which it lacked the men. The National Committee organised a school for radiotelegraphers in Valencia; the Catalan Regional Committee organised a "Laboratory for Experimentation and Testing of Raw Materials" in Masnou; and so much is being done to train the trade unions and to make them understand the needs of the times in which they live and in

which they must show other qualities than the combativeness of the past, which was certainly enough to fight against capitalism, but which, in itself, is still no guarantee of being able to carry out positive work of reconstruction.

It is already clear from the preceding chapters that I am of the opinion that each section of the IWA must be left a margin of freedom in determining its tactics, and that especially small movements of the type of mere ideological propaganda groupings cannot prescribe the way of acting to a mass organisation, even if it confesses to the same ideas.

This does not exclude criticism, but this criticism must remain within the framework of needs. The CNT must not be reproached for things which it alone did not cause, and thus worsen the tragic situation in which it finds itself in its formidable struggle against all the real powers of the world, for fascism, bourgeois democracy and Bolshevism also see their enemy – in Spanish anarcho-syndicalism. If it is necessary to criticise, this criticism must have the character of an effective aid, it must provide the CNT with ideas and propositions applicable in practice, after being studied within the organisation.

Above the right of criticism must be the duty of solidarity. Take as an example the attitude of the Swedish section of the IWA, which also has its own ideas on the tactics of the CNT, but which carries out its public propaganda solely in a sense of solidarity with the CNT and the FAI.

Foreign comrades must also make an effort to understand well the ways in which the CNT propagandists usually externalise their ideas. Those who have been to Spain once, having taken a serious look at the character of Spanish publications and knowing also the publicity of the workers' movements of other countries, know that the way in which the Spanish revolutionaries express themselves is quite different from that of the movements of other countries. And this does not only refer to the way of expression, but even to the way of linking ideas and drawing conclusions from a series of reasonings.

I have often told those who worked in foreign propaganda that, in reality, an article in a Spanish anarchist newspaper, such as it is, is untranslatable, that it cannot be translated, sentence by sentence, into another language. It is always necessary to make a commentary, to change the style, to suppress certain things and to add others, so that the translation says exactly what the article means to the Spanish reader. There are many who have come to Spain accustomed to an analytical way of thinking and to the systematic logic of the articles of substance, which in other countries has revolutionary publicity as its basis; ways which in Spain are only slowly entering to replace the sentimental and somewhat decorative form of expression which was popular and which is understood there by all. One will find in the confederal press few articles which are based on a systematic analysis of the realities and which contain clear and logical expositions of judgement, comprehending in depth a whole special subject of confederal activity, and presenting concrete conclusions, with respect to what the CNT demands and what it wants. In general, foreign comrades are disgusted and even indignant at the deficient content and lack of cohesion of the confederal press; and they are right, but they are completely mistaken if they try to form a judgement about the CNT on the basis of the print it publishes. The same goes for oral propaganda, which does not always satisfy. It is to be hoped that all this will change, but it would be ridiculous to reproach the revolutionary movement of a country for its style of expression, which after all is originated by a series of objective conditions.

These considerations can also serve as a test for the CNT to understand how necessary for it is the collaboration of foreign comrades who are knowledgeable of the countries where it wants to make propaganda, and who know how to adapt it to the countries where they have militated for

the same ideas that inspire the CNT, being familiar with the social and intellectual environment of the respective countries.

In all countries, our libertarian movements are engaged in a hard struggle against reformism and centralist tendencies, above all against the poisoning of the working-class atmosphere by the policy of alliance with capitalist imperialism pursued by the so-called country of the proletariat, Russia. To this situation, to this position of opposition against all, corresponds language and sharp systematic criticism from a doctrinal point of view, which serves to expound the ideas and to judge all the details of social and political life which are of interest to the workers' movement. The CNT, before July, used more or less the same language in its propaganda. Since then, much has changed. On a front of a few thousand kilometres, side by side and fighting against the common enemy, popular soldiers meet, who, like individuals, belong to the most diverse tendencies, but who nevertheless defend themselves for life and death against an enemy who wants to destroy them all. Even if partisan work is done on the front itself, and even if certain sectors dare to sabotage military formations of other tendencies, as has so often happened to confederal columns, a supreme and almost superhuman effort must be made to contain this front and to create an army imbued with the spirit of solidarity and the idea of having a common enemy and a common cause to defend.

It is not understandable that under these circumstances the tone of discussion with men of other tendencies should be different, and that propaganda should be based on the idea of maintaining the common front in spite of everything, the break-up of which would be the quick end for all. Thus, criticism, even against the most dangerous of allies who try to disfigure the popular movement in favour of the former privileged, must impose certain reservations in view of the needs of the moment. It will be difficult for many to understand this, and there is no doubt that it would be much easier, more pleasant and more personally satisfying for all activists to use the same tone as before, and to say everything that one thinks without any reservations. But the situation demands it, and we need today the kind of disciplined militant who perhaps needs more willpower than the classic anarchist propagandist who acted only on personal impulses, without adhering to any general line of conduct.

I find it completely incomprehensible that in a certain press of the IWA today people write against the CNT and publish, week after week, critical articles bringing to light, today one and tomorrow another, real or supposed, deficiencies of the Spanish movement, as if these were happy times in which we have no other concern than to argue to see who is the most ideologically pure. In reality, this propaganda is pernicious not only for the CNT, but also for international anarcho-syndicalism. It would be a matter of prudence and discipline not to reveal our inner divergences in this way to the adversary who is only waiting to exploit them. We are few in the world, a movement which has a great mission to accomplish, and therefore needs a common sense superior to that of the others, and at every moment to give the impression of an unshakable unity to the adversaries. If discussion is necessary, let it take place within the movement. The greatest mistake that has been made in the propaganda against the CNT was to speak publicly about the problem of the leadership and the rank and file in the Spanish organisation. I have already said that if the Spanish organisation has failed in a certain sense and has not done all that was to be done and expected, this is precisely a problem of the rank and file, and that moreover it is only in small part a question of specifically Spanish problems and almost always of questions of anarcho-syndicalist ideology and practice in general, which we must all study and overcome together, those inside and those outside Spain.

No one will deny that this is the time when we as anarchists have to learn some new things and revise some too narrow concepts, but always preserving the aim and the basic line of our movement. The mission of creating a true and well-cohesive revolutionary theory of international anarcho-syndicalism in which there is room for the practice of all is, in these circumstances, a very hard task and requires, in order to work in this direction, much comradeship, much tact, and a conscientious analysis of the realities around us and of the Spanish experience. How ignoble it is at this time to go public with accusations against comrades who are generally in a much more dangerous place than the article writer! And how unwise, tactically, is this method! A rectification of conduct is necessary for many reasons.

I think it will be necessary to study, together with the CNT, our old principles in order to agree on them and to get a clear impression of the position of each section. But after having fixed the general lines on which all can and want to work, it is necessary to introduce a certain change in the statute of the IWA, granting, from now on, a margin of freedom to each section in the choice of its tactical measures. This is essential. At the last plenary session of the IWA, a resolution was passed in which the CNT was forced to break off all direct and indirect collaboration with the governments of Valencia and Barcelona, to abandon all political, economic and doctrinal concessions made to the anti-fascist front and to officially withdraw from the Spanish anti-fascist front. Although immediately after these demands the resolution softens them a little, leaving the CNT free to accept circumstantial pacts, such a procedure is completely impossible. The IWA cannot be the guardian of the CNT. If the CNT, because of the circumstances in its own country and in other countries, is not in a position to pursue that totalitarian policy which is so easily explained in the newspapers, then it must be the mission of the CNT to create the international conditions which will permit a new international policy. The IWA's mission must be to create the international conditions which will permit a new advance of the Iberian revolution, and also to see to it that the workers of Europe can intervene in the struggle against the rebel generals.

Have libertarian ideas failed?

There are those who say: either the CNT has failed and must rectify itself, or our ideas have failed.

The declaration of principles of the IWA designates as the aim of anarcho-syndicalism the reorganisation of society on the basis of free communism through the revolutionary action of the working class. It is emphasised that only the economic organisations of the workers can bring about this social change. It then goes on to say that anarcho-syndicalism is the enemy of all economic and social monopolies, and that social organisation must be based on a free system of councils (committees) which must not be subordinated to any political power.

Anarcho-syndicalism is federalist and rejects all forms of centralist organisation which find their model in the state system. It is opposed to all parliamentary activity and fights nationalism, which is only the religion of the modern state. Consistent with its anti-statism, anarcho-syndicalism is also anti-militarist, and the declaration of principles emphasises the need for special propaganda in this direction. The methods of struggle which anarcho-syndicalism employs are all those which are characterised as direct action which can be employed by the worker himself, especially in his capacity as a producer. The declaration of principles also states that anarcho-syndicalism takes part in all struggles which do not contradict its own emancipatory

aim. Finally, it recognises revolutionary violence organised by the economic organisations of the working class itself, but rejects all violence concentrated in the hands of any government. These are the main features of the IWA's declaration of principles.

In general, before the Spanish experience occupied the milieu of our international movement, theoretically, we had two possibilities of trade unionist action in a period of revolution. One expected a victory of the parties of state socialism, under whose regime anarcho-syndicalism would continue to be in opposition, devoting itself moreover to partial realisations and to the education of the workers for their constructive aims. In this case, the organisation would be free of any responsibility in a new regime. The other possibility was to count on the spontaneous adherence of the overwhelming majority of the workers to our organisations, which would then, without the need to establish a dictatorship, which was always passionately rejected, become the basis of public life in general. Life would then be reorganised by means of free federations of producers and consumers to which all would submit *voluntarily*. This was the hope. The declaration of principles of the German organisation, which in many respects was the most detailed and clearest in existence, made the latter case.

Let it be noted that anarcho-syndicalism was always absolutely *anti-dictatorial*. Let us not forget that there was never before any thought of a forced trade unionisation of the workers as advocated by those who today believe themselves to be the anarchist opposition to the CNT. The *voluntary* decision of the workers, their freedom, was always for us the cornerstone of social reconstruction in the libertarian sense. The problem of *how anarcho-syndicalism would make other social tendencies* disappear outside its own movement had never been sufficiently reflected upon. If they did not disappear voluntarily, they would have to be destroyed by force, and a system of surveillance, control, censorship, etc., would have to be established over the whole population which would guarantee the non-resurrection of the dissolved organisations. If one discussed this problem with comrades interested in such questions, the opinion was often expressed that in a socialist system such as the one trade unions would build at the time of the revolution, the various social interests would disappear on the spot, and with them the need for reformist tendencies, political parties, etc. Actually the Spanish experience has shown what all previous revolutions had already taught: that the moment of revolution can no longer represent the principle of general welfare. Even if in Spain the CNT had established its dictatorship, as some wish, it would not have been able to ensure this general welfare or to satisfy everyone to such an extent that everyone would soon have become enthusiastic anarcho-syndicalists. The revolution, which took on in a few weeks all the characteristics of a war, had to begin in any case by imposing on all a regime of privations, of sacrifices, and of increased work for the benefit of raising the *standard* of life in general. In that case, it would be utopian to convince them of the need to subordinate themselves all to a single organisation, i.e. the anarcho-syndicalist one. At this moment there were only two paths: that of dictatorship or that of collaboration. This must be seen very clearly. Many comrades are blinded by hatred against our adversaries, by a desire to liquidate and annul everything that is not their own organisation or that does not want to subordinate itself to it. Although this is understandable as a psychological reaction against all the sufferings of persecution, such feelings of revenge and hatred cannot be used to find a path of social reconstruction. The satisfaction of these instincts would turn us into dictators, nothing more.

Many opponents of the collaboration of anarcho-syndicalism with other sectors in the revolution and in the anti-fascist war have stressed the minority mission and told us that anarcho-syndicalism does not need the majority of the people in order to win, and that in all revolutions

it has been the courageous minorities who have succeeded in imposing themselves. Fine; but these minorities never had any other aim than to seize public power in order to be the holders of a political and social monopoly. Anarcho-syndicalism does not want this. It wants the masses to become masters of themselves, to unleash their own constructive force. Revolution, as a destructive act, is to some extent a question of courage. It would be difficult to find a militant of international anarcho-syndicalism who would dare to say that the CNT has lacked courage. The CNT may lack many things, but it does not lack courage. And it does not lack libertarian instinct either. This is shown by the fact that on 19 July it renounced its dictatorship.

In Spain the CNT had to take over a part of the public responsibility, after recognising that the war had to be won and that this war was the cause of the whole people. Since this war demanded and still demands a maximum of efficiency, of production and a maximum of sacrifice, the CNT could not continue to be the opposition, fighting carelessly for a few hours of its life; on the contrary. All that was left for it, therefore, was the form of collaboration. In our declaration of principles we have to admit this possibility.

And there is more. In the old days we only counted on the defence of the revolution by volunteers. After a few months of struggle in Spain, Durruti already recognised that it would be necessary to go to a *general mobilisation*, because voluntary work was not enough. One can have different opinions on how such a mobilisation should be carried out, but no one can doubt that it was necessary in Spain. But this also means that other forms of organisation and discipline have to be established than those which were given to the war volunteers at the beginning of the struggle. Moreover, pure enthusiasm and an organisation based on spontaneity alone, without a fixed code of duties and rights, are suitable for a short struggle, but not for a modern war of long duration. The idealism of the warrior, for very human reasons, soon disappears, and only a good organisation contains an army and makes it capable of fighting well. If the working classes had listened in time to our propaganda of boycott and anti-militarist struggle, all this would not have been necessary. Events and our duty to take part in all the great struggles of the proletariat have forced us to embark on a path we had always rejected. This rectification of our conduct does not dishonour us. We must accept it without mourning and without sentimentality, seeking the best way to avoid the danger that this new revolutionary militarism will have bad consequences for the rest of social life, where there is no room for the principles of authoritarian organisation which are indispensable for the destructive organisation which is war, because the construction and creation of new social forms can only be the work of freedom.

We must also admit in our declaration of principles, therefore, the necessity of creating military formations of a modern type, if the defence against reaction makes it necessary. The struggle against the militarism of the capitalist powers and above all the tendency to combat the militarisation of social and cultural life in the style of fascism and Bolshevism is within its rights.

If it is recognised that it is necessary to collaborate with other sectors in the anti-fascist struggle and to fight together with them militarily against a common enemy, it is necessary to determine *the form of this collaboration*; whether it is direct or indirect; whether as direct collaboration it is to be limited to the municipalities or provinces, or whether it can go as far as governmental collaboration; whether the collaboration is only to be effected in economic organisations, or whether it can also be extended to the political administration; then the form of this collaboration must remain free and *can only be determined by the national organisation, that is, by the section of the IWA, directly concerned.*

The history of the political collaboration of the CNT within the governments, for which the organisation was not prepared, is well known, a lack of preparation which has certainly cost us dearly. The fault lies with all of us, not with the CNT. Today the CNT has learned a lot. It is beginning to act with political tact. It has recognised the need for political work in general.

Was there a possibility of maintaining a political power of the CNT *outside* the Government in order to avoid nominal and direct collaboration, or at least to maintain a second anti-fascist power outside the Governments, such as the Committee of the Anti-fascist Militias in Catalonia was? It was impossible to maintain two bureaucratic bodies side by side; and the maintenance of the two apparatuses of power, the old and the new, would have meant an enormous drain on human and economic forces which would have been lost for the war. Either the state or the new bodies had to be abolished. The former, because of the facts already mentioned, was impossible; the latter had to be abolished. Thus the CNT remained faithful to its anti-dictatorial postulate and to the anti-fascist cause.

Moreover, there is a point here where I think a certain concreteness of our postulates is necessary. A clear conception of the revolutionary epoch was hitherto lacking in our organisations, and there were very ill-defined concepts of freedom. One extreme of this lack of clear definition lies in the fact that some believe that on 19 July or 3 May the CNT could have destroyed all the adversary organisations in order to force the workers to join “voluntarily” the CNT or the CNT-UGT (naturally, a purely syndicalist UGT...), i.e., in the name of anarchism and freedom, defending the methods of Dr. Goebbels, who orders and commands the “spontaneous” demonstrations of the German people if the party wants it. But the other extreme is the belief that a social revolution can destroy from the first moment not only the old state, but prevent the reorganisation of any new power, and also of a syndicalist or other economically based workers’ power in possession of coercive means, in order to enforce the agreements of the producers’ society by all and even by class enemies and workers who do not possess a spirit of solidarity. This is the conception based on Kropotkin’s optimism, as the events of the last thirty years have made it completely impossible and as it corresponded to the liberal concepts of the 19th century. It must be recognised that even in a society of economic organisations, administered by the workers themselves, there should be a central body to collect the agreements of the rank-and-file organisations and to enforce them, and this idea is inconsistently conceived if it is not admitted at the same time that this power, constituted and controlled by the trade unions, must also have coercive means at its disposal.

Who among us would have admitted in the theoretical discussion before 19 July, just to give a typical example, that we should one day not only admit, but exercise or collaborate in the exercise of mail censorship? No one; and yet, after 19 July, all Spanish anarchists recognised the need for an organisation of counter-espionage and surveillance of the fascist element and that censorship of this kind would be an integral part of it. If today some oppositionists complain it is not because at the beginning full freedom was not given to all and even to the enemies of the revolution, but, on the contrary, because we anarchists have lost these positions we had in censorship, etc., *and that we have not been skilful enough to reserve for ourselves a monopoly of them*. Censorship, in this case, is only an example, a symbol for a thousand positions of influence in public life which should not be indifferent to us; and if today we think of future stages of the revolution, in which we may have the possibility of acting more freely in a socially better prepared environment than the one existing on 19 July, we must already today draw some conclusions from the experiences made in the last fifteen months if we do not want it all to have been in vain.

It would therefore be necessary *to specify more clearly in our declaration of principles the social and political structuring of the trade unionist organisation of the society for which we are fighting.*

What the CNT did is not as new in the anarchist movement as some believe. Think of the work of the German anarchists Erich Mühsam and Gustav Landauer in the Munich Republic of Workers' Councils, in which they also tried to collaborate with other sectors on a basis which seemed to them to have possibilities of a development in a federalist sense. Think of the theory of Orobón Fernández, expounded in *La Tierra*, Madrid, in 1934, where, with extraordinary clarity, he foresaw the reality of 1937.

Do not confuse the need for collaboration in a revolutionary epoch with reformism and collaboration within the capitalist regime. On 19 July a social renewal began, and the structure of the Spanish economy has since then changed profoundly in the direction of workers' intervention all along the line, although by no means satisfactorily and even though in some sectors of the economy the workers have lost ground again, as happened in the agricultural collectives of Aragon, etc. To maintain the clarity and consequence of our principles in the struggle against the other socialist sectors within capitalism was one thing; the problems of the revolutionary epoch are another.

Believing in the possibility of being able to convert the majority of the workers into anarchists or into instruments of the anarcho-syndicalist organisations at the moment of the revolution, so that the masses, truly of their own free will and in complete freedom, would begin the constructive work that we want, the anarchist theory of the revolution was based on looking at the revolution under two aspects; first, destruction of the state; second, social reconstruction. The two points of the programme would be realised in the chronological order indicated; first the complete destruction of the state, and then, "on its ruins", the new society in full freedom. Indeed, the destruction of the state and social reconstruction must be the content of the social revolution. In reality it is a long epoch of struggle between the two principles of authority and freedom. At a time when the state was weak, as it was on 19 July, social reconstruction was started without looking at the constituted powers. But these, representatives of old national and international class interests and out of instinct of self-preservation, continued to live, and even more so when the CNT declared to renounce a totalitarian attempt and its dictatorship. Since then, a movement of social reconstruction from below and the state of the petty bourgeoisie, in whose necessity a large section of the workers themselves also believe, have survived at the same time. In order to prevent as far as possible the state, under these conditions, from destroying the work begun, and in order to protect it from above and to legalise it in a certain sense, the anarchists even lent themselves to occupying ministerial posts. This is another aspect of collaboration. It should be remembered that this theory of revolution – that is, the negation of the mechanical concept of revolution, based on wanting to rebuild society only "on the ruins of the state", completely destroyed and liquidated – is one of the bases of the conscientious work of the anarchist Gustav Landauer, which we have already mentioned. This is not to say that the ideas of the realisation of socialism which Landauer advocated in 1909 are applicable in 1937, but his fundamental idea is as topical as it was. The State will disappear *the moment a new form of social coexistence makes it superfluous.* Well, in Spain a new form of social life is beginning to take shape. There is war, and anarchism imposes itself with reservations. Other times will come when more progress will be made, and it will be a question of constructive capacity and a certain political prudence to increase the economic power of the workers and to educate them in constructive ideas, which was not really possible in the stage of purely oppositionist struggle; then, in future clashes between

petty-bourgeois interests and the state, on the one hand, the working class and the principle of total social emancipation on the other, by the extent to which the constructive capacity and the political experience of the workers have increased. The Spanish experience obliges us to reflect on these problems and to concretise certain extremes of our theory. If we do not do so, we do a great disservice to the international movement and we also prevent the CNT itself from creating the theoretical clarity it needs to be able to continue its struggle and its constructive work. We find ourselves in a period of trials, of experiments, of the use of new tactics which are necessary and which include dangers which necessarily also bring with them hesitations, weariness, disappointments; and all this, moreover, at the moment of a formidable struggle which demands unprecedented sacrifices from everyone. This situation calls for a concentration of forces from all of us as the world libertarian movement has never done so far. But this concentration is the condition for the continuation of our existence as a movement and the only effective help for the CNT in its heroic struggle.

It is impossible to say that the new tactics used by the CNT are completely contrary to our principles and that one day the CNT will return to the old methods, while everything that happened in this stage of the anti-fascist struggle will be forgotten again. This is impossible. We must recognise the ideological continuity that exists, without any doubt, between the old trajectory of Spanish anarchism and its tactics of today; we must *see the organic and theoretically founded relationship between the permanent tactic, that is to say direct action, crowned by 19 July 1936; the collaboration with other sectors to avoid any dictatorship, and above all our own, and the needs of the present day.* Anarchism has not changed, and only the tactical means have taken other forms; but it was precisely these new forms that were necessary in order to preserve the essence of the movement.

These essences are the voluntarist conception of the revolutionary process and direct action, which made the CNT capable of carrying out its 19 July and which made it possible to initiate the first big struggle against fascism that was so far possible. An integral part of this essence of the movement is the idea of the political party organisation; this economic organisation of the trade union type, which constitutes the power of the CNT and the hope of the Spanish revolution on the basis of the workers' alliance, an economic organisation which enabled the CNT to initiate the most profound social transformation ever seen and which is called upon to serve as an example and stimulus for all future revolutions.

Consistently continuing along this line of principle, the CNT has made our ideas known to the world proletariat to a hitherto unknown extent. We have a better basis for our proposals, and it is our duty to take advantage of these conditions in the very interest of the CNT; also to give it public prestige, which in any case can only mean giving prestige to our own ideology.

In my opinion, therefore, neither the CNT nor our ideas have failed. The fact is that ideas have for the first time clashed with reality; that new tactical modalities have become necessary and that a certain ideological confusion has arisen in our own ranks which we must overcome quickly and by a collective effort in order to fulfil the mission of the world libertarian movement, which is at this moment in its decisive crisis of growth.

The anarchist aim can have a different expression in different countries and continents. The economic organisations in which the realising tendencies of anarchism are to be manifested can be various, and they need not be French or Spanish or European trade unions in general; and in countries where libertarian propaganda is necessary, it can be carried out in the form of the idea of free sovietism. I remember the example of Germany, where, although I was a trade unionist in

principle, we nevertheless carried out for several years propaganda under the slogan “all power to the workers’ councils”, taking the view that the idea of a free system of workers’ councils, as an expression of federalism, was more comprehensible to the German worker after the Russian revolution, the memory of which was fresh in everyone’s mind, than by the propaganda of revolutionary trade unionism, which had no roots in our country.

International anarcho-syndicalism must strive to have at all times a declaration of principles which clearly and unequivocally emphasises the common basis of all sections and which can be used publicly, without the adversaries having the opportunity to point out contradictions or confusion within the movement.

If in some of these aspects a more flexible formula is imposed; if on some points we have had to go beyond our postulates, we must speak of the reasons; we must show that, in spite of the rectifications that have been imposed on us on some points, the general line remains the same as ever, and that the libertarian aim has not been changed; that the way the CNT is going is that of revolutionary syndicalism and not of state socialism. Comrades will say that the CNT, in the midst of struggle, has no time for theorising; but there is no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory. An attitude based solely and exclusively on improvisation and spontaneity is dangerous. If we fail and are not clear in our actions, Bolshevism, first in the other countries and then in Spain itself, will easily destroy the reputation and the possibilities of the world libertarian movement for a long time to come.

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Helmut Rüdiger
Anarcho-Syndicalism in the Spanish Revolution
1938

Retrieved on 7 January 2023 from <https://londonautonomygroup.wordpress.com/2023/01/04/anarcho-syndicalism-in-the-spanish-revolution-helmut-rudiger-1938/>
Translated by London Workers Council & Autonomy Reading Group and published online on 4
January 2023.

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