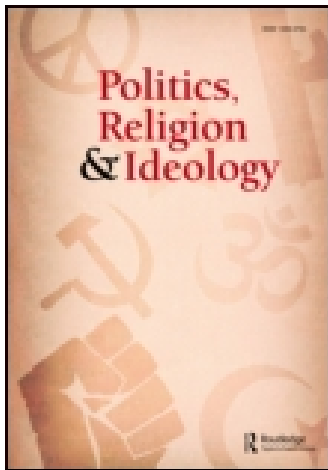


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## 'Cease Fire, Comrades!' Anarcho-syndicalist Revolutionary Prophecy, Anti-Fascism and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War

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**ABSTRACT** *This article challenges the traditionally accepted claims that in the early months of 1936, the anarcho-syndicalist labour union Confederación Nacional del Trabajo [National Confederation of Labour], or CNT, posed a revolutionary threat to the Spanish Second Republic. This argument has been used to explain the collapse of the Republican regime, and consequently the military coup that sparked the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. Though revolutionary insurrectionism was inherently characteristic of the CNT and the anarcho-syndicalist movement, in 1936, the organisation was neither prepared nor willing to incite a social revolution. This article analyses the reasons for the anarcho-syndicalists' turn to moderation, paying special attention to the emergence of a perceived 'fascist threat' that heavily influenced the change in anarcho-syndicalist insurrectionary tactics which lasted into the Spanish Civil War. It also evaluates the impact of these findings on Civil War historiography, and proposes a reconsideration of the assessment of blame for beginning the conflict.*

The last decade has produced a flurry of revisionist studies about the causes of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).<sup>1</sup> The main objective of these recent studies has been to question the historical narrative dominant during the post-Franco period, a narrative that placed blame for the Civil War almost entirely on the shoulders of Spain's reactionary conservative political elements.<sup>2</sup> This argument is rejected by new studies which assert, instead, that the political Left and even the centre played as great a role, if not greater, than the Right in provoking the fratricidal conflict. Pio Moa, one of the most vocal members of this revisionist trend, has argued that the political Left forced the hand of the July coup's conspirators by pushing Spain down the road to revolution. According to Moa, '[Spain's] conservative mass rose up in 1936 against a real and advanced revolutionary threat', one that had 'intensified since February of 1936'.<sup>3</sup> The military coup, then, is interpreted as a 'desperate' reaction against a 'revolutionary tide [which] was about to drown [the right]'.<sup>4</sup> This revolutionary threat, Moa has affirmed, was largely the responsibility of two leftist trade unions: namely, the socialist UGT [General Worker's Union] and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT [Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, or National Confederation of Labour].<sup>5</sup>

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Although Moa's claims have been criticised aggressively for being ideologically tainted, they have forced Spanish historiography to revisit and reconsider the origins of the greatest social conflict of modern Spanish history. The passionate academic debate that has ensued has been dominated by the question of socialist responsibility for the worsening political and social climate of early 1936.<sup>6</sup> Many historians continue to reject a socialist conspiracy to overthrow the Second Republic. They insist that in those critical months the socialists remained committed to constitutional democracy and the legal process.<sup>7</sup> Even so, there is a growing tendency to redirect blame for this most bitter of all civil conflicts to include – at least partially – leftist organisations, particularly the socialist *UGT*.<sup>8</sup> However, this renewed and passionate discussion of the Civil War's causes has, for the most part, overlooked the role played by the *CNT* and the anarcho-syndicalist movement. This is perhaps due to the fact that, contrary to the criticism of socialists, Moa's views on the *CNT*'s contribution to the breakdown of the Republic do not challenge in any substance the previously accepted historiography. The prevailing notion, even among leftist historians, has traditionally been and continues to be that anarcho-syndicalists were crucial contributors to the breakdown of the Second Republic, and the outbreak of war.<sup>9</sup> Even partisan studies of the *CNT* have attributed to anarcho-syndicalist elements in Spain the responsibility for the political polarisation that occurred in the spring and summer of 1936.<sup>10</sup>

This has been an easy argument to make, especially in the context of the *CNT*'s long-standing reputation as a radical revolutionary organisation. For years, the *CNT* had preached the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of 'libertarian communism'.<sup>11</sup> The revolutionary prophesy identified and united an anarcho-syndicalist movement that had increasingly assumed an aura of sacredness for many of its followers. Heavily influenced by these sacrosanct ideological beliefs, the *CNT* refused to participate in the political process and expelled any members who joined political parties. Between 1932 and 1933, *CNT* syndicates rose up against the Republic on three occasions and with the express hope of inciting popular revolt. In October 1934, the socialist-led uprising in the province of Asturias received active *CNT* support. Although all these insurrectionary attempts failed and the *CNT* was severely repressed by the state authorities after each incident, new threats of insurgency continued to appear in the anarcho-syndicalist press. Finally, the anarcho-syndicalists were the principal instigators of the revolutionary events which followed the July 1936 coup. The rapidity with which *CNT* militants and workers in the city of Barcelona took control of the means of production, and established an alternate power structure in late July and early August – so famously recounted by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia*<sup>12</sup> – has convinced historians of all tendencies of an imminently revolutionary situation, at least in the Catalan capital.

While these conclusions are by and large true, in the spring and early summer of 1936, as the Civil War neared, the *CNT* was neither prepared nor willing to incite a social revolution. A careful examination of *CNT* periodicals and syndicate meeting notes reveals that nearly three years earlier syndicate leaders had turned away from the spontaneous insurrectionist tactics of the early Republican years, in favour of a more moderate policy of syndical consolidation and reinforcement that prioritised labour-related concerns. A small number of studies have identified this trend, but its significance has been reduced to that of a temporary need for reorganisation, which, it is argued, did not appreciably alter the *CNT*'s revolutionary aims and which ended with the Popular Front electoral victory in

February 1936.<sup>13</sup> This article, however, suggests that the turn to moderation ran deeper within the organisation. It not only reflected a major reconsideration of the union's revolutionary tactics, but signified a profound reorientation of the strategic objectives and policies that were the essence of the *CNT* and the anarcho-syndicalist movement.

Critical to this strategic shift was a growing 'fear of fascism' among anarcho-syndicalists. Though more imagined than real, the fear of a growing fascist influence in Spanish politics became the focal point of anarchist 'anti-fascist' rhetoric. Starting in 1933, governmental policies or legislation previously referred to as 'reactionary' or 'conservative' were reinterpreted as 'fascistic'. Leading up to the outbreak of civil war, the terms *fascismo* and *fascista* became the preferred nomenclature for the *CNT*'s enemies, whether in the social, governmental or political arena. Fascism had come to epitomise evil in the capitalist system the anarcho-syndicalist revolution aimed to destroy. Whether wholeheartedly convinced of the danger posed by the growing unity of rightist political forces in Spain, or frustrated by the relative failure of revolutionary propaganda to attract workers to the *CNT*, the anarcho-syndicalist leadership united in order to propagate the image of a growing menace from 'fascistic' rightist politics and to reinterpret the objectives of the revolution.

This reorientation would affect the *CNT*'s behaviour during the months leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War, as well as influence its attitude toward the war and the popular revolution that accompanied it. In early 1936, not only was the *CNT* not plotting a revolution, it found itself committed to defending the Second Republic more than ever before. Although officially apolitical, the union leadership openly encouraged its membership to vote for the leftist Popular Front coalition in the February 1936 national elections. At the same time, the *CNT* largely distanced itself from the social instability that characterised the final breakdown of the Republican regime. As the social and political climate heated up in the weeks before the rightist coup in July, the *CNT* press did not encourage syndicate members to prepare for revolutionary action. Rather, it repeatedly and vociferously declared that the *CNT* would employ every means within its power to counter any aggression that threatened the Republic's stability. Local and regional syndicate committees published orders to resist a 'fascist' *golpe* [coup], but avoided any mention whatsoever of revolutionary action. In fact, in the months leading up to the outbreak of civil war, libertarian communism, the primary objective of the anarcho-syndicalist movement since its inception, took a back seat to the more imminent and seemingly more tangible fascist menace. The *CNT* had been preparing itself for a defensive, not an offensive action in the days leading up to the outbreak of war.

In this article, I will outline the idiosyncratic nature of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, torn between millenarian revolutionary rhetoric and the practical realities of labour organisation. I will trace the *CNT*'s behaviour in the months prior to the Civil War, concentrating on the breakdown of social and political stability in Barcelona, a city that in 1936 experienced the most profound revolutionary transformation in all of Spain. Barcelona was also the *CNT*'s centre of power, where it monopolised local labour organisation and where it was able to act most effectively. I will focus on the rhetorical and practical needs that dominated discussions within the *CNT*, as well as actions taken by the syndicates and the results they achieved. Contrary to traditional belief that the Catalan region was an 'oasis' of relative peace and tranquility compared with the rapidly decomposing situation

in the rest of Spain, the months leading up to the military coup in Barcelona were characterised by intense labour conflicts and violent exchanges between management, government authorities and labour. As we shall see, however, these confrontations did not represent a heightened revolutionary situation, but rather a struggle for worker's rights. Finally, I will consider the impact of these findings on Civil War historiography and propose a reconsideration of the assessment of blame for beginning the fratricidal conflict.

### Revolutionary Prophecy and Syndicalist Pragmatism

The *CNT* was founded in 1910 to give concrete form to an amalgamation of ideological projects – including anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism – that came to be identified as anarcho-syndicalism. However, the melding together in the *CNT* of anarchism and syndicalism was never complete. Anarchism provided much of the movement's ideological background, and syndicalism contributed the basic organisational structure, so the dominance of one ideal over the other never really came to pass.<sup>14</sup> The entrance or exit of any factions in the organisation's hierarchy, whether at the local, regional or national level, was accompanied by a corresponding shift in tactics. This gave the *CNT* power structure a schizophrenic personality – revolutionary at one moment and syndicalist at the next. What resulted was a somewhat uncomfortable marriage of labour syndicalism with violent 'propaganda by the deed'. Rather than coexist, conflicting factions constantly competed for influence and control within the *CNT*.

With so many variant tendencies, the only ideological principle that united all of the *CNT*'s factions was the outright rejection of the State and its ultimate destruction.<sup>15</sup> All groups within the *CNT* maintained at least nominally the 'revolution' as the syndicate's ultimate objective.<sup>16</sup> The definition of the revolution itself varied between factions, but generally found its roots in anarchist characterisations of *comunismo libertario* [libertarian communism]. Because the revolution was the most visible expression of the movement's anti-statist stance, revolutionary language became an identifying idiom of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. The use of revolutionary language guaranteed acceptance as a true *cenetista* [*CNT* member] – no matter whether one was an anarchist or a syndicalist – as well as the exclusion of outsiders to the movement.<sup>17</sup> This devotion to the revolution set anarcho-syndicalism apart from other leftist movements, even those that were ostensibly revolutionary. The socialist *UGT* and the communist *PCE* [Spanish Communist Party] asserted similar revolutionary goals, but their active participation in the political system inferred an acceptance of the state and the political superstructure, at least temporarily. The *CNT*'s refusal to participate in the electoral process placed the syndicate conceptually outside the political establishment and, as such, came to be seen as a genuinely revolutionary movement.

Spanish anarchism championed rationalism and science as natural cures to the irrational ills of society, including religion and state structure. However, anarchism also maintained a strongly millenarian rhetoric and displayed many of the characteristics of a religion.<sup>18</sup> Although aggressively atheist and vehemently opposed to the Catholic Church, anarchism developed forms of replacement for practically all aspects of the Catholic religion. Rather than represent a complete break with Catholicism, anarchism provided similar cultural structures and behavioural guidelines, such as ideological piety, ethical standards, a belief in an

apocalyptic end to the corrupted world and the creation of an emancipating revolutionary paradise.<sup>19</sup>

In anarchist rhetoric, the inevitable coming of the revolution paralleled the coming of the apocalypse in Christianity. The *pueblo* [people], instigators of the revolution, could be seen as the new Christ, saints and saviours of those oppressed by the capitalist 'Anti-Christ'. The explosive revolution would purify corrupted 'bourgeois' society as it created the new paradise of *comunismo libertario*. Science served as the prophet of the coming revolution. Through its study one could come to understand the oppressive domination of the capitalist system, and the 'bourgeois'-controlled state and church. Although not well defined, the promised revolutionary paradise would bring freedom and emancipation to all, much in the same way that Christ's second coming was thought to in Catholicism.<sup>20</sup>

Anarchist ideology defined for its followers the revolutionary paradise as an ultimate end of human existence. In addition, anarchism established moral and ethical directives that went beyond the simply political to affect every aspect of life. In rejecting the capitalist world and the oppressive nature of the State, anarchism also created its own interpretation of social reality that emphasised the role of both the *obrero consciente* [conscious worker] and the *pueblo* in shaping present and future society. It was the *pueblo*, after all, that was prophesied to free humanity from the shackles of capitalism.

In the workplace and the worker neighbourhoods, anarchist militants took on the role of *obreros conscientes*, spiritual leaders responsible for spreading the revolutionary 'ideal'. Militants not only represented workers in labour negotiations with workplace management, they also established themselves as political strongmen in worker neighbourhoods and played a critical role in neighbourhood affairs. They provided services within the neighbourhood, ranging from procurement of goods to the resolution of personal conflicts between neighbours.<sup>21</sup> They represented a separate sense of justice and ethical standards that at its extremes justified forced expropriation (robberies), the planting of bombs and the assassination of factory bosses or policemen. Militants (and many workers) not only closely identified with this distinct belief system, but also lived their lives by its rules. Anarchist culture pervaded worker neighbourhoods. From locally funded rationalist schools to cultural magazines to neighbourhood centres, workers experienced at first hand an anarchist-inspired vision of society. The widely popular anarchist weekly *Revista Blanca*, for example, not only contained short stories exemplifying different elements of the libertarian lifestyle, it also offered analyses of political events and advice on everything from vegetarian cooking to the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

Of course, not everyone in the CNT believed in the revolutionary dogma. The anarcho-syndicalist movement had *comulgadores*, those who believed, and those that did not necessarily believe, but nevertheless accepted and worked within the boundaries established by the movement's liturgy. Those who did not include references to the revolution in their dialogue risked being accused of ideological blasphemy and being expelled from the CNT. Communists Joaquín Maurín and Andrés Nin faced such a fate in 1923. Moderate syndicalists Joan Peiró and Angel Pestaña followed them late in 1931, as did large sections of the Girona region a year later.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, as important as revolutionary rhetoric was to the CNT's identity, it was often inconsistent with the syndicate's actions. Although CNT militants rejected the political process, many of them attempted to manipulate the political system



and the legislative process in Spain to the syndicate's advantage.<sup>23</sup> Strikes were occasionally used to pressure the government into passing favorable legislation, and *CNT* members were often encouraged by syndicate militants to vote for favoured candidates in local or national political elections.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the 1933 national election was the only time during the Second Republic period in which the *CNT* carried out an aggressive abstentionist campaign.

This was perhaps the greatest paradox of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. While the *CNT*'s factions remained ideologically committed to the revolution, the syndicate enjoyed its greatest successes when it concentrated its efforts on centralising organisational structure and coordinating effective labour actions. As Mercedes Vilanova and Anna Monjo have recently confirmed, a great number of the syndicate's members were more concerned with practical bread-and-butter issues, rather than with the coming of the social revolution or the establishment of *comunismo libertario*.<sup>25</sup> Workers joined the *CNT* largely because of its successful defence of workers' practical interests, both in the factory and the neighbourhood. The salary rises and improvements in working conditions obtained in the first months of the Second Republic were directly reflected in the syndicate's rapid membership growth.<sup>26</sup> Just two months after the proclamation of the Republic, the national membership numbered 535,565 and by December of 1931 it had reached 850,000.<sup>27</sup>

By early 1932, the *CNT* had become one of the two dominant labour organisations in Spain, competing for the leadership's top spot with the socialist *UGT*.<sup>28</sup> This achievement, however, caused great consternation among the *CNT*'s radical factions. In their minds, the rapid expansion of the syndicate drew it closer to the newly emerged political establishment, which, although Republican in nature, could nevertheless compromise the *CNT*'s position as a political outsider.<sup>29</sup> To avoid such an eventuality, the radicals considered it necessary to periodically expel or marginalise those factions that 'betrayed the revolution'.<sup>30</sup>

In late 1931, the possibility that then influential syndicalist *treintista*<sup>31</sup> moderates might consider a rapprochement with leftists in the Republic government deeply divided the *CNT* militancy, while opening the door to the radical anarchist *faista* factions to 'correct' the union's path.<sup>32</sup> With the excuse of cleansing the *CNT* of 'traitors to the revolutionary cause', radicals gained control of leadership positions within the national and regional committees, and by the end of 1931 steered the syndicate back onto a more 'revolutionary' path.<sup>33</sup> The two following years saw these factions carry out three separate revolutionary insurrections known as the *tres ochos* [three eights].

The first of the *ochos* began on 18 January 1932, when anarcho-syndicalist demands for improved working conditions in the Fígols mines south of Barcelona degenerated into a series of violent confrontations that spread to the whole of the Llobregat valley. Over the course of the following five days, workers in Fígols, Cardona and Manresa took over the city halls, disarmed the local Civil Guard, and declared libertarian communism.<sup>34</sup> Radical militants, Buenaventura Durruti among them, fanned out through the province to encourage factory workers from surrounding towns to join the insurrection.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the revolutionary cry emanating from the Llobregat valley fell on deaf ears. With very few exceptions, workers across Spain did not protest in the streets in support of their Fígols comrades. When the miners finally realised that the syndicates in the larger cities were not going to join them, they surrendered to the authorities and the insurrection ended.<sup>36</sup>

Radical anarchist elements greeted the advent of 1933 with another insurrection, this time at national level. However, the 8 January uprising, made infamous by the Casas Viejas episode, suffered the same fate as the revolt attempted a year earlier.<sup>37</sup> Though led by influential anarchist militants, large segments of the *CNT* were caught unaware of the uprising and completely unprepared to deal with it. With few syndicates involved, the rebellion was a blatant failure. The efforts of the anarchists had once again proven futile. *CNT* radicals would try one last time in December of 1933 after a rightist coalition emerged victorious from national elections.<sup>38</sup> Motivated this time by the 'fight against fascism', the last of the *ochos* lasted six days and was the bloodiest of the three anarcho-sindicalist insurrections, claiming a total of 89 lives and leaving another 164 wounded.<sup>39</sup> Yet, as fate would have it the third revolt was not the charm. It too failed miserably.

The police repressions that followed each revolt left local *CNT* syndicates in a precarious position. Three uprisings in less than two years convinced the government that it had to come down hard on the *CNT*. After the last insurrection in December 1933, the organisational daily *Solidaridad Obrera* remained closed for over four months. For the first time since the founding of the Republic the whole *CNT* and its branch associations were outlawed.<sup>40</sup> The total failure of the *ochos* demonstrated a gross error in strategic thinking: namely that labour agitation truly reflected a predisposition to revolution. Worse yet, the syndicate's ideological orientation as well as its strength and efficacy began to be seriously questioned by large numbers of its own membership. Many *cenetistas* left the organisation altogether. The Catalan regional, for example, fell from over 300,000 members in 1931 to about 100,000 in early 1934.<sup>41</sup>

The most significant consequence of the *tres ochos* was the harsh realisation that the anarcho-sindicalist movement's followers were not willing to sacrifice their lives for the revolutionary 'ideal'. This depressing insight sank a number of militants, from Abad de Santillán to Buenaventura Durruti, into an existential crisis of considerable proportions that forced them to question their most basic *raison d'être*. Felling utterly dejected, Durruti went so far as to claim that Spanish workers lacked any knowledge whatsoever of the revolutionary message promulgated by the anarchists.<sup>42</sup> Recognising their mistake, the anarchist militants pulled back to regroup. They rejected violent revolutionism and returned to safer ground, that which had characterised the *CNT*'s greatest successes early on in the Republic. Bread and butter issues took priority over insurrectionism, organisational efforts concentrated on rebuilding syndical strength, while fears of ideological contradiction were shelved in favour of supporting (extra-officially and to varying degrees) leftist republicanism at the polls.

The revolutionary fervour so readily proclaimed in the weeks prior to the last *ocho* disappeared faster than it had grown, replaced by more pragmatic considerations, such as condemnations of government repression and trigger-happy policemen.<sup>43</sup> Discipline and structure were the strongest messages emerging from the *CNT* press. Regional committees encouraged members to concentrate single-mindedly on pragmatic labour-related concerns, and fortifying the organisation. This opinion became so prevalent among anarcho-sindicalist militants in early 1934 that when the socialist-led leftist *Alianza Obrera* [Worker Alliance] organised an insurrection later in October, *CNT* syndicates with few exceptions refused to join the effort, preferring to avoid unnecessary confrontation with government authorities.<sup>44</sup> In early 1935, the prominent orthodox anarchist ideologue Federico Urales triggered a profound internal discussion when he proposed the creation of



an alliance with other leftist organisations.<sup>45</sup> In earlier years, such suggestions would have been considered blasphemous, but in 1935 Urales's proposal rapidly gained support. This passionate debate has not received any attention in previous scholarship, but Urales's proposition inspired local syndicates to pass motions to propose a union with the socialist *UGT*.<sup>46</sup> The proposal, in turn, was approved by a Catalan regional congress in January 1936, and again at the *CNT* national congress held in Zaragoza in early May.<sup>47</sup>

### A Labour of Ants

The objective of the *CNT*'s renovation, baptised a 'Labour of Ants' by *Solidaridad Obrera*, was to 'turn every labour union into a potent block'.<sup>48</sup> The *CNT* press never tired of repeating that the 'strength' and 'stability' of the revamped syndicates required the 'determination' and 'cooperation' of all syndicate members, from the rank and file to the national secretariat.<sup>49</sup> For *Tierra y Libertad* editor Abad de Santillán,

We must ready ourselves, with serenity, reflection and intelligence... The revolution is not a child's game; it is much more. Anybody can be a rebel, but a revolutionary is someone that to rebelliousness has added economic and social knowledge as well as a strategic personality... We cannot be satisfied with simple rebelliousness or individual heroics, not very useful in modern armed conflict.<sup>50</sup>

Syndicates that organised radical strikes were shunned by the National Committee. In one instance, the leader of the Madrid construction syndicate, Manuel Vergara, was publicly denounced for refusing to agree with *UGT* officials to end a joint strike in Madrid.<sup>51</sup> When rumours arose in early June 1936 that the Barcelona *CNT* barbers' syndicate was about to call an industry-wide strike to pressure employers, the syndicate committee forwarded notes to all the Barcelona dailies, including the conservative *La Vanguardia*, in which they denied any such possibility and assured the public that it would never call a strike 'on a whim', and that its desire was to 'try by all means to reach an amicable agreement, compatible with our organisation's dignity'. To avoid any misunderstandings, the committee instructed all members to show up for work as usual.<sup>52</sup> The Catalan Regional Committee in fact accused other less important labour unions, including the *USC* (*Unió Socialista de Catalunya*), the *POUM* (*Partido Obrero the Unificación Marxista*), and Catalan sections of the *UGT*, of attempting to create unnecessary 'ideological' strikes in industries dominated by the *CNT*.<sup>53</sup> The *Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical*, attached to the *POUM*, with a supposed membership of 60,000 workers, called some of the most successful strikes during the spring of 1936.<sup>54</sup> But when it tried to resuscitate the Barcelona transportation strike, the *CNT* local quickly refused to cooperate and the strike failed.<sup>55</sup>

The decision to refrain from politicising labour conflicts, and to concentrate instead on purely work-related demands, received praise from both inside and outside the *CNT*. Even the union's most embittered opponents agreed that the move facilitated the resolution of contract negotiations, avoiding the bitter strikes of the earlier Republican years. The Catalanist daily *La Publicitat* succinctly expressed this positive sentiment:

It is evident that in the last few years the character of strikes has evolved everywhere. Before, strikes always took on a dramatic air... Today, the accent of these conflicts has changed... [Strikes] have lost their previous explosive nature and have become more organized and reflexive... Even though they are more extensive, they also seem to have become more humane.<sup>56</sup>

The *CNT* also actively sought to establish cooperative ties with the socialist *UGT*. In late March of 1936, the Barcelona *CNT* metallurgy syndicate, one of the largest locals in Catalonia, joined hands with its much smaller but still significant *UGT* counterpart and presented common demands to their employers. When these were rejected, both syndicates went on strike, bringing the industry to a near standstill.<sup>57</sup> Negotiations were intense, and they broke down on more than one occasion. Nonetheless, the local press coincided in characterising as 'calm' and 'absolutely normal' the conditions under which the city of Barcelona lived throughout the initial stages of the strike.<sup>58</sup> Absolute calm was soon disrupted, however. Within a week, various non-lethal bomb explosions in or near metallurgical workshops affected by the strike led local authorities to increase police presence and to heavily censor the *CNT* and *UGT* press.<sup>59</sup> But the *CNT* and *UGT* syndicates had no intention of letting the conflict escalate out of control. The bomb explosions were quickly ascribed to individuals out of the syndicate's control, and strikers were instructed to restrict themselves to picketing and to not fall prey to violent provocation.<sup>60</sup> Gone was the wildcat strike mentality so dominant in 1931 and 1932, replaced by greater 'control' and 'unity' in the syndicate's application of direct action.<sup>61</sup>

Even so, the city of Barcelona experienced a high incidence of robberies, bomb explosions and shootings in the first six months of 1936. Previous scholarly studies have counted only three politically motivated homicides in Barcelona between February and July 1936.<sup>62</sup> This contrasted sharply with Madrid's 45 deaths and the other 35 split between the southern leftist 'hotspots' of Seville, Malaga and Granada.<sup>63</sup> These numbers, however, are somewhat misleading. Sources consulted for this study reveal that the number of killings motivated by social conflicts remained high. Between February and July, the conservative

**Table 1.** Deaths in political conflicts, 3 February to 17 July 1936

Location	Number of deaths
Madrid	45
Barcelona	3
Seville, Malaga and Granada	35
Other provincial capitals	54
Other cities	13
Total urban centres	150
Rural towns	59
Villages	60
Total rural centres	119
Grand total	269

Source: Juan Linz, "From great hopes to civil war: the breakdown of democracy in Spain", in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.188.

**Table 2.** Crime and violence in the city of Barcelona, 1936

Month	Major robberies	Bomb explosions	Shootings	Deaths
January	16	1	3	4
February	7	3	3	1
March	11	3	6	2
April	12	21	7	6
May	12	3	3	2
June	12	5	4	1
July	10	6	8	3
Total	80	42	34	19

Sources: *La Vanguardia* and *Comercio y Navegación*, January to July 1936.

periodicals *Comercio y Navegación* and *La Vanguardia* reported a total of 31 shooting incidents related to social conflicts in the city of Barcelona, which claimed 15 lives.

Most of these incidents were assassination attempts. The rest were shootouts between police and workers or robbers, confrontations between rival labour union militants and occasional sniper attacks. On 14 January, the director of the Batlló textile factory in Barcelona was shot dead on his way home. Police attributed this assassination to two workers dismissed by the director in question from the factory a few days before.<sup>64</sup> A month later, six workers were shot by a sniper during a rally in the Via Laietana. One was killed and the other five were severely wounded. Police never identified the culprit. In March, a worker recently laid off from a construction company showed up at his job with a pistol and killed his ex-section chief. The month of April saw some of the worst shootings of the period. On the seventh, the warden of the Modelo prison was machine-gunned from a passing car in stereotypical Chicago Mafia style. On 28 April, ex-police chief Miquel Badía and his brother José were gunned down by anarchists as they left their apartment in the Eixample district. The next day, the owner of a bar in the Paralelo neighbourhood of Barcelona received a bullet in the back of the head as he closed his establishment.<sup>65</sup> Police initially associated this last murder with that of the Badía brothers, but later admitted the connection was unfounded. A week later, bodyguards of an industrialist killed a worker who showed up at the factory offices demanding payment of wages past due.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 3.** Violence in the rest of Catalonia, 1936

Month	Shootings	Deaths
January	—	—
February	—	—
March	2	1
April	3	1
May	6	4
June	3	—
July	1	—
Total	15	6

Sources: *Comercio y Navegación*, January to July 1936.

In a little over a month, the city of Barcelona suffered ten shootings, resulting in eight lives lost.

After a brief respite in June, the killings picked up again in early July. On the second and third of the month, three people were assassinated. These incidents included the drive-by shooting of the director of the La Escocesa textile factory, a direct result – according to police – of a mass dismissal of workers.<sup>67</sup> The next day, a worker was killed for refusing to join a strike the week before in the mercantile industry.<sup>68</sup> The following two weeks saw another five assassination attempts that left various people wounded, but claimed no more lives. The most notorious of these attempts involved army colonel Crispulo Moracho. On 2 July, two individuals tried to kill him by throwing bombs into his car as it drove around the Plaza Cataluña. Though various passersby were wounded, Moracho escaped unscathed. This was the third attempt on the colonel's life in a year.<sup>69</sup>

Although most of these killings were not the result of confrontations between political parties, in Barcelona and much of the region this sort of action was then – as in the past – characteristic of social confrontation. Whereas in Madrid the escalation of violence was distinguished by the disputes between Falangists, socialists and communists, in Catalonia the negligible presence of these political elements kept political violence to a minimum.<sup>70</sup> What made the violence that erupted in Catalonia peculiar was what it implied. Shootings in Barcelona were frequent during the first six months of 1936, as indeed they were in other large Spanish cities, but they did not have the same socio-political impact as they had had in other heavily affected areas. In Barcelona and Catalonia, the violence was not imbued with the aggressive insurrectionist rhetoric that radicalised both socialists and Falangists in Madrid and Seville. In those cities assassinations and bomb throwing were clear signs of extreme political polarisation, but in Barcelona these incidents denoted a return to traditional and comparatively less threatening modes of social, not political, confrontation. Employers and conservative politicians feared that this sort of violence represented a serious threat to social stability, but it is doubtful they would have felt so had the rest of the country not been so polarised. In Catalonia, violent confrontations between labour and management had been *el pan de cada día* [daily bread] since the aptly named *pistolero* years (1919–23), when the CNT first flexed its muscles against factory owners and government authorities.<sup>71</sup> Violent aggression of this type was common fare even during the 'peaceful' year of 1935, when government repression was at its height. In fact, 1936 saw a sharp decline in major robberies (those of 500 pesetas or more), probably the result of the CNT's return to legality and the ability to raise funds through less conspicuous methods.

The impact of social agitation in the region was greatly reduced by the CNT hierarchy's decision to actively dissuade syndicate militancy from exacerbating the social climate. The syndicate press repeatedly stressed the need to concentrate strictly on rebuilding the syndicates, rather than on 'individual actions' that would only 'hurt the image and strength of the organization'.<sup>72</sup> This is not to say that all violence was rejected. A concerted effort was made to differentiate between the 'constructive' use of arms – that which contributed positively to the syndicate's larger tactical objectives – and 'destructive' violence – that which was carried out for individual gain, and which hindered the organisation's progress.<sup>73</sup> In 1936, this translated into the rejection of petty theft and physical intimidation on the one hand, but the acceptance of the use of physical force to resist any 'fascist' coup d'état, or any other attempt to undermine the relative

**Table 4.** Crime and violence in the city of Barcelona, 1935

Month	Major robberies	Bomb explosions	Shootings	Deaths
January	5	2	1	1
February	26	1	3	2
March	14	—	4	3
April	12	—	—	3
May	8	—	3	2
June	9	1	2	2
July	10	—	5	4
August	12	2	1	6
September	14	—	3	2
October	13	—	5	6
November	15	—	3	1
December	14	2	1	1
Total	152	6	30	32

Source: *La Vanguardia and Comercio y Navegación*, 1935 issues.

stability of the Popular Front government on the other.<sup>74</sup> The 'anti-fascist' effort also translated into calls for unity among workers. In mid June, the syndicate's Andalusian Regional Committee denounced the alleged shooting of CNT strikers by socialist and communist followers in the southern city of Malaga.<sup>75</sup> In an editorial entitled 'Cease fire, comrades!' which took up almost the whole front page of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the Committee pleaded for the immediate 'cessation of the stampede of shots and the triumph of serenity' among labour organisations.<sup>76</sup>

The relative success of the concerted campaign against crime and violence, along with the electoral support for the Popular Front, the joint ventures with the UGT, and the conciliatory gestures in labour relations, reflected the determination of the CNT hierarchy to implement pragmatic tactics that were part of the larger effort at organisational reconstruction, an effort which proved quite fruitful as the spring progressed. Enrollment rates rose sharply, bringing back into the local syndicates a large number of the affiliates lost in the previous three years. By the time of the celebration of a national congress held in Zaragoza in May 1936, the CNT had seen its membership grow by at least 150,000 to a national total of 559,294 affiliates.<sup>77</sup>

It was at the Zaragoza Congress that the moderate trend became official CNT organisational policy. The syndicates expelled from the CNT in 1932 and 1933 for their moderate tendencies were eventually readmitted, and the proposal for a worker alliance with the socialist UGT was approved.<sup>78</sup> CNT delegates also endorsed a dictum ordering member syndicates to end any and all 'sporadic movements organized... without minimum control, without the circumstances that would indicate an appropriate moment for the revolution, and without the necessary preparation to impose itself... on the capitalist system'.<sup>79</sup> It denounced 'conflicts of economic or any other nature organized at either the local or national level to protest against determined measures passed by the government', and ordered they be 'reduced to their minimum expression'.<sup>80</sup> The dictum even went as far as to announce the CNT's commitment to defend the standing government against any 'military pronouncement' threatening the stability of the Republic.



It ended with a strong recommendation to put aside 'individual criteria' in favour of 'organisational discipline', something unheard of in prior congresses, and bordering on ideological blasphemy.<sup>81</sup>

The overall feeling among militants returning from the Zaragoza Congress was one of optimism and renewed energy. It seemed to them that the *CNT* had finally discovered a new approach for the overcoming of the gap that separated the ideological leadership from the pragmatic rank-and-file.<sup>82</sup> Had Spanish politics not ensnared itself in civil war, it is conceivable that the *CNT* might have continued on a more moderate course, securing its organisational stability and establishing a more coherent coordination of its forces.

### Descent into War

The months of June and early July 1936 saw the final breakdown of the Republican regime. The government's attempts to attenuate the escalating political violence had proven futile. The Right accused socialists and the Left in general of inciting violent confrontations and unleashing volatile strikes. The Left responded by denouncing the Right's attempt to create an atmosphere of chaos and confusion in order to justify a *pronunciamiento* [military coup]. Rightists were quick to include the *CNT* in the growing spiral of revolutionary activities they ascribed to the Left, claiming the anarcho-syndicalist union had returned to its old insurrectionist ways.<sup>83</sup>

The *CNT*, however, largely distanced itself from the social instability that characterised these months. As the social and political climate heated up in the weeks before the rightist coup, the *CNT* press did not encourage syndicate members to prepare for revolutionary action. On the contrary, it had repeatedly and vociferously declared that the *CNT* would use everything in its power to counter any aggression that threatened the Republic's stability. Local and regional syndicate committees published orders to resist a rightist *coup*, but avoided any mention whatsoever of offensive revolutionary action.<sup>84</sup> The only insurrection with which the *CNT* concerned itself in the early summer of 1936 was a rightist *coup d'état*. Messages such as 'Be ready for war against fascism!', 'United and alert against Fascism' and 'Against reactionaries, the *CNT* takes its battle stations', appeared repeatedly on the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera*.<sup>85</sup>

The legalisation of the relatively small fascist party *Falange Española* [Spanish Falanx] by the Supreme Court in mid-June created great doubts as to the government's ability to control the extreme rightists, but this did not diminish anarcho-syndicalist determination. The next day, the headlines of *Solidaridad Obrera* announced that the *CNT* remained at the ready to counter any 'fascist threat'. The *CNT* was 'an organism operating within the law', a position from which the *CNT* was prepared to 'oppose fascism'. Fascists, on the other hand, were equated with 'organized crime' along with 'war and the destruction it brings'.<sup>86</sup> The *CNT* message was clear: the anarcho-syndicalist union would defend the status quo in the face of any reactionary coup organised by rightist elements. As one militant would later recall, 'The problem of the revolution seemed to take a back seat to the imminence of losing what few liberties the Republic guaranteed'.<sup>87</sup>

During June and July, the *CNT* press devoted its attention almost exclusively to the 'fascist menace', worker unemployment, the mounting economic crisis and government censorship. In these two months, the front page of *Solidaridad Obrera*

made mention of the 'revolution' on only four occasions.<sup>88</sup> In the month of July it was only referred to once, and even then only in the context of fighting the 'impending fascist threat'.<sup>89</sup> The CNT persisted in its determination to defend the political status quo right up to the start of the Civil War. At a meeting on 9 July of the Barcelona local federation, speakers concerned with the confrontations in Madrid and other Spanish cities warned that: 'The Popular Front government is not aware that fascism in Spain is organized and preparing for battle and that disarming workers only [facilitates] the coming of a dictatorial regime'.<sup>90</sup>

The assassination of Calvo Sotelo, leader of the conservative monarchist party *Unión Monárquica Nacional* [National Monarchical Union], in the early hours of 13 July by socialist militants was the final nail in the coffin of the Republic.<sup>91</sup> The murder of such an important member of the Spanish Parliament came after months of increasing violence – dominated by violent exchanges between militants of the *Juventud Socialistas Unificada* [United Socialist Youth] and the *Falange* – that the Republican government found itself unable to control. Any remaining hope for a peaceful resolution of the political polarisation disappeared. All sectors of Spanish society braced themselves for the coming storm. The dramatic events of these days made it clear that the CNT had no intention of inciting a revolutionary insurrection, as some rightists had claimed. On 16 July, the CNT Regional Committee aggressively denounced parallelisms drawn in the leftist Republican press between anarcho-syndicalists and fascists. Such comparisons, the Committee insisted, could only be made by 'crackpots and agents provocateurs'.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the CNT had no intention of making the first move. Syndicate leaders understood very well that any attempt to force the situation would provoke a reaction from local authorities, as well as giving the military an excuse to intervene.<sup>93</sup> At no moment during the days prior to the *coup* did Barcelona's syndicalist militants attempt to occupy factories, take over government buildings or attack military barracks. When the moment of confrontation finally arrived in the early hours of 19 July, CNT militants fought side by side with forces loyal to the Republic – including the local police and the *Guardia Civil* – that anarcho-syndicalists had for years identified with the repressive measures of the state. This was a testament to the CNT's priority of defeating the military revolt.

### Redirecting Blame for Starting the Civil War

Assigning the CNT a less important role in bringing about fratricidal conflict increases the responsibility of other parties. More specifically, the contribution of the socialist *PSOE* and *UGT*, as well as of rightist political groups becomes even more significant than previous scholars have considered it to be. Starting in 1934, both groups proved to be only 'semi-loyal' to the Republic, swinging back and forth from proclaiming their loyalty to Republican democracy, to denouncing the established rule of law, and threatening to undermine the established political regime (through revolutionary or counterrevolutionary measures), depending on what best served their political objectives.<sup>94</sup>

The 'semi-loyalty' of the *CEDA* was crucial to the destabilisation of the Republic. The Catholic conservative coalition party never fully committed itself to Republican democracy. It did succeed in securing the support of a large proportion of Spain's conservative Catholic population, but it did little to convert them to the idea of respecting democratic governance. After Hitler's rise to power in Germany in

January 1933, Gil Robles openly flirted with fascism and the *CEDA* aesthetic took on a distinctly fascist flair, especially among its youth groups. By early 1936, many *CEDA* members believed the party's ultimate objective was the replacement of the Republic with an authoritarian corporate regime.<sup>95</sup> Of course, the Left were quick to denounce the *CEDA*'s 'fascistic' tendencies. The *CEDA*'s obsessive overturning of the first biennium's political reforms and its aggressive repression after the October 1934 revolt further intensified friction with the Left, which united across party lines to form the Popular Front. Gil Robles's arrogance and self-righteousness in the parliamentary *Cortes* alienated other rightists, while it gave the Popular Front an anchor point from which to build support for its electoral programme.<sup>96</sup> Finally, after the Popular Front victory in February 1936 the *CEDA* all but gave up on the Republic, opting instead to support a conservative *coup* that would restore them to power, even at the expense of democracy.<sup>97</sup>

The leftist socialists were no less responsible for undermining the Second Republic. After a promising first couple of years, during which the socialists collaborated with other leftist and centrist parties to push through much needed political and social reforms, the defeat they suffered at the polls in December 1933 – and their consequent exclusion from power – unleashed another face of socialism in Spain. The electoral reverse shocked the socialists, unable to accept that the Spanish 'people' would vote them out of power. Wasting no time, and granting no respect to the democratic process that had brought them to power in 1931, socialists used the *Alianza Obrera* [Worker Alliance] to gather support for a revolutionary uprising against the conservative administration then in office. The October 1934 revolt in Asturias and Catalonia lasted nearly two weeks, was far more destructive and bloody than all of the *ocho* anarcho-syndicalist insurrections put together, and culminated with a very severe government repression.<sup>98</sup> It granted some legitimacy to socialist leader Francisco Largo Caballero's otherwise misleading nickname of 'Spanish Lenin'. More importantly, however, it marked a significant point of inflection in Second Republic politics, after which both the political Left and Right became increasingly polarised. Largo Caballero encouraged the radicalisation of the *UGT* and *PSOE* with incendiary revolutionary rhetoric, which in 1936 came to be associated with the Popular Front coalition. It is now clearer that the flood of revolutionary language uttered by Largo Caballero, and the radical wing of the socialist party was not backed by any serious revolutionary planning.<sup>99</sup> Rather, it seems the proud proclamations of popular revolt were designed to destabilise the national government, as well as force new elections that the socialists believed the Popular Front would win. Yet as Brian Bunk notes, in 1936 the stakes were much higher. Socialist revolutionary rhetoric was not taken lightly by the political Right, which almost immediately following its own defeat at the polls in February began to plot a *coup*.<sup>100</sup>

Socialist and *CEDA* semi-loyalty to the Republic differed greatly from anarcho-syndicalist anti-political rejection of the Second Republic. Although large numbers of the *CNT* membership voted in political elections, and the *CNT* hierarchy demonstrated an intrinsic interest in influencing politics and legislation, the *CNT* as an organisation always rejected participation in the political system. As such, its actions threatened the Republic from the *outside*. No matter how virulent, anarcho-syndicalist revolutionary rhetoric never undermined the ideological or political pillars on which the Republic stood. The *ocho* insurrections, although violent and a threat to public order, were clearly external attacks against the Republic. The *CNT* represented an aggressive 'other' or establishment outsider.

The *PSOE* and *CEDA*, on the other hand, represented something completely different. Even though both parties proclaimed at different times their reservations on parliamentary politics, they both implicitly accepted the Republican regime and its governing structure by participating in the political process. In 1936 both organisations together made up the great majority of seats in the *Cortes*. They were not minority parties standing on the political periphery. Their proclamations and actions directly affected the stability of the increasingly polarised Republican political system. They *were* the Republican establishment, so when their leaders openly and loudly proclaimed in parliament their intentions to circumvent or ignore outright the established legal channels of democratic participation, they were challenging the Republic's legitimacy and thus its very existence. It was for this reason that the socialist-led October 1934 revolt and the *CEDA*-supported July 1936 *coup* succeeded in destabilising, and finally bringing down, the Second Republic where the *ocho* insurrections had not.

This does not completely exculpate the *CNT* of responsibility for the breakdown of the Second Republic. Perhaps the most influential impact of the *CNT*'s revolutionary gymnastics was to encourage the major players in Spanish politics to opt for extra-legal tactics, stepping outside the boundaries of democratic political participation. The rightist *Sanjurjada* (1932), the October 1934 revolt in Asturias and Catalonia and the July 1936 military *coup* stand out as clear examples of this disregard for democratic participation and procedures. Clearly, both the military and leftist political elements involved in organising these *coups* considered the disregard for legal avenues of political participation, and the use of violence, to be acceptable methods of attaining power.<sup>101</sup> These tactics were not new to early twentieth-century Spanish politics. However, one wonders what their level of conviction and determination would have been if the *CNT* had, during the first years of the Second Republic, not pushed the boundaries of 'acceptable' political action so far. Furthermore, for leftist political and labour groups such as the *PSOE* or *UGT*, the *CNT*'s propagation of a proposed solution to the inadequacies of capitalist society that was both more radical and had more popular support than their own placed them in an ambiguous position somewhere between reformism and radicalism. Without the radicalising influence of the *CNT*, would the *UGT* have taken such a drastic turn in its approach to political participation after losing its influence in the national government in late 1933?<sup>102</sup>

While within the *CNT* the pragmatic turn evidenced after December 1933 represented a sharp shift in the syndicate's strategy and policies, outside of the organisation this change seemed less consequential. Stepping a little closer toward the ideological centre did not alter the *CNT*'s position as the most radical leftist organisation in Spanish politics. To the majority of Spanish society and the political establishment, the *CNT* continued to represent revolutionary insurgency and violent direct action. After all, the anarcho-syndicalist union remained committed, at least nominally, to anti-politicism, violent tactics and revolutionary action. It was in this environment that in July 1936, as increasingly radicalised political parties on both the political Right and Left threatened to step outside the boundaries of legality and take matters into their own hands, the anarcho-syndicalist *CNT* insisted on the defence of the established Republican regime. As ironic as it might seem, the organisation that had for so many years channelled efforts to overthrow the political establishment was, in the spring and early summer of 1936, one of its most ardent defenders.

Even though the Republic survived the initial onslaught of the military rebels, the regime was left weak and unstable by the uprising, creating a power vacuum that in some areas allowed worker militias to take over as the *de facto* political power. This was the case in Barcelona, where governmental authorities remained in control in name only, and CNT syndicate committees were generally recognised as the new authority.<sup>103</sup> With no effective force to stop them, workers began occupying factories and taking over the means of production. Their actions sparked a profound social revolution that quickly spread throughout Catalonia and the rest of Spain. Although not planning to carry out offensive revolutionary actions in July 1936, the CNT militancy nevertheless rapidly supported the political and economic changes occurring in the months following the outbreak of civil war. After so many years preaching the coming of the revolution, the anarcho-syndicalist militants could not refuse to lead the effort. But while large numbers of the workers occupying factories belonged to the CNT, the seizures and violent reprisals did not always meet with the approval of the union leadership. In fact, with the power of the workers still on the rise, the overwhelming aim of the CNT hierarchy was to bring the expropriations under control, while also beginning work on establishing the foundation of a coherent path toward winning the war.

It was in this frame of mind that prominent CNT leaders, including Durruti, Abad de Santillán and García Oliver, met with the Catalan *Generalitat* President Lluís Companys on 23 July to discuss the situation. The regional government had little effective authority and was powerless to stop the violent excesses of worker militias. Companys admitted to the anarcho-syndicalists that they had achieved dominant control in Catalonia, and offered to relinquish his political control to the syndicate's defence committees.<sup>104</sup> For the first time in CNT history, the anarcho-syndicalists faced the possibility of abolishing the state and seizing political power. But the anarcho-syndicalists present at the meeting renounced any intention of imposing absolute power on such an unstable political situation. Instead, they agreed to collaborate with the region's other leftist organisations in establishing a *Comité de Milicias Antifascistas* [Committee of Antifascist Militias] as a means of coordinating the effort against the military insurgents.

The decision surprised many, including Companys himself. It was, however, the CNT's radical anarchist elements who felt the most betrayed by this decision, for they considered the situation propitious for definitive revolutionary action. Speaking at a meeting of regional CNT committees on 23 July, the anarchist leader Joan García Oliver advocated 'going all the way' with a revolutionary transformation of the system, and the implantation of libertarian communism.<sup>105</sup> The syndicate's statutes, he reminded his colleagues, required such a course of action. Nevertheless, the prevailing notion among the syndicate delegates was that the appropriate moment for revolution had not yet arrived. As the then secretary of the CNT's national committee Mariano Vázquez recalled, the meeting of local syndicates voted heavily in favour of not implanting 'libertarian communism' until the impending threat presented by the military coup was eliminated.<sup>106</sup> The collectivisation of farmland and factories would continue to assure that productivity did not languish, but always in collaboration with other loyalist supporters of the Republican regime.

Condemnations of the new political collaboration did little to halt it. The principal argument in favour of cooperating with political forces was the pressing need to defeat 'fascism' on the battlefield. In the first month of hostilities, the CNT press in fact played down the progress of the revolution, placing greater importance,



instead, on the armed 'anti-fascist' struggle throughout Spain, especially in Zaragoza. Day after day, *Solidaridad Obrera* dedicated its front page to the fighting in and around the Aragonese capital.<sup>107</sup> The revolution, on the other hand, barely attracted attention, and now became relegated to the back page. There were no headlines proclaiming the revolution. These facts contradict, at least in part, the traditional argument that the *CNT* sacrificed the war in favour of carrying out the revolution.

Effective administrative power in Catalonia was transferred to the newly created *Comité de Milicias Antifascistas*. Of the 15 posts on the *CAMC*, the *CNT* only took three and the *FAI* two. The rest were distributed among Companys' *Esquerra Republicana*, the socialist *UGT*, the left-centrist *Acció Catalana* and the Marxist *POUM*. The *CNT* and *FAI* had taken the unprecedented step of direct political involvement by joining the *CAMC*. A month later, anarcho-syndicalists joined the national government and the regional *Generalitat*, demonstrating again their willingness to work in a larger 'anti-fascist' coalition. Although the new allies generally welcomed anarcho-syndicalist contributions, they were not so easily convinced by the *CNT*'s claim that it would give fighting the war precedence over the revolution. Quietly at first, but growing louder as the months passed, these uneasy bedfellows questioned the *CNT*'s loyalty to the Republican cause, despite the anarcho-syndicalists' actions demonstrating a determined commitment to the defeat 'fascism'. In fact, the anarcho-syndicalist plan to fight the war differed from that of their Republican and communist allies, which resulted in tensions, and even violent confrontations that destabilised the Republican camp.

The revolutionary crisis climaxed in early May 1937, at which point tensions between pro- and anti-revolutionary movements in Catalonia exploded into a series of bloody street engagements known as the 'May Days'.<sup>108</sup> The conclusion of this war within a war on 5 May marked the definitive end of *CNT* involvement in national government, the end of the revolutionary drive started ten months before, and the beginning of strong communist influence in the Republican camp. Ultimately, the anarcho-syndicalists were outmanoeuvred by their Republican and communist opponents, who exploited the collective responsibility of the anti-fascist war effort to erode the *CNT*'s sources of popular power gained in July 1936.

Although many anarcho-syndicalists felt they had been betrayed by their allies, they nevertheless maintained their support for the Republican cause until the end of the war. For nearly two more years anarcho-syndicalists fought on for a communist-dominated regime which repeatedly withheld crucial weapons and supplies from the *CNT*. And while other Loyalist allies – namely the Basque and Catalan regionalists – would eventually turn their backs on the Republican cause, the anarcho-syndicalists remained committed to defeating 'fascism' in Spain, even after it became evident that victory was hopeless.

## Notes

1. The prolific writers Cesar Vidal and Pio Moa head this revisionist trend. Together they have covered a wide range of topics related to the Civil War. Cesar Vidal's repertoire includes *Las Brigadas Internacionales* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1998); *Checas de Madrid: las cárceles republicanas al descubierto* (Barcelona: Carroggio, 2003); and *La destrucción de Guernica: un balance sesenta años después* (Madrid: Espasa Hoy, 1997). For Pio Moa, see *Los orígenes de la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Encuentro Ediciones, 1999); *Los mitos de la guerra civil* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros,

- 2003); and 1934: *comienzo la Guerra Civil: el PSOE y la Esquerra emprenden la contienda* (Barcelona: Altera, 2004).
2. Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–1936* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965); Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *La II República* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1976); Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War: Reform, Reaction, and Revolution in the Second Republic, 1931–1936* (London: Routledge, 1978) and *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (New York: Grove Press, 1986); Santos Juliá, *Madrid 1931–1934: de la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1984).
  3. Moa, *Los mitos* (note 1), p.189.
  4. *Ibid.*
  5. *Ibid.*
  6. Unfortunately, the debate has often degenerated into a crossfire of virulent accusations. The latest episode in Chris Ealham, "'Myths' and the Spanish Civil War: Some Old, Some Exploded, Some Clearly Borrowed and Some Almost 'Blue'", *Journal of Contemporary History* 42/2 (2007), pp.365–76.
  7. Most recently, Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Rafael Cruz, *En el nombre del pueblo. República, rebelión y guerra en la España de 1936* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006).
  8. Stanley Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933–1936* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2006); Brian D. Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion: Martyrdom, Gender, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
  9. Among the more significant studies are: Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970); Santos Juliá, *Orígenes del Frente Popular en España 1934–1936* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1979); Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986); Stanley Payne, *Spain's First Democracy. The Second Republic* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Nigel Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain. Centrist Politics under the Second Republic 1931–1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2000).
  10. Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth. An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1943); José Peirats, *La C.N.T. en la revolución española* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones CNT, 1955); Albert Balcells, *Crisis económica y agitación social en Cataluña, 1930–1936* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1971); Antonio Elorza, *La utopía Anarquista bajo la Segunda República* (Madrid: Ayuso, 1973); Juan Gómez Casas, *Los anarquistas en el Gobierno 1936–1939* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1977); Graham Kelsey, *Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State. The CNT in Zaragoza and Aragon 1930–1937* (Amsterdam: Kluwer International Institute of Social History, 1991).
  11. CNT, *Congreso de Constitución de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT), Palacio de las Bellas Artes, 30 de octubre a 1 de noviembre de 1910* (Barcelona, 1976); *Estatutos Sindicato de Servicios Públicos* (Barcelona, 1931), National Civil War Archives Salamanca, PS Barcelona 939 (from here on, NCWAS); "Reglamento porque se ha de regir el sindicato metalúrgico de Gijón afecto a la C.N.T. domiciliada en la casa de pueblo" (April 1930) NCWAS, PS Gijón K46; Miguel González Urién and Fidel Revilla González, *La C.N.T. a través de sus Congresos* (Mexico, 1981).
  12. George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938).
  13. Julián Casanova, *De la calle al frente. El anarcosindicalismo en España (1931–1939)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1997), pp.156–78; Eulalia Vega, *Entre revolució i reforma. La CNT a Catalunya (1930–1936)* (Lleida: Pagès Editors, 2004), pp.180–95. Christopher Ealham has come closest to identifying the genuine motivation behind the 'moderate turn'. In his view, the radicalisation of the early 1930s was an aberration, not a true representation, of the CNT character. The Second Republic is seen as a period of organisational crisis that hampered rather than encouraged the CNT's growth and development. In this context, the moderate turn is seen as an attempt to eliminate the 'extraneous' influence of radical elements on the organisational hierarchy. Yet, Ealham remains tied to the notion that in the weeks prior to the July 1936 coup the CNT remained at the ready for revolutionary action. Christopher Ealham, "'Revolutionary Gymnastics' and the Unemployed. The Limits of the Spanish Anarchist Utopia 1931–1937", in Keith Flett and David Renton (eds), *The Twentieth Century: A Century of Wars and Revolutions?* (London: Rivers Oram, 2000); and Christopher Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898–1937* (London: Routledge, 2005).
  14. Juan Gómez Casas, *Historia de la FAI* (Madrid: Editorial Zero, 1977), pp.117–25.
  15. José Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868–1910)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1976), pp.583–5.
  16. Jordi Getman-Eraso, "Rethinking the Revolution: Utopia and Pragmatism in Catalan Anarchosyndicalism", Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2001), pp.8–12.

17. Jordi Getman-Eraso, "Pragmatism Unveiled: The Meanings of Revolutionary Rhetoric in Spanish Anarchosyndicalism", in Sasha Pack (ed.), *Nation and Conflict in Modern Spain* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Parallel Press, forthcoming), pp.32–4.
18. Stanley Payne, "On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and its Application", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6/2 (2005), pp.166–7.
19. José Álvarez Junco, "La subcultura anarquista en España: racionalismo y populismo", in the collected work, *Culturas populares. Diferencias, divergencias, conflictos* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1986), p.200.
20. *Ibid.*, pp.201–7.
21. Jordi Getman-Eraso, "The CNT in the Worker Neighborhood: a Labor Mafia?" (unpublished paper, 2003).
22. Gerald Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp.145–9; Vega (note 13), pp.167–73 and pp.214–9; "La expulsión de Ángel Pestaña", in *CNT, Boletín de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (Barcelona, 1933); "El poder de los Sindicatos", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 2 October 1931; Ángel Pestaña, *Trayectoria sindicalista* (Madrid, 1974), pp.607–64; Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña, *Actas del pleno regional de sindicatos convocado para los días 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, y 30 de Abril de 1932 en Sabadell* (April, 1932) NCWAS, PS Barcelona 932.
23. Getman-Eraso (note 17), pp.8–9.
24. Enric Ucelay da Cal and Susanna Tavera García, "Una revolución dentro de otra: la lógica insurreccional en la política española, 1924–1934", in *Ayer* 13 (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1994), pp.125–8.
25. Mercedes Vilanova, *Las mayorías invisibles. Explotación fabril, revolución y represión* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1996); Anna Monjo, *Militants. Democracia i participació a la CNT als anys trenta* (Lleida: Alertes, 2003).
26. Susanna Tavera and Eulalia Vega, "L'afiliació sindical a la CRT de Catalunya: entre l'eufòria revolucionària i l'ensulsiada confederal, 1919–1936", in *Revolució i Sindicalisme* (Vol. II) (Barcelona, 1989), pp.357–8.
27. The June 1931 numbers are from the national congress celebrated in Madrid. The December membership is an approximate number, as official numbers do not exist. It is a combination of figures given at regional congresses held throughout Spain in the last months of 1931. Casanova (note 13), pp.22–5.
28. According to UGT records, the Socialist union comprised 958,451 affiliates nationwide. Instituto Geográfico, Catastral y de Estadística, *Anuario estadístico de España, 1932–1933* (Madrid, 1934), p.671.
29. José Manuel Macarro, "La disolución de la utopía en el movimiento anarcosindicalista español", *Historia Social* 15 (Winter 1993), pp.145–9.
30. Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña (note 22), pp.II–VIII.
31. The *treintistas* received their name because of the original thirty signatories to a reformist CNT manifesto published in the organisational newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* in August 1931. Most *treintistas* went on to form the *Sindicatos de Oposición* (Opposition Syndicates), similar in organisational structure to the CNT and apolitical in nature. John Brademas, *Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en España, 1930–1937* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1974), pp.76–7, 91–2, 117–21; Eulalia Vega, *Anarquistas y sindicalistas 1931–1936. La CNT y los Sindicatos de Oposición en el País Valenciano* (Valencia: Alfons el Magnànim, 1987), pp.225–6.
32. The term *faista* was used to refer to radical, typically revolutionist elements within the CNT. They were closely identified with the *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* [Anarchist Iberian Federation], or *FAI*, a small organisation dedicated to maintaining the CNT true to its anarchist roots, though in truth very few *faistas* were actual members of the *FAI*. Fidel Miró, *Cataluña, los trabajadores y el problema de las nacionalidades (La solución federal)* (Mexico City: Editores mexicano unidos, 1967), pp.48–53; Getman-Eraso (note 16), pp.52–8.
33. Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Cataluña (note 22), pp.II–VII.
34. Casanova (note 13), pp.102–8; Ealham (note 13), pp.130–33.
35. Adolfo Bueso, *Recuerdos de un cenetista. De la Semana Trágica (1909) a la Segunda República (1931)* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1976), p.62.
36. Brademas (note 31), pp.62–74.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.72–9.
38. Brademas (note 31), pp.80–95; Getman-Eraso (note 16), pp.187–202.
39. Getman-Eraso (note 16), pp.188–95. Examples of the use of a perceived fascist threat to motivate worker participation in the insurrection include, in the *FAI* organ *Tierra y Libertad*, "Al menor intento fascista, hay que desencadenar la revolución", 3 November 1933; and in the CNT daily *Solidaridad Obrera*, "Antes que el fascismo, la revolución social", 1 November 1933.
40. "Es forzoso seguir hablando de la amnistía", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 April 1934.

41. Tavera and Vega (note 26), pp.357–8.
42. Jacinto Toryho, *No éramos tan malos* (Madrid: G. del Toro Ed., 1975), p.67.
43. "Es forzoso seguir hablando de la amnistía", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 14 April 1934; "Vivimos el mejor de los mundos", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 20 April 1934.
44. "Informe de la comisión de alianza al comité de la Confederación Regional del Trabajo de Asturias, León, y Palencia" (16 April 1936) NCWAS, PS Gijón J12.
45. For the heated debate as a result of Urales' suggestion of an alliance with the UGT see "Una fatalidad histórica", *Revista Blanca* (15 March 1935).
46. CNT, *Actas del pleno nacional de regionales* (Barcelona, 1936) NCWAS, FA-62; CRTG, *Actas del congreso regional celebrado en Barcelona los días 28-30 de enero 1936* (Barcelona, 1936), pp.14–19.
47. CNT, *Congreso Confederal de Zaragoza* (Barcelona: 1978), pp.22–8.
48. "Perspectivas claras para la reconstrucción sindical", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 18 March 1936.
49. "El congreso de la CNT", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 April 1936.
50. *Tierra y Libertad*, 13 March 1936.
51. F. Sanchez Perez, "La huelga de construcción en Madrid (Junio–Julio 1936)", *Historia* 16 (14 February 1989), p.26.
52. "Nota de los obreros barberos", *La Vanguardia*, 2 June 1936.
53. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 4 April 1936.
54. Wilebaldo Solano, *POUM en la historia. Andreu Nin y la revolución española* (Madrid: Libros de la Catarata, 1999); Andrew Durgan, *B.O.C. 1930–1936: El Bloque Obrero y Campesino* (Barcelona: Laertes, 1996).
55. Brademas (note 31), p.167.
56. "Els conflictes socials", *La Publicitat*, 24 June 1936.
57. "La huelga en la industria metalúrgica", *La Vanguardia*, 11 April 1936.
58. A theme much repeated in the pages of *La Vanguardia* and *La Publicitat* in the initial stages of the strike.
59. See issues between 8 and 12 April of *Solidaridad Obrera* and *El Socialista*.
60. "La situación en la industria metalúrgica", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 10 April 1936.
61. "La asamblea de los metalúrgicos", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 April 1936.
62. See Stanley Payne, "Political Violence During the Spanish Second Republic", *Journal of Contemporary History* 25/2 (1990), pp.269–88.
63. Juan Linz, "From Great Hopes to Civil War: The Breakdown of Democracy in Spain", in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.188.
64. *Comercio y Navegación*, January 1936.
65. *Comercio y Navegación*, April 1936; "Doble atentado del Martes", *La Veu de Catalunya*, 29 April 1936; and "Un atentado", *La Vanguardia*, 30 April 1936.
66. "Hombre gravemente herido", *La Vanguardia*, 5 May 1936.
67. "Fué muerto a tiros el director de una fábrica de blondas", *La Vanguardia*, 3 July 1936.
68. "Un recadero es asesinado a tiros", *La Vanguardia*, 4 July 1936.
69. "Un atentado", *La Vanguardia*, 3 July 1936.
70. The sole exception to this trend was the city of Lleida, in the west of Catalonia. There shootings tended to follow the Spanish model of 'political violence' much more closely than those of Barcelona. Six of the seven shootings that occurred in Lleida arose from disputes between opposing political factions. *Comercio y Navegación*, January to July 1936 issues.
71. Robert Kern, *Red Years, Black Years. A Political History of Spanish Anarchism 1911–1937* (Philadelphia, PA: Study of Human Issues, 1978), pp.128–34; Pestaña (note 22), pp.234–50; Bueso (note 35), pp.34–55.
72. "El momento actual", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 May 1936.
73. *Ibid.*
74. The 'fascist threat' was both a respected and feared enemy. In the words of one militant, 'In Spain, fascism has certain factors in its favor that the workers' social revolutionary forces have never had, nor will ever have: great financial resources, the support and direction of military and political technicians, the support of the still powerful and aggressive church clergy, [as well as] an undeniable influence in all the levels of State administration and large industry', *Tierra y Libertad*, 15 March 1936.
75. "Serenidad", *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 June 1936.
76. "¡Alto el fuego, camaradas!" *Solidaridad Obrera*, 13 June 1936.
77. The nearly 560,000 members represented at the Zaragoza Congress were still far from the 825,000 affiliates that the industrial union claimed in mid 1932, but they represented a qualitative jump

- from the low enrollment of 1934 and 1935, which has been estimated to have fallen to between 300,000 and 400,000 dues paying members. CNT (note 47), p.64.
78. Ibid., pp.74–9.
  79. “Dictamen de la ponencia designada para el tercer punto del orden del día: Analisis de actividad y fijación de normas” (May 1936) NCWAS, PS Gijón J 22, p.2.
  80. Ibid.
  81. Ibid.
  82. Getman-Eraso (note 16), pp.328–30.
  83. Graham (note 7), pp.79–89; Payne (note 9), pp.335–42; Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos. A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp.23–9.
  84. “Acta del pleno local de grupos anarquistas de Barcelona” (June 1936) NCWAS, PS Barcelona 1335; CNT, *Sindicato Nacional del Transporte Marítimo, Segundo Pleno Extraordinario* (Madrid: 1936) NCWAS, F-4936.
  85. See headlines of *Solidaridad Obrera* from 14 and 15 July 1936: “!En pie de guerra contra el fascismo!”; “Contra el fascismo, unidos y alertos”; “Contra la reacción, la CNT está en su puesto de lucha”.
  86. “El fascismo”, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 12 June 1936.
  87. Abel Paz, *Chumberas y alacranes (1921–1936)* (Barcelona: Diego Camacho, 1994), p.203.
  88. The dates were 2, 3, 16 June and 17 July.
  89. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 July 1936.
  90. “Miting de la CNT”, *La Vanguardia*, 9 July 1936.
  91. The slaying of Calvo Sotelo was payback for the killing hours earlier of Assault Guard lieutenant José Castillo, an ardent socialist and a member of the Unión Militar Republicana Antifascista (Antifascist Republican Military Union). Ian Gibson, *La noche en la que mataron a Calvo Sotelo* (Madrid: Argos Vergara, 1982).
  92. “!Basta ya!” *Solidaridad Obrera*, 16 July 1936.
  93. Paz (note 87), pp.203–4.
  94. The concept of ‘semi-loyalty’ as proposed by Juan Linz: “in a political system characterized by limited consensus, deep cleavages, and suspicions between leading participants, semiloyalty is easily equated with disloyalty by some of the participants”. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes. Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration. An Introduction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.28.
  95. Payne (note 9), pp.258–64.
  96. Graham (note 7), p.65.
  97. Payne (note 8), pp.83–6.
  98. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Asturias 1934* (Gijón: Júcar, 1980), pp.122–6.
  99. Santos Juliá (note 2), pp.234–51; Moa, *Los mitos* (note 1), p.104.
  100. Brian Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion. Martyrdom, Gender, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp.57–60.
  101. Ucelay da Cal and Tavera (note 24), pp.125–7.
  102. Santos Juliá has for many years underlined the strong influence the UGT’s radicalisation after the 1933 elections had on the breakdown of the Second Republic. More recently, other scholars, including Paul Preston, have also increased the blame they are willing to lay on the Socialists for the outbreak of the fratricidal conflict. Santos Juliá (note 2), pp.138–45; Paul Preston, *La república asediada: hostilidad internacional y conflictos internos durante la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Editorial Peninsula, 2001).
  103. Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p.76.
  104. The famed interview is quoted extensively in Juan Gómez Casas, *Historia del anarcosindicalismo español*. (Madrid: Zyx, 1968), p.208; Diego Abad de Santillán, *Memorias 1897–1936* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977) p.275; Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos* (Barcelona: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), p.170; and Federico Escofet, *De una derrota a una Victoria: 6 de octubre de 1934–19 Julio 1936* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1984), pp.233–5.
  105. García Oliver (note 104), p.171.
  106. From a report prepared by Mariano Vázquez for an AIT congress in December 1937. Gómez Casas (note 14), p.222.
  107. See late July and August 1936 issues of *Solidaridad Obrera*.
  108. José Peirats, *La CNT en la revolución española* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1971), pp.354–60.