

Part 5

Parties and Government

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Text :

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CHAPTER XV POLITICAL COLLABORATION

Though the aim of this book is as accurate a description as possible of the socio-economic achievements of the Spanish libertarian revolution during the years 1936-1939, the author considers it essential to present a picture, however brief, of the political conditions in which these experiments were undertaken and carried out, so that certain facts may be understood more clearly. This was done in the chapter on Materials for a Revolution but we need to add, especially for readers acquainted with libertarian ideas and doctrines, some necessary details.

We have seen that the outbreak of this revolution was part of the, reply of the extreme Left to the Francoist attack. That extreme Left, which in the circumstances was the C.N.T. and the F.A.I., had and has always made intransigent anti-governmentalism and anti-statism a profession of faith. Now, for the first time in history we saw the most powerful libertarian organization in the world, which had always proclaimed the superiority of its well founded choice of direct action; which, consequently, would have rejected as a joke in bad taste the thought of one day entering a ministry, send four ministers to the government: Juan Peiró (Minister for Industry), Juan Garcia Oliver (Minister of Justice), Juan Lopez (Minister of Foreign Commerce) and Federica Montseny, extremist anarchist and intransigent demagogue if ever there was one (Minister of Health). Before that three ministers-modestly referred to as "Councilors" in Catalan-had entered the

Barcelona government, modestly called Generalitat.

The author was not in Spain at the time and therefore did not incur either direct or indirect responsibility in that extraordinary volte face, and when he did arrive in Spain the new ministers were already in office. He is no less uneasy in trying to offer an explanation which he feels necessary, for ministerial collaboration and participation for the first time in the Municipal Councils, exerted different influences, both negative-especially in the former -and positive-especially in the latter-but often decisive so far as the attitude of the libertarian movement was concerned.

Let us say straight out that what drove the anarchists in the first place to enter the Spanish government was the war, the Francoist attack and the fear of seeing the implantation of a fascism in Spain the catastrophic consequences of which were easy to foresee.

In fact, in spite of the bragging and the inept outbidding engaged in by the republican governments, the orators, the journalists who addressed themselves to the masses-and, alas, also libertarian agitators-the uncertainty of ultimate victory affected many even before the Francoist forces had in the south reached the gates of Madrid or had gained ground and taken or surrounded some towns in the northern region, Furthermore, the great majority of the population living in the part of Spain still called republican, was above all dominated by the fear of a Francoist victory and did not understand that the political and social forces organized in parties and anti-fascist sectors did not constitute a united front. Not being the prisoners of politico-philosophic principles, the people wanted the C.N.T. and even the considerably less important F.A.I. to enter the government in order to guarantee a coordination which they deemed indispensable.

The leaders of the C.N.T. behind whom were to be found those of the F.A.I. (and it was not always possible to differentiate between them), first of all did what they could in order not to give in. They were undoubtedly inspired by their traditional attitude of opposition to all governmentalism and therefore to all governmental parties. But in fact in the face of the growing danger, the greatest unification possible was needed. They thought up a revolutionary solution: the government would be replaced by a Defense Council composed of five members from the C.N.T., five from the U.G.T. and four from the republican parties. In this way they

sought to make clear the supremacy of the workers' Syndical organizations over the political parties, and so kill two birds with one stone.

Based on the numerical strength of the respective organisms this representation could appear to be justified. But the truth is also that the political parties had behind them a current of opinion consisting of the electorate. The C.N.T. and U.G.T. still had, in a Spain which was half occupied by the Francoist forces, about 1,200,000 members each-perhaps the U.G.T. had slightly fewer but its members were, by an overwhelming majority, under socialist influence; their structure was socialist just as that of the C.N.T. was libertarian. The majority of members would not therefore have accepted this take-in which would have deceived no one. No more anyway than the statesmen, politicians and professional leaders in the different parties whose influence was a very real one for the majority of the population, and it needed a minimum of commonsense to realize this.

And yet, the idea of the constitution of a unified bloc was gaining ground with many people, even among the libertarians. One of them, Horacio Prieto, the then secretary of the C.N.T., undertook to convince his comrades of the necessity of crossing the Rubicon by entering a coalition government. To that end he had been in touch with Largo Caballero who had become President of the Council, an old political campaigner of the wirepulling kind, [1] who having played the Leftist role within the socialist party during the period preceding the Francoist uprising, thought that the C.N.T. ministers-to-be would support him against his political opponents of the moment, especially the Communists whose influence was growing rapidly. There was agreement in principle between the two men. All that remained was to convince those most qualified to take the perilous leap.

Juan Lopez and Juan Peiró who were more syndicalist and revolutionary than anarchist, accepted. Then the F.A.I. leaders, Federica Montseny and Garcia Oliver, the bolstering of their egos overcoming the intransigence of principles. It is true that they already had the precedent of the Catalan government, where, there too, pure anarchists very easily abandoned their theoretical virginity.

Nevertheless, whoever examines the facts completely objectively, with a sincere desire at understanding, must admit that the situation was not an easy one. The only way of escaping from the dilemma (ministerial collaboration or the weakening of the resistance to the fascist attack) would have been the organization, to a certain

extent autonomous, of the struggle loyally carried out by us alongside the official armies thanks to a combative force seeking its inspiration in the methods of the guerilleros. But let us admit it: the imagination for such a policy was lacking. Back in 1931 the author in his book *Problemas Economicos de la Revolución Española*, had devoted a chapter to the question of the armed struggle in which, without playing at being the strategist or tactician, he drew attention to the form of combat employed by the "caudillo" such as El Empecinado and - other heroes of the war against Napoleon where Masséna and other "enfants chéries de la victoire" had been defeated by the ill-armed peasants. It warned against the error of bowing to modern military methods, instead of having recourse to the tactics of revolutionary war, invented long before Mao Tse-Tung defined it in his own way.

Those who improvised as leaders and military commanders had no ideas at all on the subject. Neither Durruti about whom one hears so much nor Garcia Oliver who had placed himself at the head of the Catalan militias and had drawn up war plans which immobilized Durruti at the gates of Sarragossa, then hastily abandoned his post to become, of all people, Minister of Justice. The initiative failed: the enemy was given the time to reinforce his armament, the time to choose his terrain and the most favorable moment to launch his offensives. The tactical genius that Makhno had given proof of in the Ukraine, when he obliged General Denikin to halt his advance on Moscow, was completely lacking.

And our eminent personages, or who very quickly considered themselves such, were no more equal to the task at the political level than they were at the military level. Their role within the government was simply pitiful. After they had been ousted from it, they complained that the Stalinists, socialists and republicans had blocked all their initiatives, and they were right. Unfortunately they lent themselves to this game in which they were always the dupes and the losers.

When one draws up the balance sheet of this collaboration, the conclusion one comes to is that from every point of view this excursion in the corridors of power was negative. One can admit in extraordinary circumstances -- and they were -- that if, over and above his loyalty to his principles a man is faced with the dilemma of personally contaminating himself to serve a cause which is greater than him, he has the right, and even the duty, to prefer contamination. History, and as it happens, that of revolutions, offers such cases. But there was deviation and

ridicule, in playing the adversary's game, and in saving nothing at all.

The only constructive, valid, important achievement during the Civil War was in fact that of the Revolution, on the fringe of power. The industrial collectivizations, the socialization of agriculture, the syndicalisations of social services, and that, which made it possible to hold out for nearly three years and without which Franco would have triumphed in a matter of weeks, was the achievement of those who created, organized without concerning themselves with ministries and ministers. From the point of view of the conduct of the war and resistance to Franco, our ministers were unable to secure anything that was useful. We have even seen them echoing the slanders made by Caballero against the defenders of Malaga, accused of having handed over the town to Franco, whereas the way they had been systematically deserted by the government could not but lead to the town falling into the enemy's hands. [2] The Aragon front which opened the way either for the Francoists to Catalonia or for the antifascist troops towards the heart of Old Castile, was systematically sabotaged, deprived of weapons, aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. During the first year of the war it would have been possible to break through that front which the fascists were holding with a few thousand mobile troops provided with fast means of transport which could quickly move in wherever an offensive was launched by our forces. It was not done, due to a lack of shells and ammunition, and this made it impossible to relieve the Madrid front, and resulted in the massacre of tens of thousands of combatants to no purpose. Instead they preferred to systematically send arms to the Central front, which was the least vulnerable, on the fascist side, but where the Stalinists were in control. The Russian generals conducted the operations on the Andalusian and Estremadura fronts in such a way that it was impossible to win. And often our forces, made to launch an offensive, found themselves faced by much larger forces and were obliged to retreat at bayonet point to avoid annihilation, leaving behind large numbers of casualties. It was as if the Stalinist and fascist generals were agreed about the massacre of our men. It is true that Stalin was capable of such things and worse; many accounts of the war justify such an hypothesis.

Another aspect of the sabotage which contributed to the rout was the refusal by the Valencia government to give financial aid to the Barcelona Generalitat to purchase arms or the raw materials with which to make them.

Against all this our ministers did nothing, either because they could not or would not. Their protests fell on deaf ears, but they did not denounce that sabotage "because we were collaborating in the government and should not air our differences in public". Men like the Stalinist Jesus Hernandez, who on orders from Moscow engineered Caballero's overthrow, have recounted how the policy of the government was conducted on orders from the representatives of the Comintern, and one can say that the best allies Franco, had were these master manoeuvrers: who were quite unconcerned with the disagreements and protests of the "anarchist" ministers.

We therefore repeat that in face of these great national and international political problems, in face of the~e difficulties for which they were not cut out, even for the major economic problems at national level the militants who played leading roles were not equal to the situation. In a situation of unilateral domination and by the use of dictatorship which silences the malcontents and discontentment, and the use of force to which the Bolsheviki had recourse, it is possible to make mistakes and remain in power. It was not a question of that.

But I also wish to put on record that one of the lessons to, retain from that collaborationist indiscretion was the harm resulting from the poison of power. In general, the rank and file of the C.N.T. remained sound, remarkably sound, as were the libertarian militants we met in the Collectives or at the head of syndicalisations. Eager to construct, with an enthusiastic effort of will, determined to realize that ideal, they let the ministers, the governors, the police chiefs, ministry officials, state officials and babbling nonentities gesticulate. But the great majority of libertarians who had strayed from their own milieu were intoxicated by governmentalism with a rapidity that was heartbreaking. Some would have started a new political party but for the opposition of the rank and file.

CHAPTER XVI LIBERTARIANS AND REPUBLICANS

Historically, the contact between libertarians and republicans first appears in the form of a common struggle against the monarchy, but there are also other explanations. From the second half of the 19th Century some Republican factions felt an active sympathy for "the workers". And certain affinities of thought were soon to emerge. We have already said that it was Pi y Margall the great leader,

thinker and theoretician of federalist republicanism who was the first to translate the works of Proudhon. And it was as a result of these translations that anarchist thought was born in Spain. From another quarter the centralist republican Joaquin Costa wrote one, among his many books, with the title *El Colectivismo Agraria en España*, gathering together systematically all the examples of mutual aid that existed throughout the country. This book could well have borne Kropotkin's name, and would be a suitable sequel to *Mutual Aid*. Among Spanish anarchists he is still held in well deserved esteem; and he also helps one to understand why the libertarian revolution was possible in the countryside.

Furthermore, at the time of the dissolution of the First International, in 1872, the great republican jurist Nicolas Salmeron, an eminent personality universally admired, eloquently defended in the Parliament this workers' revolutionary organization's right to exist.

But above all, it is in the local contacts, in many provincial towns and numerous villages that the esteem and support of the republicans for the libertarians was manifested. Especially with the federalist republicans. In the periods of repression when the C.N.T. Syndicates were made illegal as well as the C.N.T. itself, their premises were always open to us and we met there freely, welcomed with a friendship which was unflinching.

Besides, a quarter of the members of the C.N.T. were republicans. The reason was that having to choose between that organization which was essentially libertarian, and the U.G.T. which was state socialist they preferred ours, whose principles were the greater guarantee of human freedom, whereas Marxism, which the U.G.T. leaders favored, seemed to them a threat for the future ("the danger of a new Middle Ages for humanity" some of them told me).

One will therefore not be surprised that not only some lawyers, mostly republican federalists, such as Francisco Layret, assassinated by the employers' gunmen in 1921, and Eduardo Barriobero, a jurist and talented writer, shot by the Francoists, and many others whose names now escape me, were always at our disposal.

At the time of our Revolution in 1936 the Second Republic had been in existence for only five years. In such a short time only the politicians-among them Alejandro Lerroux, for a long time a rightist and conservative-had had time to be corrupted. Many rank and file forces had remained sound and for these men republicanism

embodied the social question. Thus when the agrarian Collectives emerged, many of them accepted administrative posts especially in accountancy. Belonging mainly to the middle classes they had received a technical training and education which made them efficient collaborators. Libertarian ideas had thus penetrated many republican minds. At the beginning of 1937 this writer was one of the speakers at a large meeting organized by the C.N.T. in Castellon de la Plana. Half the audience, of some 5,000, were republicans who had remained honest. It also explains how it was possible to introduce libertarian social reforms in that town in the conditions which we have described elsewhere.

CHAPTER XVII THE INTERNAL COUNTER-REVOLUTION

A complete account of the behavior of the government authorities to the diverse achievements of socialization, undertaken and realized by the Spanish libertarians during the period 1936-1939 would show contradictory attitudes which could be commented on in different ways. That the Ministry of Industry, which in the early months was in the hands of a C.N.T. militant, Juan Peiró, did in some cases help undertakings by financial contributions, such as was the case of the S.I.C.E.P. in Elda, there can be no question. But in general, that aid had as its objective not so much to help socialization, which was not approved of, but to save the political situation by supporting war industries. This did not prevent the Stalinists, when they were laying down the law inside the government, to sabotage even the manufacture of goods needed for the struggle against the Francoist armies. But at the same time, the government authorities as well as the Stalinist Communist Party, on many occasions waged war on the social achievements we have been describing. It will not come amiss to enumerate some of the more notorious with which we were acquainted.

These events were sometimes accompanied by incredible violence. The first of these armed confrontations between the builders of the Collectives and the government forces occurred in the region of the Levante. In view of the growing strength of the Collectives they represented as it were the alternative power to the central government (by then installed in Valencia) in the event of military victory over Franco's forces. The government reacted to this threat by launching an

offensive against the Collectives. Duly militarized, the "carabineros", a branch of the Civil Guard, and the Assault Guards, another police corps, created by the Republic, were chosen for this offensive the first of which took place in the Levante in March 1937. The attackers came from Alicante and Murcia. Their forces included an artillery section with large numbers of machine guns and tanks which could have been better employed at the front where they were short of them. (Eighteen were counted in the Gandia region and thirteen in the Alfara del Patriarca region.) Our peasant comrades, who were expecting the attack, had got ready to resist, and fought with rifles, revolvers and two anti-tank guns. The government forces planned to converge on Cullera and on Alfara, strategic points for eventual operations. But almost the whole region rose in arms, and in response to the alarm bells which were widely used, people joined them from the neighboring villages armed with shotguns, to give assistance to the localities under attack. Hand grenades were widely used and two battalions of the Iron Column followed by two more of the Confederal Column (of the C.N.T.) came all the way from the Teruel front to Segorbe. The cantonal federations of Jativa, Carcagente, Gandia, Sueca having gathered their forces, established the "Gandia Front" while those from Catarroja, Liria, Moncada, Paterna and Burriana established the "Villanesa Front". In Cullera and its environs the struggle lasted four days at the end of which the official troops, being unable to advance, changed their plans and moved in the direction of Silla. Finally the intervention of the leaders of the C.N.T. brought the struggle to an end. Prisoners and captured arms were exchanged, but in spite of everything some of our people, especially members of the libertarian youth, were imprisoned and only released later. There were dead and wounded, but the Collectives were not destroyed; indeed the number increased at an even faster rate.

It would appear that the whole operation had been mounted by the War Minister, the right wing socialist Indalecio Prieto, in agreement on this occasion with the Communists, whom he hated but with whom he was reconciled for this venture.

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In Catalonia too the military forces in the rearguard had been organized more quickly than the forces who were languishing without arms along the Aragon front. And when Companys, president of the Generalitat, implicitly or tacitly with the

other political parties, thought the time had come he approved of what has been called the "May Days" 1937 which ended in the eviction of our ministers and of our comrades in high official posts, and in the Communist take-over in record time of the police corps, the administrative responsibilities and the already infiltrated army. From that moment the persecutions started against our forces and we lost ground everywhere except in production.

One of the most striking examples of hostility was the embittered struggle against the collectivization of urban transport in Barcelona.

We have seen how the central government had only asked that 3% of its receipts should be paid in taxes to the Finance ministry; and the Catalan government presumably to demonstrate the superiority of federalism and decentralization demanded payment of 14 different taxes. But both governments were very careful not to upset the new socialized organization, knowing only too well that it could not replace it, and that to paralyze the means of transport in a city like Barcelona and in the suburbs would cause the kind of chaos which would play into the hands of fascism.

The Stalinists who had no such scruples received the order to sabotage and as is their wont, carried it out conscientiously. Having been removed from the management committee in which by rights they should never have been because they represented an insignificant minority and never missed an opportunity to put a brake on the enthusiasm that existed by diverse and machiavellian maneuvers, they did not however stop raising obstacles and creating difficulties.

They went about the task in many ways. For instance they had succeeded in becoming a majority in an engineering workshop where 24 workers made spare parts -- to be exact, bearings -- without which the tramcars would grind to a standstill. They did not refuse to work; indeed they formally undertook to supply what was asked of them. But a month after the delivery date established the bearings had still not been made. When eventually they were made they were the wrong size. It was partly as a means of defending itself against such forms of sabotage that the Syndicate purchased an ultra modern electric furnace.

Another maneuver consisted in fomenting disagreements and disputes between the different branches of the transport network. The Stalinists had managed to become the majority in the management of one of the two large bus companies. The

tramway workers bought a ticket when they used the busses but schooled by their committee the bus company's employees did not pay when they traveled on the trams. This caused friction, which is what they wanted. An end was put to, this situation by threatening to have recourse to strong action.

Again in Catalonia, the forms of sabotage were perfected by adapting oneself to changes in the situation. Three new elements were taken into account:

- a) The growing need felt by the population to give the struggle against fascism top priority -- a view with which our comrades concurred, but a return to management along capitalist lines of the tramways and other enterprises would, on the contrary, strengthen the possibilities of defeat.
- b) The entry of official Communists into the War and Industry Ministry after the May Days of 1937.
- c) The rights possessed by that Ministry to requisition, through its agents cunningly placed, the technical means needed for the production of arms and ammunition. These agents, or ministerial representatives, started by demanding delivery of the chemical products used for welding the rails, with the pretext of using them for the manufacture of explosives. Our comrades complied in order not to be accused of hampering the struggle against Franco but then sent technically qualified men to France to buy equipment based on electrodes (as already described) and the maneuver was neutralized. As to the requisitioned chemical products, they were left to go bad in some warehouses where they had been dumped by the Stalinists. Some weeks later several officers specially instructed, with a written order from the War Ministry in Valencia, presented themselves to requisition the latest model American lathe, though the Ministry could have easily purchased several in France, Belgium or elsewhere. [1] Our comrades offered resistance to this confiscation, and as the excuses constantly advanced were the needs of war, to which they contributed without remuneration, offered to work even more hours without payment in order to, satisfy the needs that they invoked. The offer was refused. They wanted the machine in order to disorganize the Barcelona transport services. In an attempt at conciliation, our comrades suggested exchanging two milling machines of the most recent design, and which the War Ministry could have bought abroad, for two other, older models. This exchange led to an unexpected discovery.

A technician delegated by the Syndicate to go and choose the two machines offered in exchange for theirs found them in a secret depot to which he was taken. It was situated in a place called Sarria, near Barcelona, and our astounded comrade saw there 80 other milling machines, some 40 rectifiers and some hundred lathes. What were these machines doing there when they were so badly needed by the arms factories and when there were none at all in other regions? Perhaps they were waiting to bring them out when they would be in power at national level. This not having happened the machines remained where they were. They were left to the Francoists to use.

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The Stalinists went further. In the Aragon countryside where the villages were more scattered, less densely populated and less organized for struggle behind the fronts than were those in the Levante, they succeeded in almost completely destroying the Collectives. The method used was the following.

In June 1937 after the decisive May Days in Barcelona, the Stalinist Uribe, the new Minister of Agriculture, published a decree by which he legalized the agrarian Collectives throughout the Spanish territory, whatever the circumstances, in which they had been formed. For anyone who knew what a vigorous campaign this man had waged against the social creations of the peasant revolutionaries, this about turn was surprising. For months he had been delivering radio speeches advising peasants not to join the Collectives, urging the smallholders to oppose them and combat them by every means, and he was speaking in his capacity as a minister, so much so that the conservatives and reactionaries who remained in the countryside felt they were being given official support, while those who hesitated about joining concluded that if the establishment was expressing itself against these new social structures, they would not last very long after the victory over Franco; so better not to risk taking the plunge.

Not satisfied with this campaign, Uribe organized the Peasant Federation of the Levante, which the defenders of private property in the land joined en masse. Stalinists and fascists rubbed shoulders cordially. The anti-revolutionary united front was thus on the march.

It was for this reason that the tardy legislation had caused so much surprise, the more so since groups of Young Communists were organized to spread themselves

in Catalonia and the Levante, ostensibly with the intention of helping the peasants to harvest and gather the crops. The Stalinist press published whole columns of communiqués, reports and slogans praising this wholehearted collaboration of the "shock brigades".

Those who knew the traditional tactics of these implacable enemies of the collectivizations could have no illusions about the aims of the campaign. It was a case of infiltration of the agrarian organizations, following a traditional method, of using them or of destroying them from within.

But in that month of June the offensive in Aragon was launched on a scale and using methods so far not experienced. The time for harvesting was drawing near, which explains a lot. In the countryside the carabinieri, often led by men of the Communist Party who had known how to secure posts of command, started to hold up at pistol point food lorries going from one province to another, and taking them to their barracks. A little later the same carabinieri traversed the Collectives, and in the name of the General Staff with headquarters in Barbastro, demanded large quantities of corn.

The Aragon Collectives could not be accused of meanness, especially towards the fighting forces which without their supplies would have quickly disintegrated (we have given elsewhere many proofs of this). But they were waiting for the harvest to obtain by barter the goods they themselves needed, in some cases urgently. And to hand over large quantities of corn at the beginning of the harvest without compensation, for some cantons such as Binefar which had given everything -- cereals, potatoes, oil, meat -- this provoked among some of the population a discontent which was exploited by them. For nothing was demanded from the small landowners; and the same policy was later adopted in the Levante. [2]

This demand was immediately followed by another. Always on orders from the General Staff in Barbastro, which in turn was covered by the authority of the Minister of War in Valencia, Indalecio Prieto, they started requisitioning man and horse all transport though at that moment it was vital for moving the harvested crops. We have already observed that the Collectives had almost always procured their transport by barter, often depriving themselves of food and other essentials. The lorries were among the acquisitions of which they were justly proud. The carabinieri took everything, or almost, brutally on the pretext of its being needed

for war transport.

At the same time more conscripts were called up with the pretext of an imminent offensive. At the time of the harvest some 50 youths left Esplus, a village which had already provided so many volunteers for the fronts. The other villages were likewise deprived of their young men. But the young people of the same age group who were doing nothing in Catalonia were not called up until later.

Still in Aragon at the same period troops from the front line were withdrawn and billeted in houses in villages carefully selected for their strategic positions. These forces came from other regions; they lived a carefree, parasitical existence, eating, lounging, playing pelota all day long. They were to be used when the time was ripe. At the same time the peasants who had achieved the miracle of cultivating and sowing more land than before saw the corn fall from the ears in the fields due to a lack of hands to gather it.

Simultaneously the press campaign continued. Playing as usual a double game, the Communist Party could prove to some that it supported the Collectives, by producing the text of the Uribe decree, [3] and evidence of the dispatch of youth brigades to work in the fields, whereas in fact it was destroying, in order to break up a revolution that it did not control, economic resources vital to Republican Spain.

Then one day at the end of July, the brutal attack was launched by a mobile brigade led by the commanding officer Lister whose troops were, in the following month, at the beginning of the offensive on Belchite, to retreat with such alacrity before the fascists that they stopped only when they were fifty kilometers from the front.

The final outcome of the anti-revolutionary offensive was that 30% of the Collectives were completely destroyed. In Alcolea de Cinca, the municipal Council which managed the Collective were arrested, the residents of the Old People's House were driven out. There were arrests in Mar, de las Matas, in Monzon, in Barbastro and elsewhere. Pillaging also occurred in most places. Cooperative warehouses, municipal food depots were ransacked, furniture broken up. The governor of Aragon, who represented the central government following the dissolution of the Council of Aragon-which seemed to be the signal for the general offensive-tried to oppose this plundering. He was sent packing.

At the peasants' national plenum which was held in Valencia on 22 October, 1937,

the delegation of the regional Comité of Aragon presented a report which is summed up as follows:

"More than six hundred organizers of the Collectives have been put in prison. The government has nominated management commissions which have seized the food warehouses and have distributed supplies haphazardly. The land, draft animals and agricultural implements have been returned to the members of fascist families or to fascists who had been left unmolested by the Revolution.

"The harvest has been distributed similarly, as well as the animals raised by the Collective. A large number of Collective piggeries, stables, stockyards, barns have been destroyed. In some villages, such as Bordon and Calaceite, even their seed stocks have been taken away from the peasants, thereby preventing them from sowing the fields that had been prepared."

Such exactions naturally bore their fruits. Almost all the Collectives were reformed but they were far from attaining to their earlier heights. The "individualists" and the conservatives gained the upper hand, the more so since a number of those who had joined this vast movement of socialization and who would have belonged to it again had they been free to choose, no longer dared to start again.

Then the Francoists followed the Communists, and nothing remained of the constructive work of the Aragon Collectives other than some of the technical improvements.

Much remains to be written about the maneuvers adopted by the non-fascist opponents of libertarian socialization during the Spanish Revolution. We will limit ourselves to two more examples of the methods used by them. One, which the Syndicate of the wood industry had exposed at the time, consisted in keeping tens of thousands of unemployed in idleness rather than give the Syndicates the money distributed among them, in order to create new industries or to keep going those which were essential but were in difficulties. The wasteful spending was preferred to the strengthening of the new social structure.

And when, in Catalonia, the Communist leader Comorera became Minister of Finance after the May Days, the means of struggle he adopted were original. It was

clear that it was quite impossible to destroy the outstanding influence of the Syndicates of the C.N.T. To attempt to do so would have paralyzed production overnight. So, Comorera had recourse to two complementary procedures; on the one hand he deprived the~ factories of raw materials or deliveries did not arrive on time, thus resulting in production delays which were knowingly criticized; on the other hand they paid for the deliveries of cloth, clothing, arms, etc., with a delay which affected the workers own budgets. As the wages were distributed under the supervision of the Syndicates, it was against the delegates of the C.N.T. and against the organism of which they were the representatives that the discontent of one section of the workers was directed.

This sabotage, this art of turning the responsibility for the clever maneuvers against those who suffered its consequences, reminds one of what happened during the first eighteen months on the Aragon front.

We had no arms, for what was being manufactured in Barcelona was virtually nil; and this prevented us from launching offensives which would have relieved the Madrid front, and even perhaps made possible an advance beyond Saragossa. The many desperate attempts which took place were paid for in huge losses of life. As we have already mentioned, the unsuccessful attempts to capture Huesca, a town with a normal population of 18,000, cost us 20,000 lives.

By contrast the Madrid front was, largely supplied, thanks to Russian arms supplies (paid for in advance, in gold)' but with which it was not possible to penetrate the solid defenses, backed by the Sierras, of our opponents. Our militias on the Aragon front were raging within at being condemned to impotence and at being uselessly massacred. And the Stalinist press in Madrid published cartoons such as the one in which a militiaman is portrayed spending his time quietly fishing on the banks of the Ebro instead of fighting to relieve the capital which was defending itself with difficulty.

One can imagine the repercussions that this way of presenting the facts had on the minds of uninformed readers and on public opinion.

Footnotes - Chapter 15

1. Largo Caballero had been a counselor to the dictator Primo de Rivera; he resigned when the latter was in his decline as was the monarchy. Labor Minister in

the Republic and professional leader of the U.G.T., he was a systematic opponent of the C.N.T. though later he got closer to them when it suited his political ends.

2. Largo Caballero, after he had become head of government, told a delegation who had come to ask for arms to defend Malaga: "For Malaga not a cartridge, not a rifle!" The fact was that in the Defense Comités in that town, as the author was able to see for himself, the Caballeroites were in a minority.

Footnotes - Chapter 17

1. Some people might argue that the nonintervention pact signed by Leon Blum prevented them from obtaining the equipment for manufacturing arms. In fact there has been a lot of exaggeration on this question. The Franco-Spanish land frontiers remained at least half-open for delivery of arms, ammunition, tools, and even aircraft. Under the pressure of circumstances Blum appeared to subscribe to the blockade of Spain but in reality he saw to it that as much as possible was delivered, and many were the lorries which 'crossed at Puigcerda, Borg-Madame, or at La Jonquera, carrying useful loads for the anti-Francoist struggle.

2. In that year the Communists organized a United Levante Council for the export of citrus fruit (C.L.U.E.) to compete against, and if possible ruin the FERECAL, created by the Federation of Collectives of the Levante.

3. To this day (1969) the C.P. states to those who have recently joined and do not know what happened, and leads them to believe that it was thanks to the Uribe decree that the Collectives were organized.

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