

# The SYNDICALIST

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20p

## SWALWELL SACKING

On June 24th a very successful picket was held at Regent Garage (Swalwell) Ltd in Gateshead.

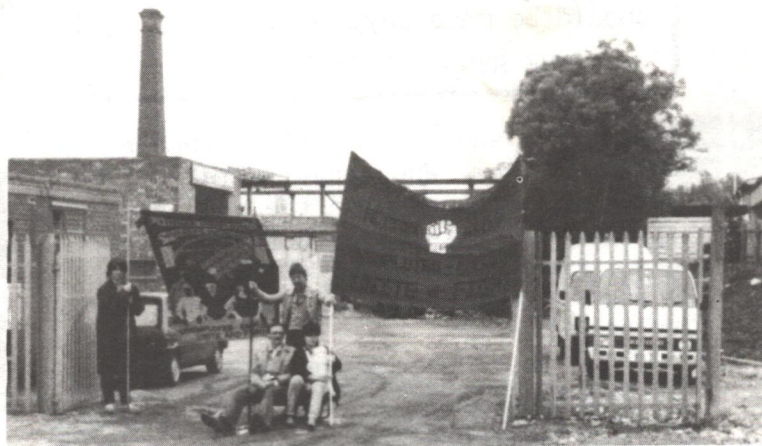
The dispute arose when management decided to sack one worker and keep on another at a £20 reduction in pay.

The man, who had worked for the firm for 5½ months, was summoned to the Directors office on Monday 23rd after returning from a weeks holiday. Tom Nicholson, the owner, informed the man that he was making him involuntarily redundant due to a slump in orders and that another man was to be kept on doing his job for £20 less a week in wages. No redundancy payment was given other than that of a weeks wages.

The following morning the Gateshead Unemployed Action Group joined together with the Tyneside Unemployed Workers movement to picket the company.

Support for the sacked worker grew steadily as van after van refused to cross picket lines. Only two vans managed to cross during the 2 hour long picket. The vans were from British Bakeries Ltd, Northern and Stanners Tools Morpeth.

It is extremely hard to say how long the dispute could run for but there is one thing for sure, companies such as Regent Garage will have to think twice in the future before hiring and firing workers when they feel like it.



Low wages, safety at work and union rights are a major issue on Tyneside at the moment. It is not just the small firms, as the one mentioned above that try to get away with treating workers as feudal serfs.



The vast majority of low wages and bad conditions comes not from the small back street firms but the large and well known shops and industries in our area. At present a campaign is being mounted against these worsening conditions for workers. Over the last few months the Gateshead Workers Information Services has been formed to combat the present levels of danger in the workplace etc. The body consists of the Gateshead Law Centre, Trades Union Studies and Information Unit, Womens Health Project, Low Pay unit, Gateshead Trades Council and a host of other trades unionists concerned at what is happening.

### ADVICE ON WORKERS' RIGHTS

The group hopes to give advice to workers on low pay and the legal levels that they should be receiving for their work, Health and safety within the workplace, and the rights of trades unionists as a whole. The amount of non unionised firms in the area is also a cause for concern and actions to gain union status within the workplace is also a major demand of the organisation.

On Monday 30th June the campaign was launched on the Team Valley, Gateshead, with a community bus being parked with a variety of people on hand to give advice on any aspect of workers rights, problems or dispute at work.



For more information on G.W.I.S. contact either

GATESHEAD LAW CENTRE,  
13, Walker Terrace,  
Gateshead.  
Tel: 4771109.

TRADES UNION STUDIES &  
INFORMATION UNIT,  
'Southend',  
Fernwood Road,  
Jesmond,  
Newcastle.  
Tel: 2816087.

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ANARCHO - SYNDICALIST MONTHLY



## EDITORIAL

During the Spanish revolution and civil war the anti-fascist forces were given considerable support from workers all over the world - who sent food and money as well as going over themselves to fight. Against this example of internationalism, it might be useful to look at the present struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Much of the action taken around the world has consisted of asking governments to apply economic sanctions against the Botha regime. In this country recently, a series of local and national demonstrations have centred around such calls.

There may be nothing wrong, in principle, with sanctions, but can we expect ones to be used that would work, given for example the failure of "total" sanctions in Rhodesia? In any case, would a wholehearted supporter of the S. Africa regime such as the British government be equally wholehearted in applying such sanctions?

What would successful sanctions mean to Blacks in S. Africa? Surely nothing more than partial and limited reforms which would only marginally improve their lot. Compared to the revolutionary aspirations of S. African workers that would be little better than nothing.

Even world leaders like Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl realise that apartheid is coming to its final end. They know that for white South Africans to keep some kind of hold on the country, action must be taken against the stubborn stand of people like Botha (although they would prefer to be able fully to support him). What the Western leaders want to do is to get introduced the smallest reforms necessary to quash the valid revolutionary movement that is now developing amongst black workers.

South African unions argue that the setting up of direct links at grass-roots level through workers' organisations would be more fruitful. This could lead to direct industrial solidarity, for example by blacking goods, as attempted by shopworkers at Dunnes stores in Dublin, or as COHSE in the North-East are now trying to do. Companies like Dunlop could come under pressure from their own workforces to pull out of their massive investment and involvement in the apartheid economic system. Financial aid could be sent, and informed propaganda written by South African workers themselves could be obtained and circulated widely. True internationalism must begin at this grass-roots level and involve close communication between organisations. South African trade unionists stress that a highly effective tactic might be to initiate a co-ordinated action against multinationals involved in propping up the apartheid system - with workers in each country's subsidiaries acting simultaneously.

Strong local groups are the bedrock of any action on a wider scale - and the fight against apartheid is no exception.

Without strong local groups on which to base activity all that will happen is more of the symbolic and token demonstrations that achieve nothing more than an illusion of real action. If local groups and community organisations in South Africa are not the focus of attention and solidarity, all we will hear are the mouthings of bishops and other self-styled "leaders" who in fact represent only themselves. The upshot of these tactical disasters is a media circus, which is no use at all to the oppressed of South Africa.

### ANOTHER FACE OF INTERNATIONALISM

July 2nd sees the 70th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme - one of the greatest single atrocities inflicted by the ruling classes of this country on its workers. The cynical disregard for human life on the part of the British Generals meant that thousands of men and boys were slaughtered on the barbed wire of no-man's land.

We would do well to remember just what extent our rulers are prepared to go to in sacrificing the lives of workers in pursuit of their ignoble ends.

The working-class and poverty are international; workers and the poor have nothing to gain from killing each other at the beck and call of their rulers - whether these be dictatorships or so-called "democratic" governments.

## Please Note! Change of Address

Due to the sad closure of Days of Hope Bookshop we are no longer able to use this address. We should be grateful if no further mail was forwarded to the above. Our new address is;

Tyneside Revolutionary  
Syndicalists,  
c/o Tyneside Free Press,  
5, Charlotte Square,  
Newcastle Upon Tyne,  
NE1 4XF.

If you have any comment to make concerning the Syndicalist or you would just like to contact the group for more information please send all correspondence to the above address.

## OBLIGATION TO THE REGION?

The news that N.E.I. Clarke Chapman have finally closed their entire power plant operation in Gateshead has caused some belated consternation to unions and local politicians.

Alan Wright, the shop stewards spokesman claimed in the media, "The company has an obligation to the region", whilst local politicians uttered words to the same effect to anyone who cared to listen.

The fact that N.E.I. amalgamated in the 70's with a Midland based company, Babcock and Wilcox, also producers of Power Plant machinery, this factory shall remain open. What the Tyneside union representatives and politicians are really saying is, 'keep our factory open and save our jobs, but its o.k. to close down the Midlands based company with their loss of jobs'.

Its this sort of naive and negative thinking that has allowed business to wreak mayhem in the workplaces not only in different regions but also in different countries around the world.

Companies have one aim and one obligation, the aim is to reap the biggest possible profit, their obligation is to their rich investors.

When the amalgamation of the two companies first took place, the activists at Clarke Chapman knew what to expect and prepared accordingly. Rank and File organisation at the works was already excellent and all attempts to introduce new technology at the expense of jobs were fought. Every minor dispute was strongly contested least the management saw an opportunity to attempt something bigger.

We didn't want to threaten jobs in the Midlands and the feeling was reciprocated, but we all knew attempts would be made to close one or other of the plants. For when the amalgamation took place the management had always given the impression that two major producers could not exist in this country therefore one workplace would be threatened. By co-operation fellow workers can protect their jobs and conditions, which we did, but when rank and file activity is on the decrease, management activity always goes on the increase. Without shop floor militancy, the unions can only plead for regional interests because of the impotency.

## Silentnight

The Silentnight strike goes on with continued attempts to force the Co-op to cancel their orders of Silentnight products. It seems that whereas local Co-op managers are often prepared to co-operate, top management hierarchy will not. This makes a co-ordinated, nationwide campaign against the Co-op crucial.

### SILENTNIGHT .... LOCAL ACTION

In the North East F.T.A.T. members have so far 'adopted' over a dozen strikers families, and hold regular workplace collections in factories in the industry (eg U.B.U. bedding, Reid Furnishings). However F.T.A.T. locally have no plans to step up solidarity and supportive action. They have not organised any leafletting or picketing of the Co-op store on Newgate Street, Newcastle. Several stores on Tyneside which sell Silentnight beds (eg Co-op, Binns, MFI) have them 'Special Offer' or even 'very Special Offer'. The quality of these beds is often quite appalling - its no

## WAS THE PRICE RIGHT ?

The saga of Birtley Royal Ordnance Factory continues along very familiar lines. First the cry about lack of orders which resulted in massive redundancies, the latest being 400 workers, then the announcement of privatisation plans and now surprise, surprise, the news that a 23 Million pound order has been placed with the company.

This bolt out of the blue will surely mean that the workers made redundant will get their jobs back - Not Exactly - A handful may, according to management statements.

The union and shop stewards must be furious - Not Exactly - they never opposed recent job losses, and anyway a huge increase in overtime working is in progress. This fact allied to the introduction of new working practices by the management has not given much hope to those still on the dole.

The bitterness felt by the redundant workers is easy to understand and the actions, or lack of them, by the stewards must be questioned. Why didn't they fight the pay offs, why allow overtime to be worked with ex-workmates on the dole, why is there no action being considered to re-employ people? The Convenor at R.O.F. has always taken a defeatist attitude and has gone on record to praise managements efforts to find work. When certain individuals tried to push the ideas of industrial action before the redundancies, they were told to be 'realistic'. He again went on record to say, "in this instance no form of industrial action would serve any purpose".

In recent talks with some of the redundant workers it was clear that they now realised that they had been sold out by their so called representatives. Certain shop stewards are now afraid to show their faces in local pubs because of the hostility that now exists. Even at this stage they could redeem some respect by initiating action to get those made redundant their jobs back. Lets see some movement, the cost of privatisation and furtherance of capitalism is more than we can afford.

The 'Syndicalist' is produced on a shoestring. If you would like to see the continuation of this paper we would ask you to forward a donation, as small or as large as possible, immediately. All cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to;

THE SYNDICALIST

wonder the shops are having trouble shifting them. When that is taken into account, combined with the probable effects of picketing the shops, its clear that, given a little effort, movement on the part of the Co-op could be forced.

This could transform the prospects the strikers have for winning the dispute. Donations;

Mrs Ann King,  
10, Rainhill Crescent,  
Barnoldswick,  
Colne,  
Lancashire,  
BB8 6BS.

Correspondence;  
Stephen Burns,  
9, Frank Street,  
Barnoldswick,  
Colne,  
Lancashire.



# HORMEL Meatpackers' Strike, U.S.A.

1,500 United Food and Commercial Workers, Local P-9 have been on strike since 17th August 1985 against unsafe working conditions and a 23% cut in wages at Geo. A Hormel & Co. at Austin, Minnesota, U.S.A..

A mediators proposal savaged union members grievance rights, left a two tier wage proposal in place, did not alter the horrendously unsafe conditions and did not enable everyone to return to work.

In October 1984 the company slashed the workers wages by 23% and gutted their benefits at a time when there was no real justification, as it was one of the most profitable in the meatpacking industry. The Chairman of the company Mr Richard Knowlton decided to give himself a pay rise last year of at least \$231,000 boosting his salary to \$570,000.

**DISGUSTING SAFETY**  
Currently members are distributing literature telling of the tremendous rate of workplace injuries at Hormel. In 1984 the injury rate at Hormel's Austin plant was 202 injuries to 100 workers. These injuries included amputations, cuts and lacerations, tendonitis, back and shoulder injuries from slips, falls and strains and the disabling wrist injury known as Carpel Tunnel Syndrome.

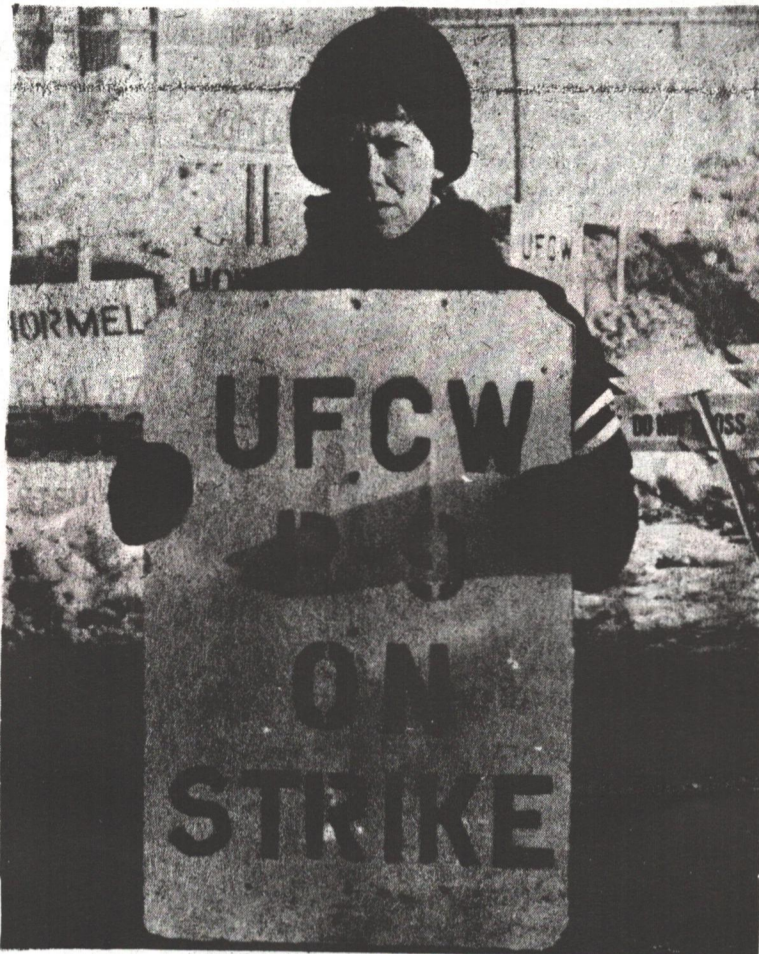
**THE NATIONAL GUARD**  
On January 21st eight hundred National Guardsmen were brought in as a second private security force to serve Hormel at a cost of \$65,000 PER DAY of taxpayers' money. The guard was escorting the scabs through the gates into the plant, and with them being their and the union being restricted by a court order to no more than three pickets to a plant gate, the union were contemplating large scale 'civil disobedience'. However, the National Guardsmen withdrew from Hormel gates on January 29th, but were expected to return if the union mounted picket lines to stop scabs.

**JAIL THREAT**  
P-9 union bureaucrats were personally facing fines and jail in the event that picketing was stepped up by the rank and file and the court order violated. This obviously did not deter strikers and Ray Rogers the Corporate Campaign Director was sent to jail facing charges including that of 'Criminal syndicalism'. This fundamentally unconstitutional provision dating for the time of Woodrow Wilson, was a result of a peaceful protest near the plant which made no attempt to block roadways or to interfere with strikers' entrance to the plant.

**BUREAUCRATIC NONSENSE**  
Strikers have asked the U.F.C.W. International to sanction roving pickets but the International refused, instead calling on all strikers to capitulate. On an American television show a U.C.F.W. Representative actually defended Hormel's position on the strike, arguing that the workers should accept concessions in order to establish an industry standard wage. Leaving the strikers with no illusions on what to expect in the future from the union

bureaucracy. On January 24th a majority of the Local P-9 Executive Board briefly recalled roving pickets on the ridiculous ground that Hormel would be less likely to settle if the union was hurting it economically. Strikers have been to Ottawah, Iowa, 250 miles down the road from Austin where a second primary Hormel plant was shut down by workers. Most of the 800 members of the U.F.C.W. Local 431 from the plant have refused to cross P-9's roving picket line set up on January 27th. Shortly thereafter, the company announced that it was firing 400 of those workers. Three days later a march and rally was held with 2,000 union members turning up. Hormel facilities across the country have been affected by the strike as P-9 has sent roving pickets far and wide. Complete and partial shutdowns have occurred in Dallas, Texas and Fremont, Nebraska. No matter what the company says Hormel has been hurt.

Union bureaucrats, in their usual style of wanting an end to the dispute immediately, have made seven separate compromise offers but Hormel even refused to budge its position in the face of such backsliding. Hormel is relying on strikebreakers, the Courts and the National Guard to keep its operations going. A company spokesman has said that they are "not bargaining with the union". The company have lately been saying that they only want 1,025 workers in the plant. They are near to this number with a combination of newly hired strike breakers and P-9 union members that have crossed strikers picket lines.



## ACTION & SUPPORT GROWING

Hormel's key corporate partner is the First Bank System. Thousands of P-9 supporters have sent complaining letters to the bank and have demonstrated outside its branches. Both Hormel and the First Bank know that as long as the conflict continues 1,500 Hormel workers and their allies are available to continue the action.

The strikers have been extremely busy organising talks with thousands of union members at plant gates, addressing membership meetings to gain more support. An emergency hotline has been set up staffed by volunteers for members to ring in if they have any problems. Mass production of hundreds of placards have been made for picketing and a ten foot high statue has been erected outside the union hall with the words 'solidarity growing' emblazoned on the side.

Many campaigns and committees have been formed to deal with gaining more support. Supporters are being asked to circulate information on the dispute, boycott all Hormel products (including SPAM) and to send financial donations to by food for those on strike. All donations, letters of support and requests for more information should be sent to;

P-9 Emergency & Hardship Fund,  
316 N.E. 4th Avenue,  
Minnesota,  
MN 55912,  
U.S.A..

## LEFTIE SCAB

It is interesting to see media stars revealed in their true colours, especially when they are token lefties. These are usually entrenched academics who had a reputation in the 1960's for being a bit radical. Laurie Taylor is no exception. He cut his teeth writing for revolutionary papers, but now indulges in pop sociology and appears in Labour Party political broadcasts. This supposedly 'socialist' professor at York University also works for Murdoch!

### ODD SUPPORT

Throughout the News International dispute Taylor has continued to write a column in the 'Times Higher Educational Supplement'. He says he supports the sacked printers, whereas most of their supporters have done their best to make the boycott of News International titles effective, not help to write them!

### NO WAY

N.C.A. and S.O.G.A.T. confirmed that although the Times supplements are being printed wholly by union labour, this was only being done to comply with a High Court injunction. They added that on no account should any trade unionist be involved with any of Murdoch's papers.

### WHOSE SIDE ARE THEY ON!

The Association of University Teachers will not take disciplinary action against Taylor for his scabbing - too many of their members engage in the same type of activity. (or would if they could). After all, their careers come first!

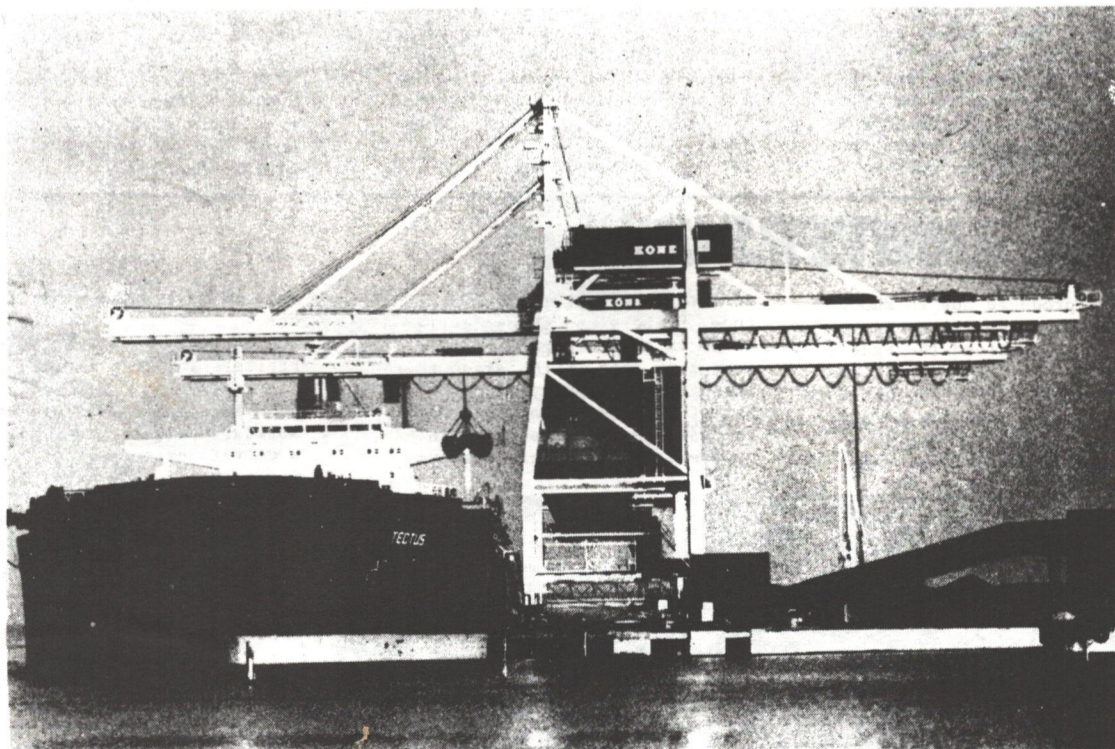
Though we can't expect too much from many of these intellectuals - since their vested interests often lie in keeping things the way they are - we would hope that there is a move by true supporters of the sacked printworkers to show the AUT the error of their ways and force them to discipline people like Taylor.

## Regrettable Occurrence

The National Conference of Trades Councils was held recently in Cardiff. Trades Councils are not wealthy organisations so it was decided that the Tyne & Wear County Association delegation would stay in an economical boarding house and comrade A. McFadden selflessly agreed to make all the arrangements.

Making some sacrifices to comfort, the delegates shared rooms and used communal bathrooms and toilets. Imagine their consternation when it was discovered that 'due to lack of rooms' comrade McFadden was obliged to have a room to himself - the 'Bridal Suite' complete with colour T.V. and its own W.C. and shower. We are assured that McFadden would most certainly have preferred more spartan accommodation had this been at all possible.

Militancy among dockworkers is international. During the Danish dock strike of 1983 rank and file dockworkers all over Europe organised an astounding and unheard of degree of solidarity. Unfortunately anti-union legislation broke the strike in the end.



Aarhus Docks, Denmark, at a standstill. Potential scabs would not unload cargo as there was a chance of it and them ending up in the harbour.

## DOCKERS' MILITANCY



RANK & FILE DOCKERS ORGANISATIONS  
ABOVE: DENMARK  
BELOW: SPAIN

FEDERACION ESTATAL ESTIBADORES PORTUARIOS



"LA COORDINADORA"

During May of this year the Spanish dockers went on strike over a proposal put forward by the "socialist" Ministry of Labour, which will effectively amount to half of Spain's docks being sold off to Maritime multinationals.

The Dockers previously went on Strike in March and April for ten and five days respectively. Their activity is centred round organisation within the "co-ordinadora" - an autonomous rank and file coordinating organisation, placing decision-making powers in the hands of an assembly of all workers and elected revocable committees.

The Strike has coincided with a wave of strikes in Spain. The day after its commencement, buses and metro were at a standstill in Barcelona over an attempt to reduce services at peak hours. Also, in the same week Statisticians and deputy inspectors, belonging to the Treasury were on Strike. There was a sit-in on the steps of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while on the same day several pits in the Asturias came out over a refusal of sick leave.

By May 22nd the Strike was biting; A state of Emergency was threatened in Tenerife, where essential supplies were being held up. On the same day barricades were erected and set alight in Gijon, in the Asturias, by Shipyard workers belonging to the threatened Cantabrica and Riero ship yards.

The striking dockers' tactics and methods of organisation can be seen to be similar to those adopted by their comrades in past struggles, particularly before and during the 1930's. The legacy of the C.N.T.-A.I.T.'s methods of struggle - Rank and File Industrial Revolutionary unionism - still continues fifty years on.



# HEALTHY FIGHT



Over the last few months health workers in the North-East have begun to display considerable militancy, in the form of solidarity actions in support of each other against privatisation and cuts, and in the face of intimidation from management.

On May 30th more than 100 domestics at Prudhoe Hospital in Northumberland decided to take indefinite strike action against the Health Authority's tender which would cut jobs, pay and services. They walked out on the 2nd of June.

**SOLIDARITY ALL OVER THE COUNTY**  
On the 4th they were banned from the hospital premises and on the same day catering and laundry staff at Ashington Hospital and cleaners at Hexham Hospital walked out in support. The next day cleaners and catering staff at Alnwick and Berwick Infirmary joined in with strikes in support.

Even when faced with such extensive solidarity the Health Authority did not give in, and on June 5th decided to go ahead with the original tender at Prudhoe.

**VOTE TO CONTINUE THE FIGHT**  
On June 6th Northumberland ancillary workers voted in Morpeth to continue strike action throughout the county. They planned a series of lightning strikes and all-out action at the beginning of July.

Despite the lack of success of the Prudhoe Hospital Campaign, the fight against cuts goes on in the face of fresh attacks on the regions health sector.

Ward 19 at the Freeman Hospital and ward 23 of Newcastle General have been permanently closed. Wylam and Ponteland Hospitals have been earmarked for closure. Also,

patients uniting to defend jobs and services. The current "Save Fleming Hospital" is one example. In Easington, the campaign linking the defence of the Maternity Unit



the Fleming Hospital for Sick Children in Newcastle is planned to close in May 1987. Normans Riding Hospital in Winlaton closed on June 13th with redundancies among ancillary staff, and a plan to axe maternity services at Thorpe Hospital in Easington was announced on June 26th. The reason given for the latter was that the 62 bed unit served too small a population - so now Easington women have to go to Sunderland to give birth. Again on the 26th the planned closure of Moor Park Geriatric Hospital in North Shields was made public.

#### COMMUNITIES INVOLVED

During this onslaught, these cuts and closures often take place despite campaigns based on community involvement - workers and patients

uniting to defend jobs and services. The current "Save Fleming Hospital" is one example. In Easington, the campaign linking the defence of the Maternity Unit

#### GOOD TACTICS

Health workers have used tactics of community involvement combined with widespread solidarity action, when workers in other sectors have been much less militant when faced with similar cuts.

But in the Health Service workers are in a difficult position. Faced with threats to jobs, pay, conditions and services, they need to fight while still retaining the support of those who use the services. Ultimately the only way Health Workers can effectively defend their sector is by other workers in

industry and in the rest of the public sector taking determined action in support. Then the contradiction between hitting by their action those very services they are trying to defend would not come about. Health workers in this area are showing a leadership it is up to the rest of us to respond appropriately.

Finally, a telling example of health workers recognising the struggle of other workers, despite their own extreme difficulties, can be seen in the decision made by COHSE (Confederation of Health Service Employees) to urge the Health Authority in the North East not to use South African Goods.

## WHERE WE STAND

1. We believe in independent, non-hierarchical working class organisation independent of all political parties and bureaucratic trade union structures, none of which represent the true interests of the majority of people, i.e. the people who create the wealth by manual or intellectual means.
2. We believe that under the present system of capitalism support should be given to the struggle for short-term gains, such as better pay and conditions, but these should always be seen for what they are - limited interim reforms which are no substitute for the total reorganisation of society necessary to ensure true freedom, equality and democracy.
3. We believe that the parliamentary system does not serve the interests of the working class. The solution to the problems that we the working class face do not lie in the election of a new leadership, but in the creation of new structures both in the workplace and the community which allows for us all to have total control over the decisions which affect our lives.
4. As revolutionary syndicalists we believe that only by a general strike accompanied by mass occupations and the implementation of workers control, can capitalism be finally removed and a free self-managed society where production and labour is geared towards need and not profit, be created.
5. We are opposed to all forms of racism, fascism, nationalism and sexism - indeed any ideology which sets out to divide the working class.

## MORRIS: 1st ANNIVERSARY

Glasgow's longest ever running dispute saw its first anniversary on May 30th. The Dispute began last year as 35 of the companies employees refused to do a 4 1/2 hour week and were immediately sacked.

The Anniversary saw a picket of over 150 at the Morris' factory. The pickets are heavily outnumbered by scabs at the Factory; Only 20 of the original 35 remain involved in the Dispute. Violence against pickets has been widespread throughout the dispute. As scabs left the Factory a group of pickets were attacked but the increased numbers of the pickets were able to send them packing.

#### SCAB WORKFORCE

To commemorate the anniversary of the Dispute Robert Morris, the owner, displayed a sign on his factory which he received for his 25th birthday which read "HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO THE PICKETS FROM THE 250 HAPPY WORKING SCABS". The amount of scabs in the Factory is in fact only around 60-

70, with a regular turn-over in employees as people are regularly sacked.

The Factory is being manned by a mainly unskilled workforce doing skilled jobs. This has resulted in a massive increase of wastage and a 50% return of

all goods produced due to shoddy workmanship. Recently Morris had planned to extend the Factory, though his plans were immediately halted as he had not bothered to get planning permission. **ACTION STEPPED UP**  
Lots of attempts have been made

to deter the pickets from violence, bribery and sheer devilment. On two occasions old cars have been left in the place that the pickets normally used to park their van. On one of those the car had been smeared with grease to stop the pickets from

moving, or leaning against, the car. Shops have been picketed by the strikers in a bid to stop sales of Morris goods. Widespread appeals have gone out asking for solidarity in their dispute. To a certain extent supportive action has been made, though more support is needed, both in a financial and an active form. Companies known to stock Morris furniture include: Goldbergs, Bows, Lawrence of Partick, Warring and Gillock, Sterlings and Bebenhams.

#### SUPPORT NEEDED

The Morale of the pickets is high and their determination to stick out the dispute is even greater. Money is desperately needed by the strikers. Special Anniversary badges have been produced and are available from the strikers. All donations and letters of support should be sent to:

Morris strikers,  
c/o R. McCallum,  
46, Carlton Place,  
Glasgow,  
G15 9TQ.



PICKETS AT MORRIS'S



# THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

1936



1986

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES



We include this special section within the pages of the "Syndicalist" in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Spanish revolution, which began on July 19th, 1936.

In the amount of space we can devote to the subject we cannot hope to do justice to the massive organisational structures that were developed in the period between 1936 and 1939. We hope that we can at least give some small insight into the workers' movements and their achievements, and the context in which they grew.

The following pages give brief descriptions of the collectivised villages, towns and cities of Spain, the worker-controlled factories and industries, self-management of farming by peasants, and finally a short look at the reaction against these achievements by the Socialist, Communist and Republican parties and politicians.

## INTRODUCTION

This period in Spain represented a far-reaching social revolution. Although it took place in the context of civil war, it was one of the most complete experiments in history in workers' control and self management.

### HISTORICAL SKETCH

For decades the Spanish Labour movement, and indeed Spanish working-class culture, had come to be imbued with anarchist principles and methods. The most concrete expression of this was the mass industrial union, the C.N.T. (National Confederation of Labour) with a membership of millions and an influence far beyond



that. The anarcho-syndicalists of the C.N.T. and the anarchists of the F.A.I. (Iberian Anarchist Federation) contributed greatly to the working-class organisation that led to the take over of industry and the land by workers and peasants in 1936. The C.N.T. had consistently urged workers to organise from the base upwards and to aim for revolution without relying on state authority or political parties. Furthermore, the consciousness of workers and peasants was such that they were able to take control of the social and economic structures on their own account, against the wishes of the political leaders and parties which many of them voted for, or even belonged to.

### THE TRIGGER

On July 18th 1936 the right and the army revolted against the Republican government elected earlier that year. They chose a time when the left and the workers were in disarray, as usually happens when a naive faith in social-democratic government is being punctured. Even during the first few months of the Popular Front government workers, peasants and the middle class were increasingly disillusioned, just as they had been in 1931 after the bourgeois revolution and the birth of the second Republic. But despite the political disunity, the workers' movement was united in its libertarian sentiments against the military uprising. The army

was resisted all over Spain, and workers achieved swift and crushing victories in Catalonia, the Asturias and Madrid. The immediate task was to keep industry running, and to adapt machinery to provide arms and ammunition for the workers. In several cities this was carried out so creatively and imaginatively that productivity increased substantially. Systems of distribution were efficiently set up and the normal functions of communities were taken over by collectives. Within a week columns of volunteer militias were organised by the C.N.T.-F.A.I. which left Barcelona for the Aragon front.

### ONE STEP FORWARD.....

In Catalonia the whole of industry was collectivised. But the Bourgeois state machinery of the Republic remained more or less intact. The bureaucracy and manipulation of the politicians - Socialist, communist and republican - soon began to interfere seriously with the progress of the revolution. This process was accelerated as so many of the respected C.N.T. and anarchist militants and other militant workers left for the front. Eventually the waters became so muddied, and people so confused, that C.N.T. leaders actually joined the republican government and became ministers. In effect they went back on their beliefs and betrayed the whole history and traditions of the C.N.T.. Ironically, it was those traditions that had facilitated the libertarian character of Workers' control in Catalonia.

### LIBERTARIAN ARAGON

The situation was markedly different in those parts of Aragon not under the control of the fascists and military rebels. To start with they controlled much of the region. But as the volunteer militias crossed from Catalonia into the villages of Aragon they found that the apparatus of the Republican regime had all but melted away. The mayors and functionaries had little to say during the bloodbaths instigated by the fascists, and then the imminent arrival of the militias left most of them frightened, out of touch, or in sympathy with the fascists anyway. In the absence of the nuisance of the local state the reconstruction of social and economic relations along libertarian lines was already taking place.

## BARCELONA PUBLIC SERVICES

The following article will look at the development of workers' organisations and the achievements that were built up in the Barcelona public services of power (gas, water and electricity), transport and health.

The reason we have chosen these services is to show the wide-ranging social implications that are thrown up when workers are left to their own devices to work, run and organise their industries for the good of all. There are many other examples in the engineering, clothing and other sectors which would have been worth mentioning, but due to lack of space this was not possible.

All quotations are from Gaston Leval's "Collectives in the Spanish Revolution", which was a catalogue of the author's experiences as he travelled around Spain at the time.

### PART ONE

#### THE WORKERS TAKE OVER

As the military uprising began to take shape so the workers of Barcelona began to organise themselves. The public services throughout the city were of the greatest importance, and this situation led the workers to realise on the very day of the uprising that the services had to be continued.

When the battles of Barcelona had finished the workers returned to work as usual though with one major difference; they were now in complete control.

In the case of the transport workers street battles had brought all traffic to a standstill. The roads were blocked by the barricades that were erected to stop the

advance of the fascists. In many cases the barricades were the burnt-out shells of trams and buses. Transport was indispensable, the streets had to be cleared and the transport system got working again. The Syndical section of the Tramways appointed a commission of seven workers to occupy the administrative offices while others inspected the tracks and drew up a plan for clearing the streets and other work that had to be done. Here started the worker-controlled transport system of Barcelona. Likewise, the power industry was also indispensable. Gas, water and electricity supplies were taken over by the workers and were supplied continuously until the end of the civil war in 1939. The only stoppages during this three-year period were temporary due to aerial bombardment attacks by the fascist Air Force..

The new social system created was to bring all public services together for the greater advancement of social needs being fulfilled. The creation of a worker-controlled environment not only heightened conditions for the workers themselves, but also had widespread implications throughout the Barcelona streets. For instance the knowledge that was held by one group of workers was made widely available to all who could potentially use it, both within the city and throughout the rest of the country. In the case of transport Barcelona had a large and over-abundant system, while other areas of Catalonia had very few or no services at all. The Barcelona transport workers did all they could to help, and all lorries and buses which were not being put to good use

were sent to areas such as Lerida, along with financial help.

### THE WORKERS ORGANISE

The basic organisational structure of the workers' movement was that of rank and file control. This was true in the public services and with slight variations the structure was the same in workplaces throughout Spain.

The structure of rank and file controlled syndicates was not a new idea in Spain, nor was it spontaneous. For many years the C.N.T. and their forerunners had built workplace syndicates though obviously on a much smaller scale. Some of these syndicates had actually survived through the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in the 1920's. The ideas already had a long history of development in the minds of Spanish workers. On the takeover of the workplaces the workers immediately began to elect their delegates to the works committees and Central Liason Committee (a structure that was to bring together both C.N.T. and U.G.T. workers). All major decisions that were made were the sole right of all workers at the Syndical Assembly of the two workers organisations. All delegates were under the complete control of the assembly and played an almost administrative role.

Below we give an example of the workplace structure set up in the Barcelona Power Industry;

"The first nucleus is the job speciality (trade), each speciality sets up a section immediately with groupings by factory, workshop or 'building' of at least 15 workers...Each section nominates two delegates which the assemblies choose; one of a technical calibre who will participate in the committee of the undertaking and another entrusted with the management of work in the section.

The Building Committee (as it is called) comes next. It is nominated by section commissions and consists of a technician, a manual worker and an administrator.

### MANUAL WORKERS DELEGATE

The manual workers delegate has to solve, or try to solve, difficulties which might arise between different sections, those arising within a section being settled by the interested parties themselves. He receives suggestions from workers in the different trades for the nomination or transfer of personell, and the sections give him daily reports on the progress of work...Periodically he calls the sections to general meetings which take place at the syndicate, which tightens the links between workers from different undertakings. During these meetings proposals and initiatives are studied which are likely to improve productivity and production, as well as the workers situation, or be of interest to the syndical organisation...It should

reports addressed to the Council for Industry are prepared.

### TECHNICAL DELEGATE

The delegate with technical functions supervises the activities of his section, and uses every endeavour to increase productivity, to lighten the workers burden by introducing new methods. He checks on production at power stations, the state of the network, prepares statistics and charts indicating how production is developing".

Unlike the capitalist orientated production for profit of today, the Spanish workers saw no production necessary other than for social need. All those involved in production were involved in the decision making.

### COUNCILS FOR INDUSTRY

"There are of course three; one each for water, gas and electricity. Each is composed of eight delegates\* four from the U.G.T. and four from the C.N.T..... The General Council of the three industries, which is also composed of eight members with, as before, four from each union organisation. This council co-ordinates the activities of the three industries, attunes the production and distribution of raw materials from a regional, national and international point of view.

The Council once again plays a mainly administrative role and is obliged at all times to submit its activities to the scrutiny of local and regional assemblies.

In the case of Transport and Health organisations the structures were very similar. Transport engineers and those within the hospitals could not take any important decision without consulting the local committee. Not only because they were delegates but also to ensure that all responsibility was shared by all those affected, and of course where practical problems are involved manual workers generally have the experience where-as technicians may not.

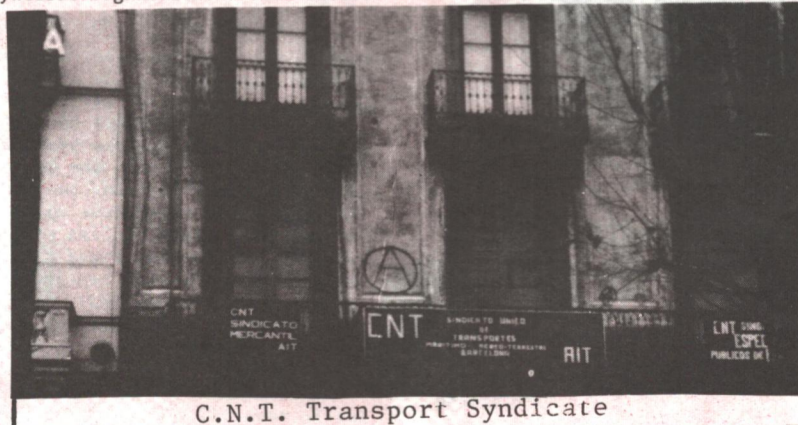
### PART TWO

#### GENERAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Though food, materials and personell were extremely short due to the civil war major advances were made in the worker controlled industries. The achievements not only matched those previously made but in most cases past efforts were generally surpassed.

#### TRANSPORT

The city streets of Barcelona were cleared of debris only five days after the fascist uprising, the trams were once again running though in greater numbers than they had ever done before. Seven hundred trams were now in operation instead of the six hundred that were usually operating in the city. More social developments regarding safety and service were to come through the workers and the co-ordination with others in industries involved in transport.



C.N.T. Transport Syndicate

be noted that the specific activities of the Manual Workers Delegate do not prevent him from continuing to work at his job alongside his comrades.

### ADMINISTRATIVE DELEGATE

The delegate with administrative functions supervises the arrival and warehousing of materials, records requirements, deals with bookkeeping for supplies and reserves and keeps an eye on the state of income and expenditure. He also deals with correspondence and it is his responsibility to see that the balance sheets and

A small and partial catalogue of some of these achievements follows;

"To start with 3,000 metal poles holding up electric cables supplying the current were eliminated as they were interfering with the traffic and causing many accidents and were replaced by a system of aerial suspension. Then a new safety and signalling system was introduced consisting of electric points and automatic discs. Furthermore the company of Agua, Water, Light and Power had installed in many places and right in the middle of the >



routes taken by tram cars, transformer cabins or power distributors, which made all kinds of detours and bifercations necessary, sometimes very sharp and resulted in accidents. This had gone on from when the services had first been laid, and were determined by the whims of financial or political interests. The comrades of Water, Light and Power (now in control) moved these cabins to where they would be in nobodys way, thus making it possible to straighten out once and for all the tramway lines".

The design and building of new tram cars was embarked on by the workers including two new models to climb the steep hills of Barcelonas outlying areas. The new cars weighed 21 tonnes compared with the 35 tonnes of the old models. The new models, even though they were much lighter, were also able to carry more passengers. Before the revolution services were highly duplicated with many routes being covered by 12 different road services and the train.

This was highly wasteful and showed the complete "absurdity of the capitalist system", the workers began a plan eliminating those services that were no longer needed. Plans were drawn up showing all routes to each destination and a new and less wasteful system implemented. Apart from changes in the transport system relating to social need working conditions were also transformed. Washbasins and showers were installed in the sheds and workshops for the first time. Another major achievement was the establishment of a workers' medical service. This included doctors, home-helps and a clinic for the use of workers and their families. Until then, the clinic had been specifically for the use of the rich. Now, those that needed it had access to specialist treatment by a gynaecologist, a specialist in disorders of the digestive tract and another in general surgery.

The health of the general public was also an area in which transport workers played their parts. All tramcars were dis-

infected weekly for the safety of passengers - preventive medicine established by workers long before it was a fashionable concept elsewhere.

#### HEALTH

The new socialised society held health care as a major priority. The Health Syndicate was divided into four principal groupings,

- General health care,
- Social hygiene and health, in relation to the general organisation of society as a whole.
- Sanitary inspection.
- Social assistance.

It was obvious that the mortality rate of Spanish children under one year of age (80,000 annually) had to be drastically reduced, especially when most of these deaths were due to social causes. Hospitals needed to be built, health care expanded and made accessible to everyone, while hy-

giene and the prevention of disease had to be promoted.

In June 1937, "18 hospitals managed by the medical syndicate (of which six were created by it), 17 sanatoria, 22 clinics, 6 psychiatric establishments, 3 nurseries, 1 maternity hospital as well as two annexes to the General Hospital, one for bone tuberculosis and another for orthopaedic treatment and out-patient departments were set up in all principal localities in Catalonia."

The health syndicates of the CNT were involved in the organising of field hospitals behind the various fighting fronts as well as co-ordinating evacuation of large numbers of children and the elderly from the war zones, anti-gas brigades, street shelters and the building of bomb shelters. The health sector was, as any other, controlled by its workers, the doctors went where they were needed, health was a social duty and a service to the community.

## ARAGON AND THE COLLECTIVES

Some of the areas of Aragon nearest the military front were foremost in creating a new social and economic organisation. In these areas libertarian communism developed very quickly and naturally, firstly with the assemblies in villages to discuss the pressing agricultural problems. This movement was initiated in some villages within a week of the military rebellion.

#### FEDERALISM

When the volunteer militias arrived the village assemblies started to become co-ordinated with neighbouring areas. Defence committees were established instead of the old municipal councils, and a Regional Defence Council was organised by the Aragon C.N.T. from October 1936. This marked a formal recognition of the revolutionary change in Aragon, and a determination to defend that change. Despite hostility or ambivalence in Catalonia, the Aragonese were serious and committed federalists, shunning centralisation or the domination of geographical areas in favour of true co-operation and regional co-ordination.

#### THE SIMPLE STEP

Collectivisation came to the villages of Aragon by adapting social trends rooted in the rural experiences of peasants and village trade unionists and anarchists. In some districts the local committees of the C.N.T. undertook the task of agrarian re-organisation. But however spontaneous the adoption of collectivisation was from area to area, care was taken not to impose the new systems on peasants and small holders who had traditionally clung to their tiny plots of land. The right of individuals to remain outside of the collectives was strictly maintained, although in practice relatively few stayed outside in the face of the outstanding successes of the agricultural collectives. This success can be measured by remembering that these villages were also feeding the many militias on the Aragon front.

assemblies, usually by delegating commissions to investigate and report back on particular problems. At the district or regional levels similar delegation processes allowed the more ambitious schemes to be implemented without control slipping from the hands of the people.

Village assemblies were held weekly, fortnightly or at least monthly. The various delegates and commissions lived in the village, so that all issues and problems were discussed routinely as part of normal social life. The assemblies themselves were part of that normality. Even the smallholders and individualists who had not joined the agricultural collectives participated in the assemblies if they so desired. The recall of delegates who had not performed their duties adequately tended to be done in the same spirit - that of a simple, social fact. Bitterness and conflict over this censure did not spoil the process because all who took part knew what was going on, and were prepared to discuss it openly and unselfconsciously.

#### FARMING FOR PEOPLE

Even in the midst of war, research and development in agricultural matters made great strides, due to the involvement of the communities in decision-making at all levels. Experimental farms and nurseries were set up across Aragon to meet the needs of the people as stated by them, not on behalf of them by experts.

#### MEAT AND VEG

Production of cereals and other crops was increased substantially by the collectives, both in amount and variety. The need to feed villages and militias furthered collectivisation and then its effectiveness. The use of fertilisers and machinery and more efficient cultivation techniques increased wheat production throughout Aragon, when in other areas the harvest was down.

## TOWARDS LIBERTARIAN COMMUNISM



the region. The system was so obviously appropriate for the people and for the times that several collectives were run by socialists, and even some wholly by communists, when both political parties were doing all they could to destroy the collectives movement.

#### THE RESPONSE TO SOCIAL NEED

The growth of imaginative and constructive schemes to improve the lives of the peasants and villagers was astounding. Real, social services were created virtually from nothing. Medical centres, schools, old peoples' homes and especially hospitals were built and equipped almost entirely with resources available locally. The hospitals were often far ahead of their time for Spain, and were advanced even by British, American or Swiss standards. Schools, which the republicans had talked much about and even built, were only used during the libertarian communist period. When the departure to the front of a large proportion of the manpower is taken into account, the real extent of these achievements can even more be appreciated.

During the subsequent period under Franco all of these amenities were like

fabled memories - they were all destroyed by the fascists to put back the standard of life for the peasants to an existence more suited to medieval society.

#### SOCIAL LIFE

The social feeling in the villages, as can be imagined, was also transformed. The families of fascists who had died or left were integrated into the collectives with little ill-feeling. The real, tangible involvement of all in the decisions affecting them and the mutual aid and solidarity that resulted, were perhaps the most conspicuous human faces of libertarian Aragon.

That all of this could happen so quickly and thoroughly; and that it could work so well despite the pressures of war, political intrigue and outright malevolence by some; can sustain all of

us who see the need for libertarian communism as the only real hope for humanity. In Spain the collectives were crushed - indeed the Spanish people were crushed - by Franco and the fascists. But not until after simple practical anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism in Aragon had shown the world how people can live.



**CNTAIT** Militia Brigade 1936

In any case, the malicious stories of hostile strangers descending on villages and enforcing collectivisation do not stand up to examination, except as usual propoganda by politicians, lapped up by foreign correspondents in Madrid bars.

#### ORGANISING THE COLLECTIVES

The village collectives were agricultural to start with, usually involving an elected administrative body delegating teams to co-ordinate every side of farming in the locality. Soon, discussions in village assemblies led to the whole communities being collectivised. This meant that at all skills, trades and resources, on the one hand, and organisation, needs and possibilities on the other could be constructively rationalised. Decisions remained under the control of the

Carpenters and building workers were now freed from working for the large estates, and began to construct buildings for animal husbandry and its development. Piggeries, chicken runs and hatcheries and facilities for the farming of rabbits, ducks, geese, turkeys and

cattle soon meant that the people were able to eat meat where before their consumption of it was minimal.

The building of flour mills and other facilities to use crops more efficiently, and the fruits of the experimental farms revolutionised farming in Aragon. Those who were initially suspicious of the collectives steadily joined them as they saw what it could mean for themselves and their families. From July 1936 to April 1937 the numbers of farming and village collectives doubled to include most of

## THE POLITICIANS

From 1936 to 1939 the Spanish Communist Party began as small in numbers, but gradually increased its influence by worming members into strategic positions. The role of the USSR and the C.P. was initially to encourage the movement of anarchists and other militant workers into the front line, and to isolate and discredit them there. At the same time they waged a covert war against collectivisation; sabotaging industry irrespectively of the effects this had on communities and on the war effort. Their aim all along was to increase their own influence, hoping to be a dominant force after the end of the war. Their attitude was such that it didn't matter to them if this strategy helped lose the war, led to the death of tens of thousands of workers, and destroyed whole working-class organisations so long as they come out of it with some slight advantage.

#### OPPORTUNISTS IN OPPOSITION

There were two particular reasons for the C.P. and Russia's opposition, in practice, to the revolution. The image of the Bolshevik revolution and its Stalinist aftermath had to be protected. A successful anarchist revolution in Spain would have tarnished the reputation of state communism. Closer to home, a familiar part of Leninist dogma is that 'conditions' must be right for a revolution to succeed. What they mean is that if the C.P. is able to take over, and in Spain they were not. Hence the 'conditions' were not right from that point of view.

#### POLITICAL DIVERSIONS

The other prominent politicians and parties associated with the Popular Front government were little better than the communists. Perhaps they were less malevolent in their hostility to working class organisation, but the effect was the same. In the classic manner, they were politicians, protecting their own interests and sacrificing people and principles when it suited them. The tragedy of this in Spain was that ordinary people could still retain faith in them even when they had the real means of change in their own hands. The anarchist leaders who joined the government found out what they should have known already. They became dupes and pawns in the parliamentary game that they couldn't win - a game that politicians seem to see as the really important arena of society, as opposed to the meaningful and potentially powerful rank and file organisation of the working-class and the community.

#### LEADERS AGAINST THE BASE

The Socialists, Communists and Republicans were at best half-hearted about the movement for collectivisation. In fact they were all opposed to the idea of workers' control, but often could not get away with voicing their opposition. This was especially true in those areas where collectivisation was non-political (ie spontaneously chosen and organised by workers) but where those involved in forming the collectives were in fact >



members of their own parties. Such as in Extremadura and Tarragona.

**SABOTAGE AND LEGALITY**  
Especially in Catalonia the politicians engaged in daily sabotage of the collectives whatever they were currently saying publicly. The Catalan law of collectivisation of October 1936 subordinated all industrial collectives to the bodies created by the government. Although for a while this did not ruin the internal workings of most collectives, it eventually proved to be disastrous in co-ordinating the efforts of industrial sectors across the economy.

**CP ATTACK THE WORKERS**  
In towns where the C.P. had any numerical strength, anarchists and other prominent pro-collectivisers were attacked militarily in May 1937. In the Levante Civil and Assault Guards from Alicante and Murcia under the control of the Communist Party attacked collectives with large numbers of tanks and machine guns. The peasants were forewarned and beat off the attacks, but not until after considerable casualties were incurred on both sides. Again and again, in several areas, the government influenced by C.P. members attacked collectives. They concentrated on those with strong C.N.T. and anarchist affiliations, but also some which had been set up by U.G.T. (the socialist trade union) members, for example in the Asturias.

**THE WORMS IN THE APPLE**  
Communist Party members got themselves into strategic positions in the bureaucracies and management hierarchies that the Catalan and Republican governments had insisted on maintaining against the wishes of workers. From there they manipulated, manoeuvred and sabotaged the war effort, industry and the collective organisations in many ways large and small. One of their more successful

tactics was to gain positions in the Ministries with requisitioning powers. They would hive off massive amounts of machinery, tools and parts to lie idle in hidden warehouses. They would then blame the inefficiency of collectives and the C.N.T. for the shortages and frustration that followed.

**THE ARAGON EXPERIENCE**  
In Aragon the most effort was devoted to undermining the collectives. Leading communists carried out an unceasing propaganda campaign to advise peasants not to join collectives, and urging smallholders to combat them in any way possible. The C.P. set up a so-called Peasants' Federation which organised around the principle of the defence of private property. These efforts culminated in a military attack in August 1937 by the communist General Lister. At the height of a republican offensive and of the corn harvest Lister's Army Division attacked and destroyed the Aragon collectives and the entire harvest and gave the machinery to small land owners. Over half of the collectives recovered for a while, and some were protected by anarchist militias who saw what was happening. But the incident burnt out the soul of the Aragonese movement for collectivisation. Again, in propaganda, the C.P. and the others blamed the principle of collectivisation and the C.N.T. for any failures that were apparent.

**AND IN BARCELONA...**  
Similar aims had to be pursued more subtly in cities like Barcelona where the C.N.T. were so strong. Nevertheless the dual strategy of sabotage and discrediting worked there too. If it had failed it would have been inconceivable for leading C.N.T. members to enter the government and betray the revolution, even after the C.P. had already done much of the spadework in achieving this.

by an older person who knew my views and beliefs and knew I was to be trusted. I then joined. My brother who was two years younger than me joined by the same method.

**Syndicalist** - How many were in the Libertarian Youth and what activities did you engage in?

**Miguel** - At one time there was as many as 200 in the Libertarian Youth in our small town. Our activities were mainly propaganda, getting our ideas across to the workers but also raising funds for the movement. We would also hold a meeting, as I said we had to be very careful so although the secretary and committee could meet in safe cafes and bars our full meetings were always held outside of town. You see at that time it was very common for people to go on picnics in large groups at weekends, this was what we would do.

**Syndicalist** - In 1936 the revolution broke out. How did this affect the Libertarian Youth in Villanueva y Gertu?

**Miguel** - The first affect that it had was that the older members joined the militia and went to the battle front. We who were left knew that the work of the Federation had to go on, the fight against the fascists was not just at the front but also at home, a rearguard was needed. A new committee was elected and the work went on. At one time I held the position of local secretary. Once I was delegated to attend a conference in Barcelona it was at the time that the anarchists controlled the city. It was then that I saw what was really possible, how things could be organised with true equality and freedom. We as delegates were booked into one of the biggest hotels in Barcelona. The dining room provided free meals to the delegates. It was here that I met a fellow anarchist nicknamed 'Zupa'. He was once one of the best pickpockets in Barcelona. I'll always remember the time that a group of us went to a restaurant that before the revolution was considered very posh, a place that only the rich could afford to eat in, but now it was run by the workers it provided cheap meals to the people of Barcelona as well as the militias who were passing through. The restaurant still used the silver cutlery that it had used before the revolution. While we were eating our meal we noticed that the knives, forks and spoons began to go missing one by one. We all knew it was 'Zupa' but we could not catch him in the act. When we got outside 'Zupa' put his hand in his pocket and took out all the missing cutlery, 'Zupa' we all said "you don't need to steal anymore". "I know" 'Zupa' said after he had taken them back "I was just practicing".

**Syndicalist** - How long were you secretary of the local Libertarian Youth?

**Miguel** - About four months and then I joined the militia. I did not tell my mother that I was going to join because I knew that this would upset her.

**Syndicalist** - What was the name of the

#### THE WAR ECONOMY

The areas where the collectives and the war effort were most closely related proved fertile ground for C.P. wreckers at all levels of the economy. To begin with, financial aid to the republic and the exporting of goods were organised among the collectives. But the USSR wanted the progress of the war slowed, and eventually the C.P. gathered all export activities under its control.

#### SPANISH GOLD

The republicans had under their control large gold reserves in the Bank of Spain. But these were not released in support of the war effort. Arms and ammunition were held back when the front was starved of them, so as to maintain a strong police force that the government could control. Eventually the gold was used as payment in advance for Russian arms - mainly weapons used in 1905. These were, needless to say, kept strictly under the control of the C.P. and Russian advisers.

#### WILFUL BETRAYAL

The Russian and communist generals deployed the militias and arms in such a way as to make victory impossible. The fronts in Andalusia and Extremadura were rendered completely useless, while the Madrid front had large quantities of arms which could not be used properly given the secure positions the fascists had carved out for themselves in the hills. While these insane tactics were operated, the Aragon front was given no support or arms. This front could have opened the way round the West to the heart of the fascists territory, but the aircraft and anti-aircraft guns that could have been so decisive here were all sent elsewhere where they were useless in military terms. Crucial strategic points fell, and thousands of peasants and workers died needlessly so that the C.P. could become bigger fish in a rapidly shrinking pond. The defeat of the Aragon front

militia you joined?

**Miguel** - I joined the Hortiz Column which was sent to Caspe in Aragon. After that we were sent to help in the battle for Belchite but in order to do this we had first to take a small town called Fuen de Todos. As we entered the town a machine gun started to cut down our comrades. The firing came from a priest who had mounted a machine gun on top of the bell tower of his church. We had to send for a Republican plane to bomb the church, it was the only way that we could take the town. It was during the battle for Belchite that I was wounded, we lost many comrades there.



Worker controlled Hotel

**Syndicalist** - You were wounded more than once. Is that right?

**Miguel** - Yes, after I recovered from the wound I received in the Battle for Belchite I rejoined my Column but was wounded again. I was taken to the hospital and the doctor told me that I was being sent to a recuperation centre and then on to the army barracks at Olot. This was at the time that the Communists were trying to militarize the militias. I told the doctor that I would go home until I was fully recovered and then report to the barracks at Olot. After about three weeks I went to report and was arrested for collaboration with the fascists. I was taken before a court martial and found guilty. I just could not understand it, but later I found out that the communists were doing this to anarchists everywhere. I was put in a cell to await sentence. Eventually I heard the keys in the door and was convinced that I would be taken out and shot. This was the first time that I was really scared. Everyone is scared when going into battle but you tell yourself that somehow you'll survive but this time I was convinced that I was about to die. The door of the cell opened and there stood a Colonel who said 'release this man'. I then recognised him as a Colonel who we had fought beside in Aragon. He was only there to inspect the new recruits but had heard that a prisoner was being held and had insisted on seeing me. On his word I was released. There was no doubt about it this man saved my life. Under the communist advisers from Russia the militarisation went on and I ended up in a communist led brigade.

**Syndicalist** - Do you remember the name of the brigade?

was portrayed as the result of idleness and a lack of patriotic republican fervour, whereas the stupid tactics on the Madrid front were shown as the heroic defence of the capital, aided by the selfless solidarity of the mighty USSR.

#### WHOSE INTERESTS ?

Victories and advances in the war were of no use to the C.P. and Russia unless the Party could be portrayed as responsible for them. They were indifferent as to what effects this stance had. For these reasons most of the militant workers, peasants, C.N.T. members and anarchists were cynically allowed to perish. The interests of statist communists and the fascists were identical in this respect - the C.N.T. and the organisation it inspired had to be destroyed at all costs.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Victory was conceivable in Spain in the late 1930's. The ruthless subversion of the revolution by the C.P. reduced the chances of victory coming with reach. They enthusiastically and successfully manipulated to their own ends the structures and hierarchies that anyway were nothing more than pointless nuisances to workers busy organising society. The republicans and socialists needed those bureaucracies because without them they would have had no vehicle for the egotism, self-importance and basically reactionary attitudes towards workers and the collectives.

The difference that this combination of political manoeuvring and opportunism makes in revolutionary periods should not be underestimated. The lesson of Spain is that workers' control is perfectly reasonable and effective, provided that the social revolution is carried through without looking to the state, institutions, parties or politicians to take the lead. They are dangerous distractions and needed to be made impotent.

**Miguel** - If I remember rightly I was sent to the 134 Brigade 10th Division First Company.

**Syndicalist** - What were your experiences there as an anarchist in a communist dominated brigade?

**Miguel** - Well I kept myself to myself after my experiences at the barracks in Olot. I thought the best thing to do was keep very quiet. By my actions it was clear to everyone that I was not a communist member. One day I was approached by a captain (who I found out later had been a centurion delegate in an anarchist column), he explained that it was not safe for anarchists and that

I should be careful what I said and did. I stayed with this captain as his assistant. The collapse of the Republic was soon to follow and I managed to cross the boarder into France.

**Syndicalist** - How were the refugees treated by the French Government?

**Miguel** - The refugee camp that I was in was just like a concentration camp. People there starved. There was food in the camp but the gaurds made people barter for it with any possessions they might have left. There was no medical treatment so disease spread through the camp. Many of the very old and very young died.

Miguel went on to fight against the Nazis in the French army and eventually with the British troops in North Africa. We finally asked Miguel if he would one day write a book about his life, he replied, "maybe one day I will but at the moment there are more important things to do like translating as much material as possible".

If you would like more information on the Spanish revolution we suggest reading the following:

The Spanish Revolution - B. Bolloten.  
The Anarchist Collectives - S. Dolgoff.  
Visions on Fire - E. Goldman.  
Civil War & Civil Peace: Libertarian Aragon 1936-1937 - G. Kelsey.  
Collectives in the Spanish Revolution - G. Leval.  
A New World in Our Hearts - A. Meltzer.  
The Tragedy of Spain - R. Rocker.  
With the Peasants of Aragon - A. Souchy.

## EYEWITNESS & PARTICIPANT

It was during the Spanish revolution that the ideas of Anarcho-Syndicalism were not just political theory but a practical reality. In many areas of Spain the C.N.T. was faced with the problems of fighting the civil war but also with restructuring the whole of society based on the ideas of libertarian communism.

During the post civil war years under the dictatorship of Franco the C.N.T. and libertarian communist influence was almost but not quite smashed. Since the death of Franco the Anarcho Syndicalist movement has come out of hiding and is again beginning to grow, though at this point in time it is obviously a shadow of its former self.

For the first time documents, reports and eye witness accounts of problems the C.N.T. faced and the solutions arrived at are becoming available. Unfortunately no real attempt has been made to translate these documents and make them accessible to the English reader - that is until now. Currently in the North East a small group of people are working at this task with the view of publishing some of this material. We interviewed Miguel Rico who witnessed these events first hand about some of his experiences.

**Syndicalist** - When and Where were you born and how did you become involved with the anarchist movement?

**Miguel** - I was born in the Hospitalet area of Barcelona on the 1st October 1919 but when I was very young my father found work at a cement quarry in a place called Villanueva y Gertu. It was there that I was raised and educated. When I was 16 I joined the F.I.J.L. (Federation of Libertarian Youth).



**Syndicalist** - Was that the average age of the members of the federation?

**Miguel** - Some were younger but most were 17, 18 and 19 years of age.

**Syndicalist** - How did you become involved?

**Miguel** - You did not just join, things were not done like that. At that time the police were trying to infiltrate the movement at all levels and there were many informers everywhere. In our town you became a member of the Libertarian Youth on the recommendation of an already respected member. This is what happened to me. I was recommended