

BARCELONA 1919: A CRITICAL TURNING
IN THE SPANISH ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST MOVEMENT

A Thesis

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by

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Acknowledgment

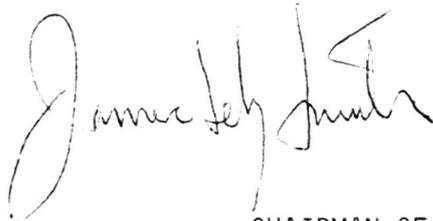
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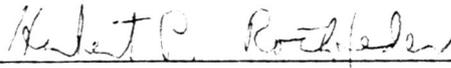
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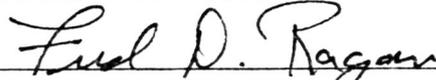


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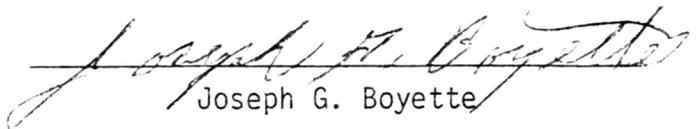
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The general purpose of this study is to examine the convergence of two ideological currents, anarchism and syndicalism, in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. This study attempts both to explain the key differences between anarchist and syndicalist ideology and to show how they were welded into an amalgamated movement on the Iberian Peninsula. As this study follows the development of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, it necessarily discusses the unique social, economic and political setting of Spain in the first quarter of the century. The specific goal of this study is to demonstrate that 1919 was a pivotal year in the anarcho-syndicalist movement.

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Preface

In 1919 the anarcho-syndicalist movement was at the summit of its power and influence. For fifty years the anarchist movement had ebbed and flowed in southern and eastern Spain, never gaining more than 70,000 adherents loosely organized in worker's centers and trade unions. In Catalonia the anarchist doctrine was fused with syndicalist ideology at the turn of the century, producing the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Although the anarchists and the syndicalists created a national labor confederation, the Conferación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in 1911, the anarcho-syndicalist movement continued to be a small, albeit disruptive, force in Spanish society. Until 1918 the CNT never represented more than 50,000 workers out of a total work-force numbering more than six million.

At the end of the First World War, however, the CNT suddenly grew into a large and powerful organization. Membership expanded throughout 1919, reaching over 700,000 by the end of the year. The nucleus of the CNT was the Catalanian Regional Confederation (CRT) which contained over half of the members of the national organization.

During the very months that the CRT was achieving unprecedented levels of strength and organization, however, an underlying dispute between anarchist and syndicalist leaders came to the forefront. Inspired by the Bolshevik, Hungarian and Spartacist Revolutions, the anarchists believed that the moment to inaugurate the social revolution in Spain was at hand. The syndicalists were much more prudent. They wished to consolidate the gains they were making and emerge in the post-war period as a powerful labor organization, capable of dealing effectively with the

manufacturers of Catalonia. The competition between anarchist extremists and syndicalist moderates over the direction of the CRT reached a decisive point in 1919. Although the anarchists were unable to engineer a revolutionary insurrection, they did manage to entrench themselves in the CRT and prevent the syndicalists from reaching an accommodation with the Catalan bourgeoisie. The inability of the syndicalist leadership to achieve a clear ascendancy over the CRT in 1919 would be a critical turning point in the anarcho-syndicalist movement, ensuring that it would emerge in the post-war period as a revolutionary rather than a moderate organization.

Anarchism in Spain During the Nineteenth Century

The theoretical basis of Spanish anarchism was firmly rooted in the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.¹ Although many of his ideas were anticipated by William Godwin (1756-1836), Proudhon was the first and most important anarchist philosopher and later anarchists writers added very little to his theory. The basic tenets of Proudhon's philosophy were first articulated in 1840 when Proudhon published What is Property? In this book, Proudhon rejected every existing political system, including democracy, and for the first time described himself as an anarchist.² This was a shocking and defiant statement because 'anarchist' had been an epithet since the French Revolution denoting one who advocates destruction and chaos as an end in itself. Proudhon took the word anarchy at face-value, however, and spent the rest of his life espousing the positive virtues of a society without government.³ Although the word anarchy still carries a violent connotation, the founder of the modern anarchist movement never advocated violence as a means of transforming society. He believed to his dying day, in fact, that an anarchist society could

¹Gaston Leval, Precisiones sobre el anarquismo (Barcelona: Ediciones Tierra y Libertad, 1937), p. 280.

²Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, What is Property? An Inquiry Into the Principle of Right and of Government, trans. Benjamin R. Tucker (New York: Dover Publishers, 1970), p. 22.

³Peter Kropotkin, Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets; A Collection of His Writings, ed. Roger Baldwin (New York: B. Bloom, 1968), p. 290.

be realized peacefully through the proliferation of cooperative organizations.⁴

In its most elemental form, Proudhon's philosophy was concerned with the relationship of the individual to society. Proudhon believed that the impetus for social organization should come from the bottom up, from the individual to the community. In the ideal society, individuals would enjoy almost complete freedom. These free individuals would gravitate into "natural groups" or independent communities based on economic cooperation. The anarchist society of the future would be no more than a very loose federation of these freely-formed and autonomous communities of producers.⁵

Unlike the utopian socialists, Proudhon did not envision totally self-supporting communities. He maintained instead that individuals could supply only a small portion of their needs and that most people relied on the efforts of thousands to satisfy their daily wants. Proudhon was not a machine-breaker because he recognized that modern machinery, large collective efforts, the intelligent division of labor and specialization enhanced the well-being of man. Thus, rather than champion the rugged individual, Proudhon emphasized the limited capacity of individuals or small groups.⁶

Although Proudhon was a persistent advocate of individual freedom, he was also a socialist. For this reason, Spanish anarchists later called

⁴George Woodcock, Anarchism; A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (Harmonsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 55.

⁵James Joll, The Anarchists, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 50, 59.

⁶Proudhon, What is Property?, p. 148.

themselves socialistas libertarias or libertarian socialists. Proudhon insisted that there was no contradiction between freedom and socialism. He believed that all instruments of production were the result of a collective effort of generations of people. Since all capital wealth had been collectively produced, Proudhon reasoned that it should be collectively owned. He completely rejected private property as an unjust inroad into what belongs to society as a whole and adopted "Property is theft!" as the motto of the anarchist movement.⁷

Although Proudhon denounced private ownership, he encouraged "occupancy". All men, according to Proudhon, had inherited the accumulated capital of the world and each individual had an equal right to use it. Each person was entitled to "occupy" a share which could be measured according to the prevalent balance of population and resources. The occupier of a machine, a piece of land or a house had to make use of it and not just possess it. That person was required to take care of what he used and to use it in cooperation with others. In short, the occupier had the right to use but not abuse capital.⁸

The occupier, furthermore, was entitled to the product of his labor. Unlike the communist anarchists of the 1880's, Proudhon and afterwards Michael Bakunin adhered to the dictum: 'to each according to his deeds'. Contracts between individuals, the only legally binding force in an anarchist society, would be inviolable.⁹ Thus the individual would be

⁷Ibid., pp. 143, 147.

⁸Ibid., pp. 82-3.

⁹Paul Eltzbacher, Anarchism: Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy, 2nd ed. trans. Steven T. Byington with appended essay by Rudolf Rocker (New York: Libertarian Book Club, 1960), p. 54.

able to freely exchange his labor or its fruits for that of others. Proudhon envisioned a national bank in which members could exchange labor by means of labor checks which would represent the hours of labor needed to produce every given commodity.¹⁰ Calling this system mutualism, he organized a mutualist bank in 1849, The People's Bank, which soon had 27,000 members. Although it quickly failed when Proudhon was imprisoned that year, it reinforced his conviction that through economic action workers could peacefully transform society.¹¹

The anarchist society Proudhon advocated was what he viewed as the natural organization of man. This flexible and efficient society was, in his opinion, suffocated by governmental authority. According to Proudhon, government with its police, armies and unyielding doctrines existed to protect the property possessed by a minority of greedy men. Because it was a rigid, unnatural apparatus, government inevitably used force and deceit to protect property and to justify its own existence.¹²

In place of government Proudhon envisioned a society of autonomous communities which would set up free federations. Rather than govern the federation would administer. It would be little more than a clearing house for economic exchange.¹³ National security would be provided by local militia which could organize a system of mutual aid against powerful enemies.

¹⁰Kropotkin, Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 291.

¹¹Woodcock, Anarchism, A History, p. 120.

¹²Jo11, The Anarchists, p. 62.

¹³Eltzbacher, Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy, p. 50.

¹⁴Jo11, The Anarchists, pp. 59, 60.

Hence, Proudhon consistently rejected authority and espoused individual freedom. While he denounced capitalism he also blasted the regimentation that communism imposed on individuals.¹⁵ Proudhon denounced religion but he also rejected atheism as being too dogmatic. This repudiation of authority led to an early breach with Karl Marx. In 1846, Proudhon wrote Marx urging a less doctrinaire approach to social issues. A leader of the radical labor movement, Proudhon implored Marx not to become the leader of a new intolerance. Marx never answered the letter and their differences were never resolved. These differences did not disappear when Proudhon died in 1865, however. They persisted and they would lead to a permanent split in the European labor movement when Michael Bakunin later confronted Marx over the issue of authority.¹⁶

Michael Bakunin was a man of action whose example more than his ideas galvanized the anarchist movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Bakunin considered Proudhon the "master of us all"¹⁸ and he never strayed far from Proudhon's vision of a society without government based on free individuals and autonomous communities.¹⁹ Bakunin shared Proudhon's distain for religious and social doctrine. With one exception the ideal economic order of Bakunin was essentially Proudhonian. Proudhon believed the basic economic unit was the individual or family but Bakunin believed the basic unit was the collective (shop,

¹⁵Proudhon, What is Property?, p. 259.

¹⁶Woodcock, Anarchism, A History, p. 113.

¹⁷Joll, The Anarchists, p. 67.

¹⁸Woodcock, Anarchism, A History, p. 141.

¹⁹Alan Ritter, Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 97-8.

factory or farm commune). Consequently, Proudhon was known as a mutualist and Bakunin a collectivist.²⁰ Thus, the most noticeable difference in the anarchist societies envisioned by Bakunin and Proudhon was the role of the family. Bakunin desired diverse and open families with sexual freedom, communal control over children and no inheritance. Proudhon, on the other hand, wanted monogamous families, parental control over children and limited inheritance.²¹

Although Bakunin and Proudhon essentially agreed in their concepts of the future anarchist society, their strategies for its realization were far apart. Proudhon believed that non-violent rational measures would usher in the anarchist age. Through reasoned argument and direct economic action, as exemplified in the People's Bank, Proudhon sought to gradually transfer capital wealth into the hands of the workers. Without a propertied elite to sustain the government, Proudhon believed it would crumble.²²

Bakunin, on the other hand, maintained that violence must be an integral part of anarchist strategy. He envisioned a bloody revolution, a class war with cataclysmic destruction. Out of the ashes of this war the anarchist society would be born. Bakunin was convinced that the workers were a massive, explosive force which the rich and powerful could not long contain. The proletariat, according to Bakunin, lacked only a universal ideal to stir them to action and to give their revolution direction. The combination of the anarchist ideal and the poverty of the

²⁰Leval, Precisiones, p. 281.

²¹Ritter, Anarchism, p. 52.

²²Ibid., pp. 97-100.

masses would soon trigger the social revolution. With the supreme confidence that would mark succeeding generations of anarchists, Bakunin predicted that "no power in the world can stop it".²³

Bakunin had definite ideas as to how to spread the ideal of anarchism to the workers. He saw the proletariat as a brutalized and ignorant multitude which would not respond to empty rhetoric. The leaders of the anarchist movement would have to be men of action who impressed the ideal of anarchism on the workers by deeds as well as words. Bakunin had great faith in the efficacy of these men of action. He felt that several hundred of them would be capable of organizing the revolutionary might of the people. This organizational work, contended Bakunin, should take place through workers' collectives which would serve as vehicles of revolutionary action.²⁴

Bakunin did not wish to see the organized might of the workers dissipated on political or economic reforms. He wanted nothing short of the total social revolution which he believed was imminent. Like Proudhon, Bakunin eschewed political action because he rejected the idea of political power even in the hands of workers. His favorite tactic was the strike which he felt trained the workers for the ultimate struggle. Bakunin was convinced, furthermore, that a great general strike was the spark which would ignite the volatile mass of workers. "A general strike," he confidently predicted, "... can only lead to a great cataclysm, which

²³Michael Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism, compiled and ed. by G. P. Maximoff (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1953), pp. 381, 202, 370.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 403, 380.

will regenerate society."²⁵

This apocalyptic scenario contrasted sharply with Marx's plan for revolution. Marx advocated political action for workers and he intended to conquer the state. A transitory period, the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat, would consolidate the revolution. Eventually, the state would wither away and a society not unlike the ideal anarchist order would remain. Bakunin, on the other hand, objected to the transitory period. He wanted to destroy rather than conquer the state. The idea of a free state was to Bakunin a contradiction in terms.²⁶ The authority, centralization and discipline of the Marxist program, furthermore, were repugnant to Bakunin whose maxims were individual freedom and federalism. Bakunin, finally saw no need for a central party because of his great faith in the unharnessed strength of the working class.²⁷

Bakunin envisioned an apocalyptic insurrection and emphasized the need for action but he was never a terrorist. Although he endorsed individual terrorism for a short time, it never occupied a central position in his strategy for revolution. Bakunin fought on barricades throughout Europe and spent over eight years in jail but there is no indication that he ever participated in a terrorists plot.²⁸ The idea of "propaganda by the deed" first appeared in a letter by Errico Malatesta

²⁵ Ibid., p. 383.

²⁶ Mikhael Bakunin, Marxism, Freedom and the State, trans. K. J. Kenafick (London: Freedom Press, 1950), p. 56.

²⁷ Woodcock, Anarchism, A History, pp. 58-9.

²⁸ Edward Hallet Carr, Michael Bakunin (London: Macmillan and Company, 1937), p. 392.

to Carlo Cafiero in 1876, the year of Bakunin's death.²⁹

Through his ideas, his example and through direct intervention, Bakunin became the dominant figure in the Spanish Anarchist movement.³⁰ He planted the movement on the Iberian Peninsula in 1868 when he sent Guiseppi Fanelli, an Italian disciple, to Spain to spread the anarchist ideas. Fanelli set up branches of the anarchist Alliance of Social Democracy, which had been founded by Bakunin, in Madrid and Barcelona.

In 1869, Bakunin attempted to enter the Alliance as a body into the International Working Men's Alliance. Marx was opposed to the idea of such a large body of Bakunists within the International, however, and he used his influence to block the entry of the Alliance. At this juncture Bakunin allegedly dissolved the Alliance and its branches were absorbed directly into the International as sections.³¹

In truth Bakunin's dissolution of the Alliance was a fraud. He continued to influence its few members who were almost all within his intimate circle. Two Spanish members of the Alliance, Fargó Pellicer and Eusebio Sentinín, met with Bakunin in 1869 and became members of his secret society, the International Brotherhood. Along with other Spanish anarchists, they founded a new, ostensibly independent Spanish Alliance of Social Democracy in 1870. Its first act was to call a general congress of working men's associations. When the congress met later that year in Barcelona it created the Spanish Regional Federation

²⁹Gerald Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1950), p. 168.

³⁰Ibid., p. 48.

³¹George Douglas Howard Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1954), vol. 2, pp. 182-3.

of the IWMA. Its bylaws were identical to those of the Swiss Jura Federation which had been drawn up by Bakunin. Thus, Bakunin, who already exercised a preponderant influence over the Italian and Swiss sections of the International, now dominated the Spanish sections.³²

Bakunin's growing influence prompted Marx to have the IWMA moved to New York in 1872 where it died of sheer inactivity. In effect, Marx destroyed the First International rather than allow Bakunin to gain control over it. The Italian, Spanish, Swiss and French delegates, meanwhile, formed an anarchist rump of the International in Saint Imier, Switzerland.³³

Bakunin's dominance over the Spanish International had been effected through the smaller and more reliable Spanish Alliance. This combination of a small, often secret, revolutionary organization that permeated and controlled a much larger federation of working men's associations became a recurring feature of the Spanish anarchist movement. In 1872, the Aliancistas, as members of the Spanish Alliance were called, were able to dominate the proceedings of the Spanish Regional Federation of the International and the Federation was reorganized along still more libertarian³⁴ lines. Following the anarchist principle of local freedom each section could secede from the national organization at any time and it could decide independently whether or not to strike. Later that year the

³²Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 137, 167, 143.

³³Ibid., p. 144.

³⁴Although the term libertarian has acquired conservative overtones in the United States, it originally referred to the decentralized socialist movements of the far Left, namely anarchism and syndicalism.

Regional Federation sent delegates to the anarchist version of the International in Saint Imier.³⁵

During the 1870's the anarchists used the First International and, after 1872, the anarchist International to reach workers and peasants throughout Spain. Because the Spanish Regional Federation allowed local sections almost complete freedom, labor unrest occurred spontaneously in each locality. Because of this lack of coordination the government could usually suppress one local anarchist uprising after another in a piecemeal fashion.³⁶ The loose structure of the Federation had certain advantages, however. When the mayor of Jerez, for example, outlawed the International and all unions connected with it in February, 1871, the workers simply dissolved the local section of the International and reconstituted themselves the "Open House of Workers". That fall the new organization submitted a constitution to the Spanish Regional Federation and, in effect, changed itself back into a local section of the International.³⁷ This freedom of choice in which local anarchist groups could dissolve and reorganize, act independently and spontaneously enabled the anarchist to regroup after each defeat and rise up stronger than before.³⁸

The most notable growth of the International occurred in Andalusia. Of the 60,000 Internationalists, as members of the Spanish Regional

³⁵ Murray Bookchin, The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868-1936 (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977), p. 77.

³⁶ Brennan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 146.

³⁷ Temma Kaplan, Anarchists of Andalusia 1868-1903 (Princeton: University Press, 1977), pp. 75-76.

³⁸ Brennan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 146.

Federation were called, in 1874, two-thirds were from Andalusia. The Andalusian Internationalists were steeped in anarchist ideology and, when the Spanish Regional Federation collapsed in 1881, they kept the anarchist doctrine alive for two more decades.³⁹ The reasons that anarchism took root in Andalusia can be explained by the interplay of events and the socioeconomic make-up of the region.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Andalusia was an overwhelmingly agrarian region. The topography was varied and the system of landholding complex but, in general, the large estate was the dominant factor. In Seville province, for instance, 72 percent of the agricultural wealth was concentrated in the hands of two percent of the population. The large landholders often lived in Madrid or other large cities and let overseers run their estates. About one-quarter of the population consisted of small peasant farmers. There was also a small class of renters and share croppers. Finally, three-quarters of the population consisted of landless peasants who worked for wages on a daily, weekly or seasonal basis and who were normally unemployed four to six months a year.⁴⁰

The poverty of the peasants had been exacerbated by a series of land-reform laws enacted during the years 1812 to 1856 by liberal governments. In response to the free enterprise philosophy of Adam Smith, Church property and common lands were appropriated and sold on the open market. Since the peasants did not have the capital to buy these holdings, the bulk of the land ended up in the possession of landlords and speculators.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 155-6.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 118.

In the meantime, the peasants lost the right to common lands on which they had grazed livestock, hunted game and gathered firewood. This unfortunate land policy, inspired by "a doctrinaire liberalism totally unsuited to Spanish conditions",⁴¹ was in its last stages of implementation immediately before anarchist ideas reached Andalusia. The desire for land reform was probably the most important reason that anarchism was accepted in Andalusia.

A second reason for its acceptance was the strong regionalism of the Andalusians. The vast majority of Andalusians lived in towns with populations of 8,000 to 20,000 inhabitants and worked on nearby farms or plantations. Their primary allegiance was to the pueblo which meant three things: township, local government and people. This allegiance had deep historic roots but was easily adapted to anarchism. The pueblo later became the basic structure of Andalusian anarchism⁴² and the Andalusian tradition of communal economic effort was translated into collectivism. Finally, the Andalusians had established a deep-seated resentment of the arbitrary rule of Madrid. They resented the Civil Guard, which had been in Andalusia since 1844, the absentee landlords and the local political bosses or caciques who represented the central government in Madrid. The anarchist repudiation of central authority and advocacy of local autonomy struck a resonant chord with the regionalistic Andalusians.⁴³

⁴¹Ibid., p. 109.

⁴²Kaplan, Anarchists of Andalusia, p. 5.

⁴³Gabriel Jackson, "The Origins of Spanish Anarchism," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly 36 (September 1955): 138-49.

A third reason anarchism was accepted in Andalusia was due to a wide-spread disillusionment with the Catholic Church. The peasants had historically looked to the Church for protection against greedy or cruel landlords. Since 1812, however, the Church had aligned itself with the aristocracy in a bitter struggle against the liberals. The Church soon appeared to be a defender of wealth and privileges. Its own wealth, moreover, often stood in stark contrast to the poverty of the peasants and the teachings of the New Testament. The resentment this caused was manifested in sporadic anti-clerical riots which, after 1835, became a common form of social protest. The anarchist movement provided a channel through which the poor could vent their rage against the Church. Anarchism also filled a spiritual void left when the peasants lost faith in the Church. Anarchism was more than a political or economic doctrine; it was a way of life, a religion of sorts.⁴⁴ The most zealous anarchists who traveled from pueblo to pueblo spreading the "idea" were reminiscent of the friars of the Catholic Church. These anarchist "saints", as they were called, often led ascetic, puritanic lives, abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and sometimes meat. With no visible means of livelihood, they devoted their lives to teaching and converting workers to the "idea".⁴⁵

A fourth reason anarchism took root in Andalusia was the failure of liberalism. The fatal agrarian policy plus a fraudulent parliamentary system permanently alienated the masses from liberal politics. After the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1874, Prime Minister,

⁴⁴Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 43-45, 192.

⁴⁵Jackson, "Origins of Spanish Anarchism," p. 139.

Don Antonio Canovas del Castillo established a system within the constitutional monarchy which provided for "free" elections to the Cortes but ensured control over the results. By using political bosses, Canovas provided the form of democracy without allowing its substance. To give his system more authenticity, he periodically allowed the majority in the Cortes to rotate between the two liberal parties, the Liberals and the Liberal Conservatives. There was not a single genuinely free election during the entire period of the constitutional monarch (1876-1923).⁴⁶

The final reason that anarchism succeeded was that there was sufficient wealth in Andalusia to make the poverty of the population unbearable. Anarchism was strongest in the most prosperous areas and weak in the poorer sections. The social revolution did not make sense to the people of very poor regions, such as Extremadura, because redistribution of wealth would only make everyone equally poor. In the fertile areas of Andalusia, however the revolution promised to improve the living standard of most people and presented a sensible alternative.⁴⁷

As the anarchist movement took root in Andalusia, Spain was experiencing six years of political upheaval. Queen Isabell II was driven from the throne in 1868. After two years of turmoil the Cortes invited Amadeo of Savoy to become King. Amadeo, who was inexperienced and spoke no Spanish, was never able to master the political confusion

⁴⁶Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁷Kaplan, Anarchists of Andalusia, p. 10.

in Spain. In April 1872, the second Carlist War broke out in Aragon⁴⁸ and nine months later Amadeo abdicated. In June 1873, the Cortes voted for a Republic and Pi y Margall was elected president.

Pi y Margall, a Catalan, the founder and leader of the Federal party, and a follower of Proudhon, espoused a system of extreme decentralization for Spain. He devised a plan in which Spain would be divided into eleven autonomous cantons and, within these cantons, the larger municipalities would be self-governed. A deliberately weak central government would administer rather than rule this Swiss-like federal republic. The plan also called for social legislation, the abolition of conscription, separation of church and state, and land reform.⁴⁹

Within two months, Pi y Margall's federalist experiment collapsed. He had been unable to disband the Army Because of the Carlist rising in the North. Several disillusioned and impatient provinces of southern and eastern Spain decided not to wait for the Cortes to pass the new Federal Constitution. Malaga, Seville, Granada, Cartagena and Valencia almost simultaneously declared themselves free and independent cantons. Amid this confusion the Army rose and marched against the rebellious cantons in Andalusia and Valencia. By January, 1874, the Army had crushed the Cantonalist movement and dissolved the Cortes. Later that year, Alfonso XII, Isabel's son, was proclaimed King of Spain and a constitutional monarchy was set up which lasted until 1923. The Carlist uprising

⁴⁸The Carlists were concentrated in the Basque Provinces, Navarre, Aragon and Catalonia. They were devout Catholics, monarchists and, consequently, bitter enemies of the liberals. They had been defeated in the first Carlist War from 1833-40.

⁴⁹Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 147-157

was defeated in November, 1874.⁵⁰

The cantonalist insurrection had a profound impact on the anarchist movement. Several sections of Spanish Regional Federation took part in the uprising. In Barcelona the Internationalists led a general strike. The Seville revolutionary committee was headed by an Internationalist, Minorance, and, in San Lucar and Alcoy, Internationalists staged large-scale revolts. The insurrection in Alcoy, which was precipitated by a general strike, left about a dozen dead on each side. After gaining the upper hand, the workers burned down a number of factories and houses. They killed the mayor, cut off his head as well as those of their opponents who had fallen in the street fighting, and then paraded the severed heads through the streets. This gory scene caused a sensation in Spain. It marked the first time that a large-scale rebellion had been planned by workers rather than the Church, the Army or the bourgeoisie. The results were two-fold: the anarchists gained a measure of notoriety and prestige; and a wide-sweeping reaction followed. The government of the new constitutional monarch outlawed both the Spanish Regional Federation of the International and the Federalist Party. This suppression eliminated the Federal movement for good but the much smaller International survived underground. Many Federalists made the easy transition into the anarchist-controlled International.⁵¹

The suppression of the public activities of the International led to a movement characterized by individualism or small clandestine groups.

⁵⁰Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 147-157.

⁵¹Bookchin, Spanish Anarchists, p. 103.

The practice of "propaganda by the deed" emerged in Italy during the late 1870's and soon spread to Spain. Through individual acts of sabotage and violence, militant anarchists hoped to stir the workers, who had been intimidated by police repression, to action. These "deeds" and harsh police reaction created a vicious cycle of violence and reprisal which led to the formation of hardened terrorist groups.⁵²

In 1881 the Spanish anarchists were suddenly presented with an opportunity to reorganize on a large scale when the government legalized trade unions. The International continued to be outlawed, however, so the anarchists dissolved it and set up a new organization, the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region. In 1882, this new Federation held a congress at Seville which represented about 50,000 workers, 30,000 of whom were from Andalusia while most of the others were from Catalonia. In general, the Andalusians favored short, violent strikes and were opposed to establishing strike funds.⁵³ The Catalans, however, favored a program of orderly strikes for modest goals, such as better working conditions, and higher wages. The congress reached a compromise program which called anarchism its long-term goal and economic improvement its immediate task.⁵⁴

At this point, a group of militant Andalusians calling themselves the "Disinherited" walked out of the congress in protest against the

⁵²Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 75.

⁵³This objection to a strike fund was partly due to the poverty of the Andalusia workers who could not afford to pay dues.

⁵⁴Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 159-162.

moderate, unrevolutionary program. The Disinherited returned to Andalusia and gained some support in the vineyards of Jerez where there was labor unrest over the practice of piecework. Between 1881 and 1883 several fires and a number of assassinations occurred there. In the midst of a strike against piecework in 1881, the Civil Guard suddenly announced that it had uncovered a hugh secret society, the Mano Negra or Black Hand, which was conspiring to kill all the landlord in Andalusia. Whether the Mano Negra ever existed at all is a matter of historical dispute but the Civil Guard used it as a pretext to arrest anarchists and labor leaders throughtout Andalusia. Hundreds of men were arrested and tortured and seven men were executed by garrot.

After the Mano Negra affair the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region steadily declined. The anarchists in Andalusia were driven underground and militant anarchists of Catalonia were disgruntled by the lack of fighting spirit of the Federation of Workers. An internal dispute over the question of collectivist anarchism versus communist anarchism caused further discord. In 1888 the Federation of Workers officially dissolved itself and for the rest of the century there was no national anarchist organization.

For the next twenty years the anarchist movement followed an unclear and disjointed course. Various towns contained small groups of militants and intellectuals who were often focused on anarchist periodicals. In 1888, two organizations were formed: the Pact of Resistance and Solidarity which was based in Catalonia and mainly concerned with trade union activity and the Anarchist Organization, which was a small group of anarchist intellectuals formed in Valencia and primarily concerned with propaganda. Barcelona, Madrid and Corunna formed the strongest

circles of anarchist militants. In Andalusia the movement was widespread and subject to bursts of enthusiasm followed by long periods of inaction.⁵⁵

During these years, the anarchist movement in Spain existed on two levels. On one level, anarchist leaders wrote articles, held congresses and discussed the social order of the future anarchist society. Dozens of publications appeared in Spain between 1880 and 1900 on topics related to the future. These included pamphlets and journals on the role of women and families in the future, the function of scientific study, the division of labor and resources and the use of money in the future.⁵⁶ Other anarchists went a step further and tried to live as closely as possible to their vision of the ideal anarchist life. They often gave up alcohol and tobacco and were faithful to their women, to whom they conscientiously remained unmarried. They often divided work and resources communally, and they sometimes opened libraries and centers to provide secular education and to discuss anarchist philosophy.⁵⁷

On a second level, small groups of men congregated in their homes or in small cafes and planned some ultimate act of defiance against the rich and powerful. This was an era of secret societies, bomb outrages and assassinations. It was often difficult to distinguish the dedicated anarchist militant, inspired by humanitarian ideals, from the psychopath

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Max Nettlau, Bibliographie de Anarchie (New York; Burt Franklin Bibliography Series #219, 1968), pp. 141-147.

⁵⁷ Jackson, "Origins of Spanish Anarchism," pp. 145-147.

who used the anarchist creed to lash out against society.⁵⁸

During these years, the rural anarchists of Anadalusia were swept by waves of excitement and expectation. Intoxicated by the Bakuninist vision of an apocalyptic insurrection, the peasants of southern Spain tended to view each large strike as the opening stage of the social revolution.⁵⁹

This belief in an imminent revolution which would usher in a new and better world has prompted one historian to declare that the "chief characteristic of Andalusian anarchism was its naive millenarianism."⁶⁰ Recent research, however, has shown that the Andalusian anarchists were motivated by reason as well as emotions. The education of the anarchists was this-worldly rather than mystic or quasi-religious as would be expected of a millenarian group. The ideology of the Andalusian anarchists, furthermore, was subject to conflict and change; as years went by many anarchists dropped the collectivist model and adopted communalism. The strongest argument against the millenarian theory is the rational strategy of the anarchists. They usually conducted strikes during good harvests when labor was in demand rather than during lean years when emotional stress was highest.⁶¹

⁵⁸Joll, The Anarchists, p. 110.

⁵⁹An imprisoned anarchist leader, for example, wrote a letter to his followers, declaring, "we are on the eve of a profound and grand transformation, called to change radically and completely this old and depraved society." Fermin Salvochea, letter published in La Anarquia (Madrid) 18 October 1890, p. 3.

⁶⁰Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 157.

⁶¹Kaplan, Anarchists of Andalusia, p. 10.

There is validity in both points of view. Bakunin's sanguine prophesy of an apocalyptic revolution undoubtedly had an emotional impact on the illiterate peasants of Andalusia. The recent evidence, however, and the simple fact that the movement endured for over seventy years suggest that the leaders, at least, took practical steps to ensure the survival of the movement. The most important aspect of the Andalusian movement, however it is interpreted, is that it kept the anarchist creed alive in Spain during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁶²

During the 1890's, the center of anarchist activity began shifting away from Andalusia to the city of Barcelona. On May 1, 1891, the Pact of Resistance and Solidarity began a general strike for the eight-hour day. After some violent clashes between the workers and the police, the government declared martial law. On the third day of the strike a bomb exploded in front of the building which housed the manufacturers' association. From that point on bomb explosions accompanied most labor agitations in Barcelona. During the first year, the bombs were usually placed in isolated spots and set off early in the morning. The intention was apparently to frighten or increase tension rather than to kill or maim. They may have been planted by the police to give themselves an excuse to round up labor leaders. Afterwards the bombs were exploded with the deliberate intention of killing people.⁶³

⁶²Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 156.

⁶³Bookchin, Spanish Anarchists, p. 118; G. D. H. Cole, History of Socialist Thought, vol. 2, p. 757.

Events in Andalusia stimulated the escalation of violence in Barcelona. A large spontaneous uprising began in January, 1892 when about 4,000 workers marched into Jerez shouting, "We cannot wait another day--We must be the first to begin the Revolution--Long live anarchy." They were armed only with scythes and sticks and were easily dispersed by the police. During the course of this short-lived 'revolution', two shopkeepers were murdered. The Civil Guard used the slayings as a pretext for a vigorous repression of anarchists. Hundreds were arrested and sixteen men were given long terms of hard labor. Four other men received the death penalty. Just before being garroted one of the condemned men cried out for revenge.

Seven months later, in Barcelona, a young Andalusian anarchist named Paulino Pallas answered this call. Pallas threw two bombs at General Arsenio Martinez Campos, the captain-General of Catalonia. Martinez Campos survived but five others were killed. Throughout the trial Pallas remained defiant and, as he faced the firing squad, he cried, "vengeance will be terrible".

On November 7, 1892, his ominous prediction became a reality. A bomb was hurled from the balcony of the Tetro Licea in Barcelona where the well-to-do had gathered for the opening night of the opera season. Twenty-two were killed and fifty wounded. The police responded by arresting five leading anarchists who were hurried through a trial and condemned to death. The actual assassin, a friend of Pallas named Santiago Salvador, was arrested and confessed two months later but this did not prevent the five innocent anarchists from being executed.

More bombings, arrests and executions followed. In an attempt to eradicate the violence, the government created the Social Brigade, a

special anti-terrorist police force. In June, 1896, nonetheless, another bomb was thrown into a crowd. This time it was Barcelona's Corpus Christi Day procession and the victims were mainly working-class Catholics. Eleven died and forty were wounded.

The assassin was never found but the new captain-general of Catalonia, Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, used the incident to make wholesale arrests of moderate labor leaders, anti-clerics and republicans, as well as anarchists. Over four hundred men were arrested and thrown into the dungeons of Montjuich fortress in Barcelona. Within Montjuich extreme tortures were applied which caused the deaths of several suspects before they reached trial. Twenty-six men were eventually convicted and five of these were executed. The others received long sentences. Sixty-one prisoners were acquitted but the government had them rearrested and sent to the African penal Colony of Rio del Oro.

The sordid details of the Montjuich tortures made their way into the press and outraged people throughout Europe and America. After reading about them an Italian anarchist, Michel Angiolillo, followed the Prime Minister of Spain, Antonio Canovas del Castillo, to a mountain resort in the Basque country and shot him to death in August, 1897.

Finally, in 1898, this epidemic of violence subsided. The government was discredited by the disaster in Cuba and the publicity surrounding the Montjuich tortures. The Spanish public no longer supported the aggressive stance that the government took against the terrorists. The anarchist terrorists were also discredited. Their violence had accomplished nothing and the leaders of the terrorist groups were dead,

imprisoned or in hiding. As a tactic, "propaganda by the deed" had spent itself.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, pp. 162-165.

The Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement in Spain: 1900-1914

By the turn of the century, the Spanish anarchists were almost completely cut off from the working-class movement. The practice of individual terrorism had driven many workers away from the movement. The few remaining anarchists were either in jail, hiding or under police surveillance and could not operate openly. Many anarchists, moreover, were smug in the purity of their convictions and did not wish to sully their principles in a large-scale movement. These "pure" anarchists formed small secret sects where they refined increasingly unrealistic doctrines. They were an annoyance to the police but posed no serious threat to the established social order.¹

The Spanish anarchist movement would probably have withered and died in the first decade of the twentieth century if it had not fused with the more pragmatic syndicalist movement. The syndicalist movement emerged in France during the 1890's. The French word syndicat means union and large apolitical trade unions were the central feature of the movement.²

The most important figure in the French syndicalist movement was Fernand Pelloutier, who became general secretary of the National Federation of Bourse du Travail in 1895. Pelloutier sought to organize all the workers in France into one large federation of unions in which the impetus would

¹Daniel Guerin, Anarchism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 78.

²Val R. Lorwin, The French Labor Movement (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 22.

come from the bottom up. His dreams of a national federation of trade unions became a reality in 1902, one year after his death, when the Federation of Bourses merged with the Confederation Generale du Travail.³

Pelloutier considered himself an anarchist. In the tradition of Proudhon and Bakunin, he looked forward to a freely-federated society of producers. Unlike the anarchists of the 1890's, however, Pelloutier also concerned himself with the improvement of the immediate living conditions of the workers. By fighting for higher wages, shorter hours, pensions and other moderate goals, Pelloutier hoped to free the workers from the demoralizing struggle of making a living. Only after the workers had attained a secure livelihood reasoned Pelloutier, could they begin preparing themselves for the revolution.⁴

Pelloutier believed that the true source of strength for the working class could be found in the economic sphere. He rejected political activities altogether and advocated trade unions, managed and controlled by workers, as the most effective organization of the workers. Pelloutier urged the workers to refuse all support from the bourgeoisie, including leadership from middle-class intellectuals.⁵

Apolitical, worker-controlled unions, according to Pelloutier, would not only improve the quality of the workers' lives, they would also be "practical schools of anarchism." Convinced that the unions themselves would be the basic unit of the future society, Pelloutier encouraged the

³Ibid., p. 25.

⁴Ibid., p. 22.

⁵Guerin, Anarchism, p. 81.

workers to pursue a moral, technical and administrative education to pave the way for an anarchist society.⁶

Syndicalism was the fusion of the anarchist and trade union movements. Because the syndicalists retained anarchism as their long-range goal and followed the anarchist principle of direct action, syndicalism was sometimes defined as "organized anarchism."⁷ The pure anarchists, however, denounced the shift towards trade unionism. Theoretically, they distrusted power even in the hands of the unions but a more urgent concern was the moderating influence that unionization might have on the workers. The pure anarchists wanted to press relentlessly towards the revolution and they feared that the improvement of working conditions might shift the workers away from a revolutionary path.⁸

The syndicalists, on the other hand, pointed out the utter failure of individual terrorism and accused the pure anarchists of losing touch with the working class. Trade unionism, argued the syndicalists, could open up new perspectives for the anarchists and give life to their moribund movement. The syndicalists felt that anarchism had been valid in the past but it had not adapted to changing circumstances. The rapid industrialization of Europe and the expanded political rights of the workers opened up opportunities for large-scale labor activity. Huge federations of trade unions, according to the syndicalists, would maximize the strength of the working class. These federations would be

⁶Ibid., p. 78.

⁷Bertrand Russell, Roads to Freedom (London: Allen and Unwin, 1920), p. 58.

⁸Guerin, p. 81.

essential, moreover, if libertarian socialists intended to attract workers away from political labor movements.⁹

Initially the syndicalists were anxious to emphasize their fidelity to anarchist ideology. Their confidence in the importance of trade unions, however, increased as the syndicalist movement expanded and before long an independent ideology centered on unions developed. According to this ideology, unions would be essential in preparing for and carrying out the social revolution. Massive federations of unions would give the workers enough strength to overthrow the existing order. These federations, moreover, would coordinate economic activities in the wake of the revolution, thus ensuring a smooth transformation from a capitalist state to an anarchist society. The future society envisioned by the syndicalists would be composed of federations of independent unions. By the turn of the century, some syndicalists had abandoned anarchist ideology altogether and began proclaiming, "syndicalism is sufficient into itself."¹⁰

The syndicalists had great faith in the strike both as a tactical and as a strategic weapon. They viewed the general strike as the ultimate form of direct action and used various forms of it to pursue limited objectives. On May Day 1906, for example, a one-day general strike was called throughout France in support of the eight-hour day. Other variations of the general strike included work-stoppages of all the workers

⁹Ibid. There were basically two groups of labor parties in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century: the moderate social democratic parties and the Marxist parties.

¹⁰Gurin, p. 80.

of a single trade or industry, or all the workers of given locality.¹¹

The syndicalists also saw the general strike as a revolutionary weapon which would someday topple the capitalist state. They took a different view of the revolutionary general strike than Bakunin had taken, however. Bakunin had assumed that the general strike would act as a catalyst, unleashing the pent-up fury of the proletariat. A bloody insurrection would then destroy the capitalist state. The syndicalists, on the other hand, contended that the general strike itself would be the decisive blow to capitalism. They distinguished the general strike from bloody revolutions which they felt, had always worked to the advantage of the authorities.¹²

From the syndicalist standpoint, a revolutionary general strike would occur on the day that all the workers of an entire country went on strike. Many syndicalists were positive that the employers and the government would be devastated by the economic consequences of a total work stoppage. If troops were mobilized they would be powerless against the millions of workers on strike. To prove this point, some syndicalists calculated the number of meters of railroad track that each soldier would have to patrol if the entire army were called upon to protect just the railway system. The syndicalists conceded that the revolutionary general strike would probably involve violence but they expected the strike to be short and decisive.¹³

¹¹Lorwin, p. 32.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

The image of an immense general strike which would usher in a new and better world caused considerable excitement, especially in areas where anarchist influence was strong. The philosopher Georges Sorel¹⁴ viewed the general strike as one of the "social myths" which inspired men to action, like the early Christian prediction of the end of the world. These myths did not need to be accurate predictors of the future nor complete in detail. The importance of the social myth, according to Sorel, could be measured solely by its affect on present events. In this sense, the "myth of the general strike" played a key role in Spanish labor history during the first quarter of the twentieth century.¹⁵

The myth of the general strike reached the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the century and had an immediate impact on the Spanish anarchist movement. A discernible shift away from the individualism which had characterized the movement since the 1880's took place in 1900 when labor leaders formed the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region. The constituent congress of the new Federation represented 200 labor and anarchist groups with a combined membership of 52,000 workers. The congress openly acknowledged its debt to the ideas of Fernand Pelloutier and adopted a syndicalist program.¹⁶ The delegates expressed their

¹⁴Sorel has often been called the philosopher of syndicalism. He was actually a philosopher after the fact. His best-known book, Reflexions Sur la Violence was published in 1908, long after the syndicalist movement was established in both France and Spain. It was not translated into Spanish until 1915.

¹⁵Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence, trans. T. E. Hume, (New York: B. W. Huesch, 1914), pp. 133-135.

¹⁶Syndicalist ideology never completely supplanted anarchist doctrine on the Iberian Peninsula. The program of the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region, therefore, marked the beginning of a somewhat incongruous anarcho-syndicalist movement.

opposition to political activity of any kind and ratified the policy of direct action against employers and, if necessary, against the government. Stating the eight-hour day and higher wages as its immediate goals, the congress declared that the general strike would be an essential weapon in their economic struggle.¹⁷

In 1902, the Federation first tested the efficacy of the general strike in Barcelona. Ninety percent of Spain's textile industry was situated in and around Barcelona.¹⁸ This city was thrown into a severe recession in 1898 when the protected markets of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Cuba were lost in the war with the United States. The hardships incurred by this recession were exacerbated by the influx of thousands of impoverished peasants from rural areas south and east of Barcelona. From 1880 to 1900 the population increased from 346,000 to 533,000. In 1902, 31 percent of the labor force had been born outside of Catalonia.¹⁹

These immigrants provided an unlimited source of cheap labor at a time when manufacturers had to cut costs in order to compete with more mechanized competition abroad. In 1901 textile employers began rolling back wages and increasing the length of the workday. The textile workers responded by calling a strike which was completely crushed by the manufacturers. Their success encouraged employers in other industries to

¹⁷Joan Connelly Ullman, The Tragic Week, A Study of Anticlericism in Spain, 1875-1912 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 20.

¹⁸Antonio Ramos Oliveira, Politics, Economics and Men of Modern Spain, 1808-1946 (London, Macmillan Press, 1946), p. 243.

¹⁹Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp. 19, 66, 67.

implement similar wage-reduction plans.²⁰

In the face of this challenge, all the metallurgical workers in Barcelona went on strike in December, 1901, demanding that the workday be reduced from eight to ten hours. The employers categorically refused to negotiate with union leaders and the metallurgical workers stayed out on strike for almost three months without the benefit of strike funds. By mid-February 1902, it had become apparent to other unions that the basic issue of the metallurgical strike was the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively. Realizing that a defeat of the metallurgical workers would jeopardize the entire Catalanian labor movement, the Barcelona section of the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region called a city-wide general strike in support of the metallurgical workers.²¹

On Monday, February 17, the strike began and Barcelona came to a standstill. One witness reported that not a single streetcar, bus, cab or vehicle of any kind was visible on the streets. With the shops and cafes and the banks all closed, the normal life of the city was utterly paralyzed. Before long, disturbances broke out in some areas and troops were mobilized. In the streetfighting shots were exchanged between strikers and soldiers, resulting in several deaths. As the week wore on food became scarce. The totality of the strike made it difficult to transport goods into town and ships left port unloaded. The resolve of the strikers weakened as food supplies dwindled and by Sunday the General Strike of 1902 was over.²² Workmen returned to their jobs on Monday

²⁰Ibid., p. 68.

²¹Ibid., p. 70.

²²Times (London) 19 February 1902, p. 5; 20 February p. 5.

without having gained a single concession from the employers. The display of solidarity, nevertheless, impressed workers throughout the peninsula and substantially reinforced the myth of the general strike.²³

After the strike, employers redoubled their efforts to destroy organized labor in Barcelona. Wage reductions continued and, when workers responded by striking, employers brought in strikebreakers. The manufacturers were supported by the government which closed down the most important labor centers and arrested labor leaders. Of the 74 strikes that took place in Barcelona during 1903, labor won only six. These strikes led to 264 imprisonments and left 2000 workers unemployed. As a result seven thousand workers left the militant unions. Many unions closed or suspended activities and in 1904 there were only 24 strikes in Barcelona.²⁴

In Andalusia news of the General Strike generated a tremendous amount of excitement and raised the hopes of thousands of landless peasants. A wave of strikes spread across the large estates of Andalusia in 1903. The landlords responded vigorously, arresting labor leaders and closing down workers' centers but these measures only hardened the resolve of the peasants. As fields ripened soldiers were mobilized to harvest crops and the Civil Guard was used to protect strikebreakers brought in from other regions. The strikes continued through 1904 constituting the longest and most widespread labor agitation ever

²³Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp. 71, 72.

²⁴Miguel Sastre y Sanna, Las Huelgas en Barcelona durante los años 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906 (Barcelona; Imprenta Barcelonesa, 1907), p. 6.

witnessed in Andalusia.²⁵

A severe drought the next year, however, put an end to the strike movement. By August 1905, thousands of starving campesinos were roaming the countryside of Andalusia in search of food.²⁶ For a decade after this devastating drought the labor movement in Andalusia was small and impotent. The fervor created by the myth of the general strike produced a corresponding despair after the strike movement of 1903-1904 collapsed. It was not until 1918, when a new social myth, that of the Bolshevik Revolution, swept through Spain, that widespread labor unrest returned to Andalusia.²⁷

In Barcelona, workers left the anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in large numbers and now entered an uncharacteristic political phase which would last until 1910. In the decade after the Spanish American War, known throughout Spain simply as "The Disaster", two major political parties arose in Barcelona. The first was the Lliga Regionalista or Regionalist League formed in 1901. The basic program of the Lliga called for more political and fiscal autonomy for Catalonia. By blaming the Madrid government for the Cuban disaster, this party was able to garner a formidable middle-class following. Within a few years it was the most powerful political party in Catalonia. The Lliga never incorporated a large working-class following, however, because the interests

²⁵Edward Malefakis, Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 141.

²⁶Times (London) 14 August 1905, p. 4; 16 August 1905, p. 6.

²⁷Malefakis, Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain, pp. 140-146.

of labor ran counter to those of the Catalan middle classes. Those workers born outside of Catalonia, moreover, took little interest in the regionalist issue, the primary concern of the Lliga.²⁸

The second major political party was the Radical Republican Party organized in 1902 by an ambitious and charismatic journalist named Alejandro Lerroux. Lerroux was extremely anticlerical and vehemently opposed to Catalan regionalism. He supported the monarchy and the Army but he also promised the workers a vaguely defined "social revolution" and urged them to leave the ineffective unions. Lerroux was a brilliant orator and it was through oral communication that he reached the illiterate masses of workers.²⁹ He organized huge public rallies where his fiery speeches captured the support of Barcelonese workmen, who made up two-thirds of his party. The remaining third consisted of a minority of middle-class Catalans whose anticlericism outweighed their feeling of regional loyalty.

The Radicals also set up dozens of republican centers where workers were provided with secular education and organized for electoral politics. Between 1903 and 1908 Lerroux and other Radicals were elected to the Cortes several times. By 1907 Radicals controlled the key sectors of the industrial labor force in Catalonia.³⁰ In February 1908, Lerroux was forced to leave the country when the conservative government revived an

²⁸Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp. 78-83.

²⁹The adult illiteracy rate for all the inhabitants of Spain was forty-three percent. It was undoubtedly higher for the working class alone. See: Ullman, The Tragic Week, p. 2.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 86-88.

old charge against him for a seditious newspaper article. He would not return until October 1909 but the Radical party machinery continued to function in his absence. In December 1908, Lerroxx, in absentia, and two other Radicals won seats in the Cortes.

Lerroxx's remarkable political ascent illustrates an extraordinary feature of Spanish politics during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is now known that Segismundo Moret, a liberal politician, secretly funded the Radical republican centers. The funds either came from the Interior Ministry or the Liberal Party, in the hope that Lerroxx would attract workers away from the regionalist movement and thus weaken it. This was one of many incidents during those years in which the central government actively or passively supported divisive movements in Catalonia. Madrid could more easily rule a divided Catalonia.³¹

Catalan regionalists frequently accused the Madrid government of actually instigating social unrest in Barcelona in order to divide Catalonia along class lines. A series of mysterious bombings between 1902 and 1908 caused many Catalans to suspect the Madrid government of complicity. The bombings reached a high point between 1906 and 1908 when over forty bombs exploded, resulting in five deaths and twenty-one injuries. Unlike the terrorist bombings of the 1890's, which were directed mainly against the wealthy or authority figures, these explosions were set off in the streets of the poorest neighborhoods. The bombs were detonated very early in the morning as though efforts were being made to protect human lives.

³¹Ibid., p. 92.

³²Ullman, The Tragic Week, p. 104-106.

Although a suspect, Juan Rull, was arrested in 1907 and executed the next year, the source of the mysterious bomb explosions was never discovered. Rull had been a paid police informant and some observers believed that he was actually an agent provocateur working for the government. During Rull's lengthy trial, government prosecutors tried, unsuccessfully, to prove that he was collaborating with the Radical Party. The Radicals vehemently denied this accusation and charged that Rull had been subsidized by pro-Catholic Catalans. Many people assumed that the bombings were organized and funded by anarchist groups. Labor leaders, however, argued that the bombings had been paid for by industrialists trying to discredit the labor movement. Rull himself never admitted receiving money from any group besides the police. On the day that he was executed a bomb went off on a major thoroughfare. Police found a note saying Rull was innocent and the bombing would continue.³³

In the unnerving atmosphere created by periodic bomb explosions, a handful of syndicalist leaders took the first tentative steps towards reorganizing the Catalonian labor movement. Even though most of the workers in Catalonia had gravitated towards the demagogic politics of Lerroux, a new labor federation was formed in 1907. Thirty-five of the seventy-five labor unions in Barcelona joined the new federation, called Worker Solidarity. Describing their program as "the purest syndicalism," the founders of Worker Solidarity urged workers to eschew political

³³Ullman, The Tragic Week, p. 104-106.

activity and to use sindicatos³⁴ as training schools for the class struggle.³⁵

Although very few workers returned to the Unions, the leaders of Worker Solidarity decided to expand the federation less than a year after it was founded. Reasoning that a successful labor organization would have to encompass the entire textile industry, labor leaders from all of Catalonia met in 1908 and formed a new, expanded Worker Solidarity.³⁶

This expanded federation, which now represented about 20,000 workers, retained the syndicalist program of its predecessor. Delegates at the constituent congress emphasized the class struggle yet also stressed the need for better housing and minimum wage laws. Again, they affirmed their commitment to direct action as opposed to political action. At the end of the congress, the delegates agreed to discuss the formation of a national labor confederation at the next congress, scheduled for September, 1909.³⁷

Just before the scheduled congress, Barcelona was rocked by a large-scale urban riot. Since the Disaster of 1898, there had been widespread anti-war sentiment in Spain. These feelings reached a high point in July, 1909, when a column of Spanish troops was surprized and almost completely massacred in Morocco. The Army responded to this catastrophe by calling up reserves. Since most of the reservists were lower-class

³⁴During this period Spanish labor leaders adopted the term sindicato in imitation of the French. The English equivalent of sindicato is simply 'labor union'.

³⁵Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp. 109, 110.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid. pp. 111, 112.

workmen, the mobilization order caused intense resentment.³⁸

At this point, an independent group in Barcelona, consisting of an anarchist intellectual, a syndicalist union official and a socialist, decided to organize a general strike in protest of the war. They appointed themselves as the Central Strike Committee and immediately began to solicit support from working-class organizations. The small Socialist Party, various pure anarchist groups and the Radical Party all agreed to support the strike. Although Worker Solidarity did not officially sponsor the strike, many individual unions within the federation pledged support with the understanding that it would only last one day.³⁹

The general strike began on Monday, July 26 as a widely-accepted protest against the war. The striking workers were actually supported by some factory owners and shop keepers who closed their establishments to express their disgust with the war. Before the day was over, however, it became apparent that two groups, the anarchists and the Radicals, wanted to turn the strike into something more than a protest. There was only a handful of anarchists in Barcelona, however, and in the last five years they had lost their grip on the working class. On Monday, a few of the best-known anarchists tried but failed to incite crowds to attack the police. This would be the extent of anarchist activity during the riot.⁴⁰

³⁸Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 34.

³⁹Ullman, The Tragic Week, p. 168.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 170, 171.

The Radical Party, on the other hand, had by far the largest working-class following in Barcelona. For eight years Lerroux⁴¹ had attracted workers to his party by promising a social revolution and by focusing their discontent on the Catholic clergy. On Monday morning groups of Radical workers began attacking streetcars and, within a few hours, several were overturned and set on fire. Martial law was declared shortly after noon but very few troops were available because of heavy fighting in Morocco. By mid-afternoon the strike had turned into an uprising in some parts of the city. A number of assaults were launched against police stations and several people were killed. Around midnight a group of Radical extremists burned down a Catholic school.⁴²

From that point on church property became the prime target of the rioters. What was originally a protest against the war turned into a five-day anticlerical rampage known as the Tragic Week. By the end of the week twelve churches and forty convents or religious establishments had been destroyed by fire. In the streetfighting 119 people were killed including three clergymen, eight police or army personnel and four members of the Red Cross. In the aftermath of the Tragic Week, martial law lasted for months. Over 1700 people were indicted on charges of armed rebellion and 458 of these were convicted. Seventy-one people received life sentences and five were executed.⁴³

⁴¹Lerroux had the good fortune of being in Buenos Aires for most of 1909 and could not be held accountable for the events of July when he returned to Spain in October, 1909.

⁴²Ullman, The Tragic Week, pp. 180-182, 192.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 286-288, 323.

Although Worker Solidarity had not sanctioned the general strike nor taken an active part in the ensuing riots, the government closed down the federation headquarters and suspended its newspaper.

In the months following the Tragic Week membership in Worker Solidarity plummeted to 4,418 workers in all of Catalonia. The repression caused not only a reduction in membership but also a change in the make-up of Worker Solidarity. Many moderate labor leaders left the federation to protect their unions from harassment. The socialists, who had exercised a moderating influence on Worker Solidarity, also withdrew. As these groups left, anarchists and the most militant syndicalists gained control over the federation. Within Worker Solidarity, the attitude of the rank and file hardened as the severe repression continued.⁴⁴

The new aggressive outlook of Worker Solidarity was evident in October 1910, when libertarian groups and labor leaders from all of Spain met to draw up plans for a national labor confederation. Less than a year later, Worker Solidarity was expanded from a regional to a national organization. In September 1911, the founding congress of the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (National Labor Confederation) was held in Barcelona. Within the CNT, as the new organization was called, the leaders of Worker Solidarity formed the Catalanian Regional Labor Confederation or CRT. From the outset, the CRT was the largest and best-organized entity in the CNT, exercising a predominant influence over the entire national confederation.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ullman, The Tragic Week, p. 317.

⁴⁵Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 197.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the Tragic Week and the repression which followed was that the CNT arose as a hardened and truculent organization⁴⁶ rather than a collective bargaining agency. Although Lerroux and the Radicals emerged from the Tragic Week as defiant heroes, their triumph was short-lived. Within a few years the workers of Catalonia became disillusioned with politics in general, and the Radical party in particular. As their faith in political action declined they began to enter the apolitical unions of the CNT, the ultimate beneficiary of the Tragic Week.⁴⁷

From its inception the CNT represented two converging ideological currents. The organization and official doctrine of the CNT were syndicalist but a strong and influential faction of dedicated anarchists ensured that the confederation would maintain a combative, at times revolutionary, posture. Hence, the CNT was always an anarcho-syndicalist organization, held together by broad areas of agreement but never totally homogeneous in outlook.⁴⁸

Theoretically, the CNT was a perfect model of syndicalist organization. The basic unit of the confederation was the sindicato. The founders of the CNT planned to organize local and district federations of sindicatos into huge, independent regional confederations. A national committee,

⁴⁶An example of the aggressive attitude of the CNT can be found in the manifesto announcing its formation: "In order to conquer the bourgeoisie," it declared, "it is an indispensable condition that the entire proletariat class is solidly united against its enemies and exploiters." See: "Manifiesto a las Entidades Obreras" Solidaridad Obrera 13 January 1911.

⁴⁷Ullman, The Tragic Week p. 317; Gerald H. Meaker, The Revolutionary Left in Spain: 1914-1923 (Sanford: Sanford University Press, 1974), p.8.

⁴⁸Meaker, Revolutionary Left, p. 8.

elected at the annual congress of the CNT, would help coordinate the activities of the regional confederations, without exercising any real authority.⁴⁹

At first, there was only one regional confederation, the CRT, and most of the delegates at the annual congresses of the CNT represented either local federations of unions or individual sindicatos. After a few years the Galician Regional Confederation joined the CRT and, in 1918, the Andalusian Regional Confederation was formed.⁵⁰

The CNT deliberately avoided any appearance of bureaucracy or centralization. There was only one paid employee, the general secretary, and no strike funds were kept. Dues were kept very low, ten centimes per month, and used to aid imprisoned members and their families, to establish libertarian schools and to publish anarcho-syndicalist newspapers.⁵¹

Within the CNT, the influence of a vocal and active anarchist elite was immediately evident. Just five days after the founding congress of the CNT dissolved, the confederation rashly declared a general strike in support of strikers in Bilbao and against the war in Morocco. The strike was cut short in Barcelona when the police, acting on an informant's tip, arrested several hundred members of the CRT. In Saragossa, Gijon, Valencia, Seville, Oviedo, La Caruna, Malaga and Santander, however, general strikes took place. In Cullera, near Valencia, the general strike precipitated a full-fledged insurrection in which the mayor and a

⁴⁹Bookchin, Spanish Anarchists, p. 161.

⁵⁰Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 197.

⁵¹Bookchin, Spanish Anarchists, pp. 160-162.

judge were murdered.

The CNT paid dearly for this premature action. Prime Minister José Canalejas immediately called up troops and placed all of Spain under martial law. The CNT was vigorously suppressed. Union headquarters were closed, the anarcho-syndicalist press was banned and strike leaders were imprisoned. As a result, the CNT was forced underground and membership dropped off rapidly.⁵²

Canalejas, in turn, paid for his rigorous suppression of not only the CNT but the entire Spanish labor movement. In 1912 he was shot to death by Miguel Pardiñas, an anarchist. An attempt on the life of King Alfonso XIII the following spring by another anarchist, José Sancho Alegre, confirmed that individual terrorism was still a tactic of the anarchist wing of the anarcho-syndicalist movement.⁵³

Canalejas' successor, Prime Minister Romanones, took a conciliatory stance towards organized labor. In 1913 he granted an amnesty for prisoners connected with the general strike and, in 1914, the government permitted the CNT to operate legally. By this time, its ranks had been depleted to a meager 15,000 members. Few people would have predicted that within five years membership in the CNT would soar close to a million workers, constituting a revolutionary threat to the Spanish regime, because the major factor in the meteoric rise of the CNT was the First World War.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid., pp. 162-165.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Meaker, Revolutionary Left, p. 9.

The Anarcho-Syndicalist Movement During World War I

World War I had a profound impact on the life of Spain. Although a large proportion of the lower classes were indifferent about the outcome of the war, middle and upper-class Spaniards were sharply divided in sympathy for the belligerents. The army, the clergy, the aristocracy and the Carlists supported the German cause. King Alfonso did not openly support either side until 1917 but his mother, the Austrian born Maria Christina, was wholly committed to the cause of the Central Powers.¹

The conservative forces supported the Central Powers for several reasons. First of all, they viewed the Allied as defenders of liberal and anticlerical institutions and they feared that an Allied victory would strengthen liberal tendencies on the Peninsula. Patriotism was another factor. There was widespread resentment against the English for its continued occupation of Gibraltar. Patriotic Spaniards also harbored grudges against the French for the Napoleonic invasion of 1808 and the United States for the defeat of 1898. On the other hand, there was a feeling of kinship with the Austrians because of historic and dynastic ties. The Spanish Army was openly Germanophile both because of the impressive victory of the Germans over the French in 1870 and because of the militarism of German society. Soon after the war began Spain was cut off from the Central Powers by the British fleet.

¹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 20.

Under these circumstances, a policy of neutrality was the most that pro-German elements could hope for.²

The pro-Allied sector included most of the intelligentsia, the Republicans, the Radicals, the Reformists, the Socialists and the Basque and Catalan bourgeoisie. These groups viewed the Allies as defenders of liberal and democratic values. The notable exception on the Spanish Left was the CNT which maintained a scrupulous neutrality throughout the war. As the war progressed the pro-Allied factions increasingly viewed absolute neutrality as a pro-German position. Beginning in 1917, these groups demanded that the Spanish government abandon neutrality³ and sever diplomatic ties with the Central Powers.

Although Spain never intervened in the war, the war intervened in Spain. The war at sea severed commercial lines and caused an acute shortage of shipping on the Peninsula, resulting in a series of grave social and economic problems.

Perhaps the most serious of these problems was the sudden interruption of emigration from Spain to the New World. For decades this stream of emigration had acted as an outlet for an expanding population. In 1912, nearly 195,000 Spaniards emigrated, but in 1918 only 20,000 were able to leave Spain.⁴ Thousands of peasants who otherwise would have gone to the New World to escape the poverty of rural Spain went instead to the large cities. Between 1914 and 1919, the population of

²T. H. Pardo de Tavera, "Spain and the Great War," Century, January 1918, p. 217.

³Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, pp. 22, 29.

⁴Jaime Vicens-Vives, Historia Economica de España (Barcelona: Editorial Vicens-Vives, 1959), p. 565.

Madrid increased by 76,268 inhabitants while that of Barcelona expanded by 61, 979. At least half of this urban growth was due to rural migration.⁵

The uncertainties of maritime transportation also made it difficult to transport goods into and out of Spain. In the Levante (Murcia, Alicante, Valencia and Castellon) thousands of peasants were thrown out of work because fruit could not be shipped to overseas markets. Many of these peasants entered the stream of rural-urban migration.⁶

Within such large cities as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Bilbao, the immigrants became an economic and social substratum. They were displaced, unskilled and uneducated. In Barcelona, the disorientation of the newcomers was intensified by their inability to speak Catalan. Impoverished and desperate for work, these immigrants competed with each other for low-paying jobs and were often exploited by employers. Among the throngs of immigrants who made their way from the Levant to Barcelona, were thousands of peasants who had been exposed to anarchist ideas in the countryside. In general, these peasants were more volatile than the urban Catalans and more susceptible to extremist appeals.⁷

Although lack of shipping caused an overall contraction of the Spanish economy, demand for Spanish goods was high. Industrialists and merchants were flooded with orders from the Allies for everything from foodstuffs, shoes, uniforms and blankets to howitzers and aircraft

⁵Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 31.

⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁷Robert Kern, Red Years/Black Years: A Political History of Spanish Anarchism (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), p. 264; Vicens-Vives, Historia Economica, p. 725.

engines. The flow of goods to the Allies along with the difficulties in maritime transportation caused shortages of consumer items of every description on the Peninsula. These shortages and the high prices that the Allied war machine was willing to pay caused prices to soar. The cost of feeding a family of five increased from 19.15 pesetas per week in 1914 to 39.20 pesetas in 1919. Salaries also increased but they did not keep up with the cost of living and, as a result, real income dropped over 20 per cent.⁸ The high cost of food and widespread unemployment caused sporadic bread riots in various cities throughout the war.⁹

The insatiable demands of the Allies caused a few industries to expand rapidly. The mining industry of Asturia and the steel and ship-building industries of the Basque provinces grew substantially during the war. In Catalonia orders for textile and metalurgical products were at an all-time high level. Yet, in spite of the expansion, these industries could not absorb all the new workers pouring in from the countryside. The industrial expansion, furthermore, was uneven because production was frequently interrupted by shortages of raw materials which had to be imported from overseas. Such interruptions caused periods of extensive unemployment even in the booming war-time industries.¹⁰

⁸Manuel Tuñón de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero en La Historia Española (Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, 1972), pp. 564, 565.

⁹Charles H. Cunningham, "Spain and the War," American Political Science Review, August 1917, pp. 421-426.

¹⁰Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 35.

The war meant economic distress for millions of Spaniards but it brought extraordinary profits to certain industrialists, notably those in Catalonia and the Basque Provinces. Huge sums were also made by middlemen who arranged the sale of anything needed by the Allies, without regard for the needs and welfare of the Spanish people. The workers, who did not share in the prosperity, naturally resented the considerable profits of the manufacturers and as a result, there were sporadic strikes for increased wages in 1915. In 1916 strike activity picked up considerably.¹¹

As the war continued economic conditions in Spain deteriorated. In 1916 the growing discontent of the workers brought the two largest labor movements in Spain together. Leaders of the Socialist Unión General del Trabajo (UGT)¹² met with three representatives of the CNT, Salvador Seguí, Angel Pestaña and Angel Lacort, in May 1916. Their talks culminated in a formal alliance signed in Saragossa during July. The Pact of Saragossa, which represented the first time that Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists had ever agreed to cooperate, caused a sensation among the workers of Spain. After signing the accord, joint meetings of the CNT and the UGT were held in most of the large cities in Spain to protest the apparent indifference of the government to the economic crisis.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹² The Unión General del Trabajo or General Labor Union was founded in 1888 by the leaders of the Socialist Party. It was more disciplined, more centralized and larger than the CNT. In 1916 the UGT had about 110,000 members whereas the CNT still had only 15,000. The strongholds for the UGT were Castile, the Basque Provinces and Asturias.

¹³ Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, pp. 40, 41.

On November 26, delegates of the UGT and the CNT met again in Saragossa and agreed to launch a one-day general strike to protest the inertia of the government. On December 18, 1916, as a consequence, the first successful nationwide general strike in the history of Spain was carried out, with the total number of strikers exceeding the combined membership of the UGT and CNT. The purpose of the strike was to warn the government that unless definite and immediate steps were taken to ameliorate the economic impact of the war, more serious actions would follow.¹⁴

After the strike, however, the government did not take any decisive steps to remedy the situation. During 1917 resentment mounted as the economic ordeal continued. On February 1, the German high command declared its intention to employ unrestricted warfare in an area extending from Norway to the Spanish coast and throughout the Mediterranean. This development could only worsen the economic situation on the Peninsula but the government still did not initiate positive measures, such as price control and rationing, to curb the economic impact of the war. When Romanones closed the Cortes on February 27 without having addressed the economic crisis, labor leaders across Spain were infuriated.¹⁵

On March 5, representatives of the UGT and CNT met in Madrid to discuss further joint action against the government. The CNT was again represented by Seguí, Lacort and Pestaña. The delegates quickly drew up a manifesto calling for another general strike within three month's time.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 41, 42.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 49.

Since this strike would be of unlimited duration, the implied objective was the overthrow of the government.¹⁶

The Socialists and the Cenetistas,¹⁷ however, had markedly different conceptions of the proposed strike. Within the CNT, preparations were made for a large-scale insurrection. Evidently, many Cenetistas envisioned the impending strike as a revolutionary insurrection that would sweep away the old regime in a few days. The Socialists, on the other hand, were not nearly so confident. They believed that the success of the strike would be predicated on careful planning. In an effort to organize a broad coalition of support, the Socialists contacted several left-bourgeois parties and also tried to win the support of at least part of the Army. The Socialists did not entertain thoughts that the strike would precipitate a socialist revolution. Believing in inevitable historical stages, they sought the limited, and more realistic, goal of a bourgeois republic with a liberal, democratic constitution.¹⁸

In the spring of 1917 the pressures of the war pushed Spain relentlessly toward revolution. The privations of the population continued as Germany stepped up its U-boat campaign. At the same time, the war increasingly appeared as an ideological struggle in which the forces of democracy were ranged against the militaristic and authoritarian Central Powers. The plausibility of this viewpoint was strengthened in March when the autocratic regime in Russia was replaced by a liberal

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷ Members of the CNT were often called 'Cenetistas'.

¹⁸ Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 51.

government. When the United States entered the war on April 2, the perception of the war as an ideological struggle was complete.

By this time many pro-Allied forces were demanding that Spain abandon its policy of strict neutrality. Resentment against Germany reached the boiling point on April 9, after U-boats sank a Spanish ship, the San Fulgencio. When a majority in the Cortes refused to support a stern warning to the Germans which had been drafted by Prime Minister Romanones, middle-class leftists throughout Spain were outraged. At this point, the King betrayed his pro-German leanings for the first time by expressing opposition to the strong wording of the note. On April 16, Romanones resigned in protest.¹⁹

The diehard neutrality advocated by the oligarchy in the Cortes and by the King compelled many bourgeois leftist to adopt an openly anti-monarchical position. Reformists, Radicals, Republican and Socialists were now united in antipathy for the King. On May 27 about 25,000 pro-Allied leftists assembled in the Plaza de Toros in Madrid to demand a severance of diplomatic ties with Germany. Several of the speakers issued ultimatums to the King, stating that he should either place Spain at least diplomatically on the side of the Allies or risk losing his crown.²⁰

At this critical juncture the King was confronted with another, more serious challenge to his authority. The source of this threat was the junior officers of the Army. Like most social groups in Spain, their standard of living had declined rapidly under the weight of

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 54.

war-induced inflation. At the end of 1916, therefore, a group of infantry officers in Barcelona set up a Junta de Defensa to discuss their grievances. The major complaints of the officers were centered on their declining real wages, the unfair system of promotion and the frequent intervention of the King in military affairs. Within a few months Juntas were formed in other districts. By May 1917, three Juntas Superiores, representing infantry, cavalry and artillery officers throughout Spain, had been organized in Barcelona.²¹

It was now evident that the military Juntas could undermine the ability of the government to control the Army. On May 28, therefore, the Minister of War, General Francisco Aguilera, ordered the Juntas Superiores in Barcelona to disband. When this order was not obeyed, Aguilera had all twelve members of the infantry Junta Superior arrested. Other officers immediately reconstituted a provisional Junta Superior, however, and on June 1, they announced that if the imprisoned officers were not released the next day, the Juntas would seize power in Barcelona.²²

This was an extremely tense moment for the government. Spain was on the verge of a military insurrection which would probably be supported by the pro-Allied leftists and perhaps by the workers. Garrisons all over Spain, meanwhile, were staging demonstrations of support for the Juntas in Barcelona. The Garcia Prieto government realized that it did not have the necessary forces to challenge the Juntas. Within a

²¹ Stanley Payne, Politics and the Military in Modern Spain (Stanford: University Press, 1967), pp. 125-130.

²² Ibid., pp. 128-130.

few hours of the ultimatum, therefore, the authorities released the prisoners. On June 8, the government agreed to give the Juntas legal recognition within the Army structure. The next day, when the Garcia Prieto government refused to grant further concessions, the Kings intervened on behalf of the Juntas. The entire cabinet resigned in protest on June 10. The new government, led by Eduardo Dato, came to power prepared to grant substantial concessions to the Juntas in order to save the monarchy. From that point on, however, the colonels of the Junta Superior exercised a predominating influence over Spanish affairs. Although they did not govern directly, the Juntas decided who would or would not do so.²³

The success of the Juntas was the cue for a fresh cycle of revolutionary activity. Francisco Cambo, the leader of the Lliga Regionalista, believed that the moment to wrest power from the oligarchy was at hand. For several reasons Cambo believed that immediate, decisive action was imperative. The government appeared to be weakened by its loss of military authority. Cambo meant to capitalize both on this setback and the widespread anti-government sentiment generated by the war. He hoped to reform and revitalize Spain by ousting the oligarchy and setting up a federative democracy. To accomplish this goal, Cambo intended to use the Lliga as the nucleus of a broad political coalition that would attract as much popular support as possible without threatening the interests of the bourgeoisie. His position was paradoxical. On the one hand, he was at the head of a revolutionary movement struggling against the landed oligarchy. Yet,

²³Ibid., pp. 130-132; Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 68.

on the other hand, he appeared as a conservative in relation to the workers. Aware of the growing strength of the proletariat, Cambó felt an urgent need to reform Spain in order to avert a social revolution.²⁴

Cambó and his followers wished to change Spain through legal measures. At the beginning of July, they demanded an extraordinary session of the Cortes in order to draft a new constitution. When Prime Minister Dato refused to reconvene the Cortes, Cambó himself summoned a constituent assembly scheduled for July 19. Dato denounced the assembly as seditious, suspended constitutional guarantees and censored the press. The July 19 meeting, nevertheless, was secretly held in Barcelona, attended by 68 deputies and senators. Expecting the police at any moment, the delegates hurried through resolutions denouncing the government and calling for a new constitution. In an effort to generate working-class support, the delegates appointed the Socialist leader, Pablo Iglesias, to head a new commission formed to deal with social and economic problems. The police eventually arrived and the assembly was broken up without violence. Before the meeting was dispersed, however, the delegates scheduled another assembly for August 16.²⁵

By that date, however, the moderate and legalistic "Assembly movement" would be swept aside by the revolutionary effort of the Socialists and their allies who launched a nationwide strike on

²⁴Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 70.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 73-75.

August 13.²⁶ Although the UGT and the CNT had agreed in March to declare a general strike within three months' time, the Socialists had insisted on pushing the date of the strike back until their methodical preparations were complete. Throughout the spring and summer, however, the Cenetistas, especially the more zealous anarchists among the, demanded action. By July, the Socialists could barely restrain the anarchists from launching the strike on their own. Yet, at the beginning of August the Socialist leadership was still trying desperately to put off the strike until the broadest possible coalition of forces could be organized.²⁷

The Socialists were forced to take action in August, however, when the Railworker's Union of Valencia declared a strike scheduled to begin on the tenth. At first the Socialists attempted to convince the railworkers to postpone the strike. The railworkers were actually anxious to reach a compromise settlement but the company officials suddenly took a completely intransigent stance. As a result, on August 8, the railworkers announced their intention of carrying out the strike. At this point, the leaders of the UGT could sense that the rail strike would precipitate widespread striking. Recognizing that they could not stop the rising tide of unrest, the Socialists resolved to take command of it.

²⁶As a young journalist in 1917, Salvador de Madariaga viewed the Assembly movement as a supreme opportunity to regenerate Spanish society. Years later, in his history of Spain, he contended:

"The Assembly movement might have been the true salvation of Spain and, in part, of the monarchical system, had the crown been more convinced of the advantages of the parliamentary form of government and had the hot-heads of the labor movement been less convinced of the advantage of revolution." Salvador de Madariaga, Spain: A Modern History (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 319.

²⁷Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 80.

At an emergency meeting of the national committees of the Socialist Party and the UGT, the Socialists decided to launch the general strike on August 13, just four days away.²⁸

The Socialists set very moderate goals for the strike. They wanted to topple the regime, already shaken by the recent political crisis, and thus help the liberal-bourgeoisie set up a republic. After the coup, the Socialists expected to have a wider arena for the labor struggle but they did anticipate wholesale economic reforms. The strike manifesto, indeed, made no economic demands on the propertied classes and urged the workers to avoid violence.²⁹

The General Strike of 1917 began, as scheduled, on August 13 and very quickly developed into a fiasco. Communications were poor. Newspapers which signaled the start of the strike were simply not delivered by the Central Post Office. Then, on the fifteenth, the strike committee was arrested.

By setting forth moderate goals, the Socialists had hoped to gain a wide base of support. Soon after the strike began, however, it was obvious that very few middle-class Spaniards supported the strike. The Lliga hastily condemned the strike and support from the Republican allies of the Socialists was half-hearted. The Socialists had counted on the neutrality of the Army, but the officers of the Juntas led their units against the workers without the least hesitation.

Although the Socialists were unable to obtain a broad coalition of middle-class support, hundreds of thousands of workers participated

²⁸Ibid., p. 84.

²⁹Ibid., p. 85.

in the strike. There were work-stoppages in dozens of cities and major disturbances in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Viscaya and Asturias. Throughout Andalusia, however, there was very little strike activity. The anarchists of the region refused to take part in the strike because it had political goals.³⁰

In Barcelona, the Cenetistas simply turned the strike to their own purposes. They had no intention of conducting a peaceful strike and violence broke out almost immediately. The Captain General of Barcelona had anticipated trouble, however, and over 12,000 soldiers were stationed in the city. The troops quickly deployed artillery on strategic routes and set up six cannons in the Plaza de Cataluña, in the center of Barcelona. The strikers erected barricades and fired on patrolling soldiers from rooftops and windows. There were several violent conflicts between mobs of workers and soldiers which might have reached very serious proportions if the strikers had had a few hundred rifles. Their revolvers were no match for the mausers of the troops, however, and the insurrection was put down within a few days.³¹

The General Strike of 1917 collapsed on August 17, just four days after it started. In the turmoil seventy people were killed and hundreds wounded. Evidence indicates that the Dato government deliberately provoked the general strike by encouraging the intransigence of the rail officials. In goading the railworkers to strike, Dato set off the general strike prematurely and thus stemmed the revolutionary tide of 1917.³²

³⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

³¹ Pardo de Tavera, "Spain and the Great War," p. 362.

³² Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth, p. 64.

Dato's decisive action may well have saved the monarch but it was a short-lived triumph. When constitutional guarantees were restored in October, Dato was forced to resign by the military Juntas. Dato's resignation marked a turning point in Spanish political history. It signaled the end of the system of artificially rotating parties, which had kept the oligarch in power since 1875. Neither the Army, which had put down the August revolution, nor the Lliga, which had withheld support for it, were willing to return to oligarchic government. They now demanded honest elections, free of interference from Madrid.³³

Elections held in February 1918, as a consequence, did not involve the usual interference from the Ministry of the Interior. They returned the most genuinely representative Cortes in the history of the constitutional monarchy. What the Cortes gained in sincerity, however, it lost in efficiency. Instead of consisting of a powerful majority and a cooperative opposition, according to the time-honored pattern, it was now composed of a number of mutually hostile groups. Thus, during the entire fifteen months of its existence, the new Cortes would be racked by division and unable to deal effectively with the mounting social problems in Spain.³⁴

The discord in the Cortes both reflected and contributed to the extreme particularism that plagued Spanish society from 1917 until the coming of the Dictatorship in 1923. During this period, Jose Ortega y Gasset published a penetrating critique of Spanish society, entitled España Invertebrada. He described Spain as a fragmented and ailing country:

³³Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, pp. 95-98.

³⁴Times (London) 23 May 1919, p. 11.

Today, Spain is less a nation than a series of airtight compartments...Each group--political parties, the military, landowners, industrialists, workers--lives hermetically sealed inside itself and doesn't feel the least curiosity what happens to the rest...It would be difficult to imagine a less flexible society. That is, it would be difficult to imagine a human conglomeration which is less a society.³⁵

The dissolution of Spanish society, according to Ortega y Gasset, had been caused by the egotism of every social group in Spain.

Particularism (he wrote) is that spiritual state in which one believes he does not have reason to consult with others. Sometimes through excessive extimation of himself, other times through excessive deprecation of those around him, he loses the notion of his limitations and begins to feel totally independent...This state of mind inevitably leads to direct action.³⁶

Accordingly, from 1917 to 1923 direct action did in fact become the rule in Spain. It was in this social milieu that the CNT, which was doctrinally based on the principle of direct action, reached the pinnacle of its power.

After the General Strike of 1917, the CNT had been forced underground. When constitutional guarantees were restored in October, nevertheless, the CNT emerged at about the same level of strength that it had had in August, with about 30,000 members. Although the CNT had achieved modest gains in 1917 it was still much smaller than the UGT. In 1918, however, membership in the CNT increased dramatically, reaching over 100,000 in Catalonia alone.³⁷

³⁵ Jose Ortega y Gasset, España Invertebrada (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1946), pp. 65, 66.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 74, 75.

³⁷ Meaker, Revolutionary Left, p. 149.

The major factor in the rapid growth of the CNT was the Bolshevik Revolution which provided the social myth so long missing in Spain. News of the October Revolution made a deep impression on the peasants and urban workers of Spain. Unaware at first of the dictatorial role of the Bolshevik Party, most Cenetistas wholeheartedly embraced the October Revolution. Because information about the Revolution came in bits and pieces and was colored both by distance and by emotion, many Cenetistas believed that an anarchist revolution had been carried out.³⁸ The revolt against the Provisional Government and the widespread seizure of land appeared to be a spontaneous uprising, the type of social revolution that Bakunin had predicted.³⁹

Coming as it did into an environment charged with political and social unrest, word of the Bolshevik rising acted as a catalyst, sending a flood of workers into the CNT and a wave of disturbances across Spain. In Andalusia, the Levante and Extremadura three years of labor unrest, far more extensive than the strike movement of 1903-1905, followed the October Revolution. An "avalanche of workers,"⁴⁰ according to one observer, rushed to join the sindicatos of Catalonia, carrying the CNT to the summit of its power in 1919. As the CNT developed into a major force in Spanish society, however, the differing outlooks of the anarchists and the syndicalists became ever more apparent. A bitter struggle would evolve from these differences, reaching a crucial turning point in March, 1919.

³⁸Tierra y Libertad (Barcelona) 21 November 1917, p. 1.

³⁹Malefakis, Agrarian Reform and Revolution, pp. 146-147.

⁴⁰Angel Pestaña, Trayectoria Sindicatista (Madrid: Ediciones Tebas, 1974) p. 173.

The End of the War and the La Candaiense Strike in Barcelona

For over a year after the Bolshevik rising the ordeal of the war continued to weigh heavily on Spanish life. The sinking of Spanish and Allied ships brought the cost of living and unemployment to unprecedented levels. On top of the privations inflicted by the war, the worldwide influenza epidemic struck the Peninsula in the spring of 1918, causing thousands of fatalities.¹

At the same time, the ideological impact of the war reached new dimensions. Two ideological currents came to full expression in 1918, causing a heightened sense of anticipation in the last months of the war. On one level, the Wilsonian principles of democracy and self-determination gave new impetus to the republican and regionalist movements. On another level, the Leninist conception of an immediate social revolution generated a revolutionary ferment among the workers of southern and eastern Spain.

When the war ended in November 1918, therefore, the situation in Spain was far from tranquil. The fall of the German and Austrian monarchies made many Spaniards wonder if the Spanish crown could survive much longer. In Andalusia there was widespread striking and in Catalonia there were violent demonstrations by Catalan nationalists for regional autonomy.²

¹El Sol (Madrid) 25 October 1918, p. 4.

²Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 155.

In the first few months after the war two basic conflicts dominated the life of Spain. One was political, involving the struggle of the regionalists and republicans against the king and the oligarchy. The other was social, involving the struggle of the CNT against the landlords of the South and the factory owners of Catalonia. Although the regionalists and the republicans conducted heated campaigns against the regime in the fall of 1918, by January their movements were overwhelmed by the rising tide of labor unrest. The center of the social struggle was Barcelona where an immense strike began in February 1919.³

The war had had a tremendous impact on the life of Barcelona. The booming war-time economy enriched some Catalan manufacturers but it also attracted thousands of immigrants to Barcelona and, thus, widened the gulf between the affluent few and the unfortunate many. In the process, there was a sharpening of class differences. During the war, a new breed of anarchists appeared: these were organized gunmen, pistoleros, who formed secret "action groups" and practiced terrorism systematically. A large percentage of these pistoleros appear to have been recruited from the population of immigrants. Anarchist terrorism had a long history in Barcelona but it had usually been carried out spontaneously by individuals or small groups. Until 1915, anarchist violence was characterized by isolated incidents or "waves of terror" in which victims were randomly selected by idealistic or demented individuals.

About 1916, however, a pattern of violence became evident. Angel Pestaña, editor of the syndicalist newspaper Solidaridad Obrera, recalled:

³Ibid., p. 146.

"One gradually got the impression that the victims were not chosen after sober discussion. The slayings were not the result of a desperate individual, no, but were mediated, prepared, organized. They arose from a preconceived plan and were a studied tactic to conquer the bourgeoisie."⁴

In 1916, just two or three action groups, made up of a dedicated anarchist militants, were at work in Barcelona. These groups departed from anarchist tradition by employing the use of terror for specific material gains. They supported syndicalist strikes and carried out assassinations of employers who refused to yield to labor demands. They also carried out sabotage operations against the factories and shops of intransigent employers. And, they attacked workers who crossed picket lines; the name "hunter of squirrels" (scabs) was coined in reference to the pistoleros.⁵

The anarchist gunmen proved to be very successful at intimidating employers into granting wage concessions. Because they were able to obtain these concessions only a few voices within the CRT were raised against the pistoleros. Many workers secretly applauded the violent acts of the terrorists reasoning that "every employer dead is one less enemy." The labor leaders were divided in their reaction. A few denounced the violence but most leaders did not speak out against it. To do so, they feared, would make them seem like "defenders of the bourgeoisie."⁶

⁴Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 173.

⁵Eduardo Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo Español 1836-1948 (Madrid: Editorial R.A.D.A.R., 1948), p. 39.

⁶Pestaña, La Trayectoria, pp. 179, 180.

The systematic use of terrorism spread rapidly and was firmly established before some labor leaders recognized the potential dangers it contained. Pestaña remembered it as "a cancer, an epidemic, an evil, the gravity of which nobody suspected". Most of the abuses of the system were already apparent when news of the Bolshevik Revolution reached Spain. The dispatches from Russia, however, encouraged the extremists who viewed the Revolution as living proof of the efficacy of violence.⁷

The proliferation of anarchist terrorism occurred at the same time that the sindicatos of Barcelona were being swelled by new members. In his memoirs, Pestaña recalled that a large portion of these men were "workers of good will" but "simple" and "exploitable".⁸ The itinerant revolutionary, Victor Serge, who was in Barcelona in 1916 and 1917, depicted them as "militants who often seemed to me no more than great big children."⁹ Among the hordes of new members were thousands of displaced peasants, steeped in the apocalyptic creed of rural anarchism. There was also a criminal element, described by Pestaña as:

that special class of individual, who lives on the uncertain boundary separating the worker and the common delinquent. Such individuals work one day and on the next, if the opportunity presents itself, rob and kill. For them, when all is said and done, it's all the same."¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., pp. 173, 176.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 174, 175.

⁹ Victor Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941, 5th ed. trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 58.

¹⁰ Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 174.

Within the CRT there was as fluid environment created by several factors; the precipitous growth of the unions; the turbulence and naivete of the rank and file; the ideological ferment generated first by the war and later by the Bolshevik Revolution; and the longstanding anarchist aversion to discipline and authority. In this atmosphere, the official structure of the CRT often gave way to the force of personalities. "Detached elements" according to Pestaña, "could exist in the organization without having to answer to anyone." Pestaña, himself, first took an active part in the CRT without being a member of any union. He was a watchmaker, by trade, and a sindicato for watchmakers had not yet been formed. He later received a union card, from the longshoremen's sindicato, although he never worked on the docks.¹¹

In the middle of this somewhat chaotic situation, a minority of convinced anarchists sought to influence the direction of the burgeoning labor movement. Although the structure and organization of the CRT had been the work of syndicalist leaders, the anarchists had penetrated the unions and competed vigorously for control over the workers.¹² Gerald Meaker has characterized this struggle as "a secret , almost unacknowledged civil war...within the sindicatos and committees in which control alternated between the Anarchists groups and the moderate Syndicalist leaders."¹³

The syndicalists wanted to consolidate the gains they were making by organizing and disciplining the expanding membership. The anarchists, on the other hand, wished simply to harness the gathering strength of the CRT

¹¹ Ibid., p. 172.

¹² Bookchin, The Spanish Anarchists, p. 169.

¹³ Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 176.

and turn it against the bourgeoisie. The syndicalists intended to build the CRT into a potent labor organization, capable of bargaining effectively with the Catalan bourgeoisie; the anarchists meant to immediately turn the CRT into a revolutionary force, capable of destroying the bourgeoisie.

This underlying struggle gave the CRT a split-personality of sorts. In December 1916, for example, the CRT participated in the nationwide general strike and perfect order reigned in Barcelona. Eight months later, during the General Strike of 1917, a violent conflict took place in which there were 32 dead and 74 wounded.¹⁴ Along similar lines, the CRT continued to develop into a modern, organized and disciplined movement. Yet, at the very same time, the CRT was directly connected to the terrorist violence which mounted with recurring frequency throughout the war.¹⁵

The association of the sindicatos with anarchist terrorism would ultimately be disastrous for the CRT. As a large and organized movement, the CRT needed to be able to operate openly and could ill-afford the repression that terrorism invites. Some union bosses, however, did not immediately grasp the potential danger of the violence. Their immediate concern was to win strikes and they could not deny the efficacy of sending anarchist henchmen against intransigent employers.¹⁶

At first these union leaders were not directly connected to the anarchist action groups. The union chiefs would let it be known, however,

¹⁴Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo, p. 39.

¹⁵Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 174.

¹⁶Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 173.

who they wanted murdered and, before long, the body of that person would be found. As this practice became more common (the timidity of the employers ensured that it would continue) the identity of the pistoleros was increasingly obvious to everyone but the police. "They were in our midst," recalled Pestaña, "living in anarchist and syndicalist circles; they were visible members of the organization and of the groups, enjoying respect and consideration in the general opinion of the workers."¹⁷

Initially, the terrorists appear to have been sincere anarchist zealots, inspired, according to Pestaña, by a "mystical and apocalyptic idealism." Pestaña, a moderate syndicalist, portrayed them as young men "who obeyed a doctrinal criterion, false in its basis, without doubt, but (containing) a strong sense of justice and a conviction of sacrifice." They practiced terrorism with no thought of personal gain. "The disinterest of the groups," wrote Pestaña, "was absolute."¹⁸

It was not long, nevertheless, before terrorism lost its mystique. Beginning in 1916, some labor leaders found it necessary to pay the pistoleros for their deeds. Apparently, this arrangement reduced the risks involved for both parties; but, it also paved the way for the gross "commercialization" of terrorism.¹⁹

As terrorism spread and the number of pistoleros multiplied, the underlying idealism of the violence was substantially diluted. The first groups of visionary terrorists were soon joined by criminally inclined

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 174

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 175, 181.

drifters and vulgar opportunists who were mainly attracted by the violence and easy money. Pestaña characterized the latter as:

...neither workers nor habitual criminals. They would work one day or one season, but quit the next. Finding themselves down on their luck, they would have to live on something. These kind of men would pick up a wench one day and exploit her but on the next go to the workshop and give the impression of being good and dignified workers. Yet, in the bottom of their hearts, they had only one concern: to satisfy their sensual desires at whatever cost... They had no scruples in the matter.²⁰

Out of this group, a class of terrorist mercenaries soon developed. Murder was committed at so much per head depending on the importance or position of the victim. As professional gunmen, they worked for the highest bidder regardless of the source of the money. Factory owners and the police hired them to exact reprisals on anarchist terrorists or to eliminate troublesome labor leaders. In 1918, an organized gang of counter-terrorists was formed by the German espionage agent, "Baron" de Koenig and funded by the employers. The Employers Federation reportedly spend 50,000 pesetas per month to support the de Koenig gang.²¹

Some ringleaders worked both sides. They would recruit professional pistoleros and agree in writing to pay them a fixed sum of money to kill a designated victim. Afterwards, the recruiters would present the contract to police informers and thus double their profits. At times, it was impossible to know for whom a pistolero worked.²²

²⁰Ibid., p. 181.

²¹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 177.

²²Pestaña, La Trayectoria, pp. 177, 179.

During the war, German spies operating in Barcelona added to the violence and intrigue of the industrial conflict. The industrial capacity of Barcelona²³ and its accessibility to France made the city an important supplier of the Allied powers. The Germans naturally wanted to disrupt the production of these suppliers and, to this end, they had agents in Barcelona who spent large sums of money.

In one celebrated case, the owner of several matalurgical shops, a certain Señor Barret, was gunned down by anarchist pistoleros in 1916. Among other offenses, he had been accused of personally shooting a striking worker. Subsequent investigations, however, revealed that these accusations were false. Barret had actually been killed because his shops were working twenty-four hours a day making howitzer shells for the Allies. German spies had secretly hired the chief of police, Manuel Bravo Portillo, to work for German interests. Bravo Portillo, in turn, had managed to bribe Eduardo Ferrer, the head of the metalurgical sindicato, to arrange to have Barret shot.²⁴

Ferrer was later assassinated for being a police informant. Bravo Portillo was later found guilty of pro-German espionage. He was accused of selling information of shipping schedules which had led to

²³In 1919, there were 205,642 workers in Barcelona. The largest industries were: Textiles, 94,254 workers; Metalurgical, 20,732 workers; Commerce, 12,018 workers; Food processing, 9,905 workers; and Garment making, 9,067 workers. See: Marcelino Graell, Resumen de la situacion economica de España, Surgimiento de la clase medio. (Barcelona: Ediciones Tebas, 1923), p. 24.

²⁴Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 179.

the torpedoing of three ships in three days.²⁵ After serving a short sentence, he was released and he went to work for the de Koenig gang of counter-terrorists. He was gunned down in September 1919 in retaliation for his part in the murder of Pablo Sabater, a syndicalist leader.²⁶

At the same time that the pistoleros were developing a bloody cycle of violence and reprisal, the CRT, through the work of its syndicalist leaders, had achieved new levels of strength and organization. The failure of the August strike in 1917 had raised serious questions concerning the organization and direction of the Catalonian labor movement. In a clear reference to the anarchist, an editorial in Solidaridad Obrera criticized "the lack of direction...the supreme indecision and the tremendous chaos" within the CRT. The editorial went on to denounce the spontaneous insurrections which had over the years "squandered the entire stock of power which we could have saved for the great and fruitful struggles."²⁷

In an effort to overcome these weaknesses, the syndicalists started an organizational campaign in the spring of 1918. This drive culminated in a Congress of the CRT in the Barcelona district of Sans from June 28 to July 1. At the Sans Congress, the CRT adopted sindicatos unicos, which represented a huge step towards centralization of the organization. The sindicatos unicos were large industrial unions for

²⁵Bravo Portillo was first exposed by Solidaridad Obrera. After the liberal press took up the story, there was a public uproar which led to Bravo Portillo's imprisonment. The expose in Solidaridad Obrera was an important step in the career of Angel Pestaña. See: Times of London, 6 LX 19, p. 10.

²⁶Times (London) 1 August 1919, p. 11; 6 September 1919, p. 10.

²⁷Solidaridad Obrera (Barcelona) 9 January 1919, p. 8.

each branch of production. There was, for example, a sindicato unico for the building trades which had sections for carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, etc. "Through the sindicatos unico," the Congress declared, "the working class will be able to struggle advantageously against the employers; from now on, when one section of a sindicato unico should resort to a strike, it can count on the prompt and effective aid of all the brother sections."²⁸

The adoption of sindicatos unicos, furthermore, enabled the syndicalist leaders to effectively organize the thousands of workers who joined the CRT after the Congress of Sans. The Congress of Sans represented 73,860 workers; by December 1918, the CRT had 107,096 members. During 1919, the CRT grew at an incredible pace, reaching 345,000 by the end of the year.²⁹

By joining together what were formerly scores of craft unions into a few massive unions, the sindicatos unicos eliminated much of the chaos which had in the past plagued the CRT. The concentration of power into a few sindicatos unicos made the CRT stronger than it had ever been. In September 1919, when the CRT was at the zenith of its power, Angel Pestaña maintained that the adoption of sindicatos unicos was "the most important act that the Catalanian labor movement had ever carried out."³⁰

²⁸Comicios historicos del la CNT Memorias de Congreso celebrado en Barcelona los dias 28, 29 y 30 de Junio y 5 de Julio de 1918 (Toulouse: Ediciones CNT, 1957), p. 71.

²⁹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 149.

³⁰Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 364.

The Congress of Sans was a triumph for syndicalism. The Congress selected a new Committee of the CRT, made up of five moderate syndicalists. Angel Pestaña was retained as editor of Solidaridad Obrera. Pestaña and Salvador Seguí, a member of the CRT Committee, emerged as the two principal leaders of the CRT.³¹

Seguí was a twenty-eight year old house painter who grew up in an industrial suburb of Barcelona. At an early age, Seguí became active in union affairs: at the age of fifteen, he served as an official of his union. Seguí grew up with the Catalanian labor movement. He was a delegate at the 1908 Congress of the regional confederation, Solidaridad Obrera and he became president of the Barcelona Federation of Construction Workers. This position served as his base of power within the CRT.³²

Affectionately nicknamed "Noi de Sucre" (Sugar Boy) because of his childhood fondness for sugar, Seguí was very popular with the workers of Barcelona. In comparing Seguí to Pestaña, one worker characterized Seguí as "open and exuberant" and Pestaña as "cold and unapproachable".³³ Victor Serge, who befriended Seguí in 1917, described him as:

³¹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 151.

³²Ibid., p. 162.

³³Jose Peirats, Figuras del Movimiento.

A worker, and usually dressed like a worker coming home from the job, cloth cap squashed down on his skull, shirt-neck unbuttoned under his cheap tie; tall strapping, round-headed, his features rough, his eyes big, shrewd and sly under heavy lids, of an ordinary degree of ugliness, but intensely charming to meet and with his whole self displaying an energy that was lithe and dogged, practical, shrewd and without the slightest affectation. To the Spanish working-class movement he brought a new role: that of the superb organizer. He was no anarchist, but rather a libertarian, quick to scoff at the resolutions on 'harmonious life under the sun of liberty', 'the blossoming of the self', or 'the future of society'; he presented instead the immediate problems of wages, organization, rents, and revolutionary power.³⁴

In addition to his skill as an organizer, Seguí was a remarkable speaker; he was, indeed, considered to be one of the greatest crowd orators in Spain.³⁵

Pestaña was a thirty-two year old watchmaker who had not arrived in Barcelona until 1914. He was slender in build with dark eyes and thin mustache. He had a solemn personality which can best be explained by the harshness of his youth. Born in Leon, he was brought up by his father, an illiterate construction worker and miner. At the age of fourteen, his father died and Pestaña was left to fend for himself. Like Seguí, Pestaña was almost entirely self-educated. In addition to a sharp intellect, Pestaña apparently possessed an exceptional mechanical aptitude. He worked, at one time or another, as a bricklayer, a mechanic, a boiler-maker, a musician, a sandal-maker and a watchmaker. Through his occupation as a watchmaker, he later observed, he formed "habits of meticulous

³⁴Serge, Memoirs, p. 56.

³⁵Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 163.

observation" and learned "patience, calmness and serenity--attributes necessary in a social struggle."³⁶

Unlike Seguí, who was never an anarchist, Pestaña had been "converted" to anarchism as a very young man and had only recently moved towards a syndicalist outlook. Pestaña was in contact with anarchist groups but he was continuously losing their confidence because of his own transition into a moderate syndicalist.

Pestaña had become one of the principal leaders of the the CRT through his position as editor of Solidaridad Obrera. Not long after he was first named editor in 1916, his office became an important, although unofficial, center for union affairs. "On matters relating to the organization," he later boasted, "I was more consulted on a daily basis than the combined local, regional and national committees were in a week." The reason for this, he explained, was because all the members of the committees worked and could not meet with the workers until nine or ten at night. At that hour, most of the workers were either in bed or had gone to the cafes. Since Pestaña's office was accessible all day long, workers usually went to him with questions or to get information.³⁷

As the leading figures of the CRT, Seguí and Pestaña complemented each other well. The outgoing Seguí almost always spoke Catalan, his native tongue; the unsmiling Pestaña, an immigrant, spoke Castilian. Seguí was a more powerful speaker; Pestaña a better journalist. Both men were excellent organizers.³⁸

³⁶ Serge, Memoirs, p. 104; Pestaña, La Trayectoria, pp. 79-95, p. 152.

³⁷ Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 172.

³⁸ Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 151.

Neither Pestaña nor Seguí were infected by the excitement and supreme confidence generated by the Bolshevik Revolution. They reserved judgment of the Revolution in Russia until more information should become available; and, in any event, they were skeptical whether a large-scale revolution could succeed in Spain. Both leaders were sober pragmatists: they sought moderate, obtainable goals; in the place of revolutionary rhetoric, they preached a doctrine of "possibilism."³⁹

At the Congress of Sans both Pestaña and Seguí addressed the closing meeting. There was no mention of the Russian Revolution. Both men predicted that a confrontation between the CRT and the bourgeoisie would come shortly after the end of the war. They did not speak in terms of a great cataclysm, however. Pestaña pointed out the folly of the past when the employers had been able "to divide and conquer" the scores of disorganized unions. In the coming confrontations, however, Pestaña confidently envisioned: "the working class will be gathered into enormous nuclei, powerful falanges of producers, conscious of their rights and prepared to force others to respect those rights at all times."⁴⁰

In a speech marked by its lack of rhetoric, Seguí emphasized the vital importance of organization:

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 244, 151.

⁴⁰ Comicios historicos de la CNT, p. 89.

"The fundamental importance of this Congress is that it presents us with the opportunity to bring our organization to the maximum level of power. In order to do this, we need only put into practice the guidelines of organization which (the Congress) has planned for us. When the war ends, when questions might be decided more through the dictates of passion than through the counsel of the mind, if we do not represent an immense force, if we do not form an extremely powerful group through our cohesion and through our capacity, we will be toys of the bourgeoisie."⁴¹

The first major test of strength for the new sindicatos unicos came, as predicted, shortly after the armistice. A conflict developed in January 1919, when the Riegos y Fuerza del Ebro, a power company known commonly as La Canadiense,⁴² permanently hired several low-paid, temporary workers. Apparently, the company was attempting to cut costs in anticipation of a post-war recession. The full-time workers, however, viewed this move as the first step in a general wage roll-back. As a consequence, there were several disturbances at the power company. The management of La Canadiense reacted by lowering the wages of the men involved in these incidents. The announced purpose of this measure was to make an example of the troublemakers, but the company may well have used the disorders as a pretext to lower wages.⁴³

The workers whose wages had been cut appealed to the new Sindicato Unico of water, gas and electricity. When the company discovered this, they fired seven of the workers. The union responded by calling for a work-stoppage in La Canadiense on February 5. In the meantime, the seven

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴² Canadian investors were the principal source of capital for the company.

⁴³ Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo, pp. 197-198.

fired employees petitioned the civil governor, Gonzalez Rothwos, requesting that he intervene on their behalf. Gonzalez Rothwos, however, sent fifty policemen to La Canadiense to evict the workers inside who were conducting a sit-down strike. The union, meanwhile, had sent delegations to the mayor of Barcelona and the president of the Catalan Commonwealth.⁴⁴

All of these efforts towards a negotiated settlement failed, however, and on February 8 all the workers of La Canadiense went out on strike. The escalation of the strike and the resolve of the workers by this time had disposed Fraser Lawton, the director of La Canadiense, to take a more conciliatory stance. He offered to cut the workday from ten to eight hours if the striking workers returned to their jobs. The workers of La Canadiense rejected this offer and presented the following demands: the reinstatement of the fired workers and all those involved in the work stoppage; a wage hike; the dismissal of all "squirrels"; and a guarantee that there would be no reprisals. In order to emphasize their resolve, the employees of another plant, La Energia Electrica de Cataluña, joined the strike and most of Barcelona was left without electricity.⁴⁵

At his point, Fraser Lawton met with Gonzalez Rothwos to decide on a course of action to resolve the crisis. He went into the meeting, according to Pestaña, inclined to negotiate with the workers but when he emerged, he categorically rejected all demands. The governor apparently felt that, by picking up the gauntlet thrown down by the Sindicato Unico of Water, Gas and Electricity, he would discourage future strike activity. The intransigent position of the company,

⁴⁴Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 379.

⁴⁵Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo, p. 198.

however, was a vital challenge to the CRT: if La Canadiense was allowed to fire employees for union activities, it would undermine the entire organized labor movement.⁴⁶

While the struggle between the CRT and La Canadiense took form, the terrorists of Barcelona had been active. On February 1, a worker was attacked and seriously injured. Ten days later and presumably in retaliation, two bombs were set off on a major street resulting in two wounded. On the twelfth, a shop foreman was shot dead by three assailants; on the next day the payclerk of La Canadiense was murdered.⁴⁷ The violence was undoubtedly stimulated to some degree by widespread agitation elsewhere in Spain. In Andalusia, the disturbances were "working up to an acute point" in early February, according to a London Times correspondent. In Seville, there was a general strike of bakers, electrical and gas workers, streetcar personnel and other important trades. Soldiers were pressed into service operating the streetcars. In the north of Spain, miners were protesting against growing unemployment. Some anarchists saw these developments as the first stage of the long-awaited revolution, and, in the excitement, were stimulated to action.⁴⁸

To the leaders of the CRT, however, the violence was "unnecessary and repugnant."⁴⁹ As Seguí and Pestaña had predicted, organization was

⁴⁶Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 380.

⁴⁷Jose Farre Morego, Los Atentatos Sociales en España (Madrid: Artes Graficas, 1922), pp. 228, 229.

⁴⁸Times (London) 7 February 1919, p. 7; Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 176.

⁴⁹Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 401.

the key to the strength of the strike. On February 17, the national Minister of Provisions, Don Baldomero Argente, issued a statement to the press summarizing the extent of the strike. Calling the strike "perhaps the gravest ever set off in Catalonia" he described its impact:

An infinity of services which depend on the (La Canadiense) company have been successively paralyzed; thousands of workers have been forcibly idled. To understand the importance of the strike, it is sufficient to say that there are substations in Tarragona, Lerida and Gerona with countless employees - in the central station alone there are over a thousand employees.⁵⁰

On the next day, February 18, the textile workers entered the strike. Three days later, all the utility workers in Barcelona joined the strike. The normal functions of the city were paralyzed. The Captain General of Barcelona, Lorenzo Milans del Bosch, responded to this crisis by ordering that the state should temporarily take over control of the utilities.⁵¹

In the meantime, the Prime Minister of Spain, Count Romanos, had sent troops to operate the utilities of Barcelona. The soldiers were able to "fend off the complete disorganization of the machinery of life," but the situation deteriorated daily. When soldiers began operating the gas plant, the CRT resorted to a teamsters' strike to stop the transfer of coal from the wharf to the plant. Teamsters' strike affected the trash collectors and the garbage began piling up. Even the funeral workers entered the strike and, in one instance, soldiers with carbines were seen carrying a coffin.⁵³

⁵⁰Quoted in: Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo, pp. 196-197.

⁵¹Tuñón de Lara, El movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

⁵²Times (London) 10 March 1919, p. 9.

⁵³Pestaña, Trayectoria, P. 386.

By the first week in March, the residents had to carry water by hand to their homes. Street lighting and public transportation were frequently interrupted by shortages of electricity. In the older sections, where gas lamps were still used, soldiers carrying Mausers escorted comrades who lit the lamps.⁵⁴

The strike of the La Canadiense was so complete by March 7 that not one single workman reported for duty that day. On the ninth of March, Milans del Bosch conscripted all the utility workers of military age with the intention of ordering them, as soldiers, to operate the vital energy and water works. The printers' union, however, refused to publish the proclamation announcing the draft. The Army then requisitioned a typeset and posters were printed by soldiers.⁵⁵ The drafted men, however, refused en masse to report for duty. As a result, about 3,000 men were arrested for draft evasion and placed in Montjuich prison.

The printers meanwhile announced the imposition of a "red censorship" in which the union maintained the right to suppress all stories that were "insulting to the workers or went against the labor movement." When Milans del Bosch released an edict proclaiming a state of war in Barcelona on March 12, the printers were able to delay its publication for three days.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ABC (Madrid) 1 March 1919, p. 17.

⁵⁵Times (London) 8 March 1919, p. 9; 10 March 1919, p. 9.

⁵⁶Tunon de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

⁵⁷Pestaña, Trayectoria, p. 382.

At this point, Prime Minister Romanones intervened. The hardline of Rothwos and Milans del Bosch had only served to inflame the crisis. In a conciliatory gesture, Romanones removed Rothwos and Police Chief Matorell. Romanones named Carlos Montanes, a Catalan engineer, as the new civil governor and Gerardo Doval as Chief of Police. The Prime Minister also sent Jose Morote as his personal representative to negotiate a settlement.⁵⁸

Morote was able to get management and labor to the negotiating table immediately and a settlement was reached on March 17. According to the agreement, the 3,000 prisoners at Montjuich would be liberated; all striking workers would be reinstated in their jobs; and, La Canadiense agreed to augment wages and to adopt the eight-hour day.⁵⁹

The settlement was a great victory for the CRT and a vindication of the moderate syndicalist position. For six weeks, the CRT had conducted a strike of unprecedented strength and discipline, a strike which has never since be equaled in magnitude in Spain. The terms of the settlement met every demand of the strikers. All that remained was ratification of the agreement by the workers.⁶⁰ At this crucial moment the military governor of Barcelona stepped in, however, and forced the workers of Barcelona to choose between an imperfect victory or a new round of striking. This would be a momentous decision for the Cenetistas, a decision which would ultimately determine the future course of the anarcho-syndicalist movement.

⁵⁸Comin Colomer, Historia del Anarquismo, p. 201.

⁵⁹Tunon de Lara, Movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

⁶⁰Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, P. 159.

The General Strike and Lock-Out of 1919

On March 24, 1919, a general strike of all the workers in Barcelona began, just six days after a settlement of the La Canadiense strike had been reached. The immediate cause of the strike was the refusal of Milans del Bosch, Captain General of Barcelona, to release twenty-four prisoners in accordance with the terms of the settlement.¹ All other prisoners connected with the strike had been set free. Neither Milans del Bosch nor the Military Governor, Severiano Martines Anido, had been included in the strike talks. Milans del Bosch, therefore, did not feel obligated to hand over the prisoners he held under military jurisdiction.²

This decision reflected the long-standing resentment that the Army harbored towards the civil government. The formation of military juntas during the war had injected the officers with a sense of independence from civil authority. The military was one of those "hermetically sealed" groups, described by Ortega y Gasset.³ The officers could not see beyond the immediate interests of the Army. In their egotism, the officers believed that only they understood the problems of Spain and that they would be the salvation of the country.

The military authorities were openly critical of the government in Madrid and, indeed, many felt that the Army could better handle affairs.

¹Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 389.

²Tuñon de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

³Ortega y Gasset, España Invertebrada, p. 66.

When Romanones had called up troops to maintain the basic services in Barcelona and other cities, many officers were indignant, claiming that the government was using the Army "for its own purposes."⁴

The officers were particularly unhappy over the restricted nature of the duties they had performed during the strike. Their solution to the labor unrest was to reject every demand of the CRT and issue shoot-on-sight orders in the event of violence.⁵ With their narrow view of political and social problems, the military authorities were outraged that the government should restrict their use of power in any way.⁶ The unyielding position of the military on labor questions and its hostility towards the Madrid government brought about a new and surprising rapprochement of the Catalan bourgeoisie and its old enemy, the military. "It was a strange situation" wrote Gerald Brenan, "this union of the Catalan Nationalists with the anti-Catalan Army and a proof, if any were needed, that for the Lliga the social question took precedence over the Catalan one."⁷

The hard line taken by Milans del Bosch had its counterpart within the Catalonian labor movement. The anarchists were convinced that a revolutionary opportunity was at hand. Rather than consolidate the considerable gains that had been achieved, they wanted to propel the La Canadiense strike into the long-awaited revolutionary general strike.⁸

⁴Stanley Payne, Politics and the Military in Modern Spain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 146, 147.

⁵Robert Kern, Red Years-Black Years, p. 38.

⁶Payne, Politics and the Military, p. 146.

⁷Brenan, Spanish Labyrinth, p. 67

⁸Fernando Baratech Alfaro, Los Sindicatos Libres en España: Su origen, su actuacion, su ideario. (Barcelona: Ediciones Tebas, 1927) p. 56.

Several recent events created a mood of supreme confidence among the anarchists. Outside of Spain, the proto-Communist Spartacists staged an uprising in Berlin in January; in Hungary, a Communist regime came to power in March; throughout Italy there were massive strikes.⁹ Within Spain, there was widespread unrest in Andalusia; bread riots in Madrid; general strikes in Seville and Cordoba; and now, the sudden surrender of the employers in Barcelona.¹⁰

These events, coming hard on the heels of the Bolshevik Revolution, created the impression that the Revolution had spread across Europe and was now entering Spain. Some anarchists started calling themselves anarcho-Bolsheviks, and criticized Seguí's reformist tactics.¹¹ In this atmosphere, thick with emotion and expectations, compromise proved to be an elusive entity.

When Milans del Bosch refused to release the handful of Prisoners under his jurisdiction, he placed the moderate leaders of the CRT in a very awkward position. At a meeting held two days after the strike settlement, Pestaña and Seguí found the workers present unwilling to end the strike so long as these last prisoners remained in prison. The strike committee, therefore, decided to arrange a much larger meeting for the next day, March 20.¹²

⁹Tuñón de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero, p. 613.

¹⁰Times (London), 10 March 1919, p. 9; Baratech Alfaro, Los Sindicatos Libres, p. 56.

¹¹Ricardo Sanz, El sindicalismo y la política: los "Solidarios y "Nosotros" (Toulouse: Imprimerie Dulaurier, 1966), p. 53.

¹²Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 388.

At this meeting, more than 20,000 workers gathered in the Las Arenas bullring. Most of the speakers were moderate union chiefs who advocated ratification of the strike accord. Within the stands, however, groups of anarchist militants hooted down the speakers and urged the crowd, as a matter of dignity, to carry on the strike. The emotional outbursts of the anarchists made an impression on the workers who joined in chants demanding the prisoners' release. By the time Seguí got up to speak, the meeting was rapidly developing into a fiasco for the moderate syndicalists.¹³

Seguí's speech, however, was a masterpiece of crowd oration. Within a short time, he had the audience "in his pocket." Years later, Manuel Buenacasa¹⁴ recalled the occasion in a letter to Jose Peirats:

When "El Noi" - the last speaker - got up to speak, the crowd continued to shout. He put up with the uproar, remaining quiet for several minutes; but, his huge and upright presence eventually silenced that enormous multitude. Seguí was always able to assert his will... Facing all those people drunk with mad enthusiasm, Seguí interrogated the crowd with a thunderous voice: "Would you like us to go fetch the men in prison and at Montjuich?" "Yes! yes! etc." Seguí, without losing his composure, rejoined: "Very well, if they are not released by Sunday" - it was Wednesday, San Jose's day - "all of Catalonia will go on a general strike."¹⁵

The workers overwhelmingly accepted this ultimatum and returned to work the next day.

Milans del Bosch, however, continued to hold the prisoners. When Monday arrived, therefore, all of Barcelona was thrown into a general strike.

¹³Baratech Alfara, Los Sindicatos Libres, p. 57.

¹⁴Buenacasa was one of the leading anarchists in Spain. In 1919, he was a member of the National Committee of the CNT. He later wrote a history of Spanish anarchism.

¹⁵Manuel Buenacasa, personal letter to Jose Peirats. 1964, quoted in Peirats, Figuras del Movimiento Libertario, pp. 211, 212.

In the end, this strike would have disastrous results for the Catalanian labor movement: all of the hard-won concessions of the La Canadiense would be lost in the bitter struggle that ensued.¹⁶

Buenacasa later called Seguí's ultimatum "the greatest blunder of his life," adding that, "all of his psychological science failed completely in that supreme moment." According to Buenacasa, Seguí had two viable alternatives before him. The wisest course of action would have been to convince the crowd that it was just a matter of time before the prisoners would be free either through sentence reductions or the next amnesty. Failing this, Buenacasa contended that Seguí should have left the La Canadiense strike intact, rather than propose a general strike, until the prisoners were released.¹⁷

Seguí may not have been able to convince the unruly crowd at Las Arenas stadium to wait for the prisoners' release. He apparently felt compelled to throw out a challenge to the rabble-rousers in the stadium in order to destroy their grip on the crowd. By doing this, he managed to save, for the time-being, the La Canadiense victory.¹⁸ He had hoped to negotiate the prisoners' release before Sunday but in this he was unsuccessful. Seguí could have called for a continuation of the La Canadiense strike but it would not have had the same dampening effect on the crowd. The words huelga general had over the years acquired a mystique in the minds of most Spanish workers. The threat to involve a general strike, therefore, had a more dramatic impact on the crowd than a proposal

¹⁶Tuñón de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

¹⁷Buenacasa, personal letter to Peirats, op. cit., p. 212.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 213.

to continue the La Canadiense would have had. Besides, for all practical purposes the La Canadiense strike had developed into a general strike.

When the strike began on Monday, the strike committee was still negotiating for the prisoners. Seguí and the other moderate syndicalist leaders were inclined to postpone the general strike for a few more days in the hope of finding some compromise that would avert the strike. They could not hold back the rising tide of extremism, however. The anarchists and the Army were ready to give combat and neither side would yield. The crowning blow to the moderate syndicalists, however, came from the Catalan employers. The day after signing the strike accord, the employers had second thoughts and hurried a letter off to the Civil Governor stating that they could not accept all the conditions of the agreement.¹⁹ They now refused to guarantee readmission of all the striking workers, one of the major terms of the settlement.²⁰ Under these circumstances, recalled Pestaña, "We had to enact the general strike against our will."²¹

The general strike began at noon on March 24. About that time, Rodolfo Pla y Armengol, a socialist journalist, was waiting for a streetcar on Paseo de Gracia. He noticed that there were just a few streetcars and that they were all going in towards the station. As the next streetcar approached, Pla y Armengol noticed that it moved very slowly from lack of electrical current. When it arrived, an attendant announced that the general strike had begun.²²

¹⁹Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 389.

²⁰Ramon Pla y Armengol, Impresiones de la huelga general de Barcelona del 24 marzo - 7 abril 1919 (Barcelona: Imprenta Victoria, 1930), p. 13.

²¹Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 390.

²²Pla y Armengol, Impresiones de la huelga, p. 13.

The people at the stop, according to Pla y Armengol, appeared "agitated and fearful." To his side, one man asked the attendant, "When will it all end?" Pla y Armengol heard the attendant reply curtly, "They have cheated us. In this country one must always live with tyranny." Throughout the day, Pla y Armengol heard this sentiment repeated over and over. "I got the clear impression," he wrote, "that the workers considered themselves to have been cheated and defied; and, that they have immense confidence in victory."²³

The strikers displayed the same discipline and organization that they had shown in the La Canadiense strike. Once again, Barcelona was without electricity and streetcar service. Factories, shops, stores, restaurants, and docks and even banks were closed. Pla y Armengol went to a medical clinic and found the nurses there on strike. The work stoppage was so rapid and so complete that, by three o'clock, boasted Pestaña, "the Governor of Barcelona could not eat because nothing was cooked in the restaurants."²⁴ At six in the evening, Pla y Armengol notes: "Barcelona is absolutely tranquil. The people go confidently through the streets without a disturbance."²⁵

Notwithstanding the orderly conduct of the strike, the authorities declared a state of war just three hours after the strike began.²⁶ Constitutional guarantees were again suspended and troops were sent into the city. The military set up canons and machine guns at key points in the city and nervously waited for a major upheaval.²⁷

²³Ibid., pp. 13, 14.

²⁴Pestaña, La Trayectoria.

²⁵Pla y Armengol, Impresiones, p. 14.

²⁶Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 390.

²⁷Alberto Bacells, El sindicalismo en Barcelona, 1916-1923 (Barcelona: Editorial Nova Terra, 1965), p. 88.

In spite of the vigorous response of the authorities, the strike continued through the first week without violence. The paralysis of the city was evident wherever one looked. At the harbor, grain was shovelled into large mounds where mold and mildew were eating away at it; ships sat idle and decaying fruits and foodstuffs floated in the water. On the wide boulevards, people walked four and five abreast along into the night. One American visitor was surprised by the high morale of the strikers:

And the faces in these streets, of these 200,000 walking up and down, looked pleasant enough...Open, cheerful faces, they gave the hot blood and clear wits. Nobody looked very sordid or frantic and nobody looked like black bread, pogroms and murder. Barcelona was like a big fair.²⁸

The Catalan bourgeoisie, meanwhile, formed a civilian militia the Somaten, which soon had some 8,000 members. Wearing yellow armbands, these men forcibly kept shops open and tried to ensure the flow of essential supplies into the city. Working together, the Army, the Police and the Somaten arrested every union leader they could find.²⁹

The leadership of the CRT was soon decimated by these arrests. On April 1, the authorities surprised an assembly of two hundred men who were representatives of virtually every section of the CRT on strike. The same day, over a hundred foreigners of German, Austrian and Russian origin were rounded up and detained. Early the next morning, Pestana was apprehended. Later that day anarchist and syndicalist presses were shut down; unions were

²⁸Stark Young, "Striking in Spain," The New Republic, November 1920, p. 236.

²⁹Bacells, El sindicalismo, p. 88.

closed; and, records were impounded.³⁰ All told, some 1,700 years in prison sentences were meted out to the union leaders.³¹

The vigorous repression of the Catalonian labor movement alarmed labor leaders throughout Spain. In a gesture of support, Largo Caballero, the venerable leader of the socialist UGT, traveled to Barcelona and offered his services to the syndicalists. The printers in Madrid, meanwhile, had instituted a "red censorship" and, for a few days, El Socialista was the only newspaper appearing in Madrid.³²

The general strike, which now encompassed almost all of Catalonia, was, nevertheless coming to an end. By April 1, the workers had shown signs of being tired of the strike. The arrest of virtually the entire leadership of the CRT the next day coincided with a Royal Decree instituting the eight-hour day, effective October 1, throughout Spain. This measure ameliorated the situation substantially. The next day some workers returned to their jobs. By April 4, all streetcars were running and by April 7, several factories were operating.³³

The newspaper editors now categorically refused to publish any papers subject to the "red censorship." On the ninth, the factory owners threatened to lock out all who failed to return to work. After two months of striking without the benefit of strike funds, the workers were too exhausted to meet these challenges. They returned to their jobs and,

³⁰Comin Colomer, La Historia del Anarquismo, p. 206.

³¹Angel Pestana, La Trayectoria, p. 390.

³²Tuñón de Lara, El Movimiento Obrero, p. 614.

³³Times (London), 31 March 1919, p. 11; 3 April 1919, p. 12; 7 April 1919, p. 11.

by April 14, the general strike was over.³⁴

All of the concessions earned during the La Canadiense strike had now been lost. The institution of the eight-hour day, nevertheless, was a significant achievement. Spain was the first country in the world to have this limit set by law. The losses, however, outweighed this one considerable accomplishment. Martial law continued into August, unions were outlawed and the leadership of the CRT was in jail or hiding.³⁵ The end of the strike, it should be emphasized, did not leave the CRT prostrate. The two strikes displayed an organization which, according to one observer, "(had) reached an astounding degree of perfection."³⁶ Although they were vigorously suppressed, the sindicatos continued to grow at a remarkable pace.

The end of the general strike signaled the beginning of a three-month period of harsh repression in which the Army and the Catalan bourgeoisie attempted to eliminate the unions entirely. The first measure of the Army was to force the moderates appointed by Romanones, Civil Governor Montanes and Police Chief Doval, to leave Barcelona. On April 14, Milans del Bosch reportedly sent messages to these men informing them at what hour the next train left for Madrid and bluntly stating that he expected them to be on it. This high-handed action, of dubious legality, prompted Romanones to resign.³⁷ He released the following statement to the press explaining his motives:

³⁴Times (London), 7 April 1919, p. 11; 16 April 1919, p. 11.

³⁵Pla y Armengol, Impresiones, pp. 95, 96.

³⁶Times (London), 23 April 1919, p. 11.

³⁷Times (London), 2 April 1919, p. 11.

I foresaw that the Governor and the Chief of Police would be obliged, owing to the force of circumstances, to leave Barcelona, and I decided to resign the very day they did so, believing that it would be impossible to find substitutes for them. They are leaving and I leave with them.³⁸

King Alfonso XIII summoned Antonio Maura to form a new government. Maura's government, which lasted until July 18, gave the military a free hand in Barcelona. The Marquis de Retortillo, appointed as the new Civil Governor, allowed the Army to rule as it saw fit through martial law. Colonel Miguel Arlegui, a tough-minded professional soldier, was named Chief of Police.³⁹

The Catalan middle classes supported the military rulers but they viewed this alliance with the Army as a temporary arrangement. The nationalistic Catalan bourgeoisie continued to aspire for self-rule in Catalonia although the immediate problem of labor unrest overshadowed the autonomy issue. Many middle class Catalans entertained the hope that the King would grant autonomy as soon as martial law was lifted. Given a free hand, they were certain that they could "resolve the social question" for good.⁴⁰

Although the Catalan employers had been disposed to yield during the La Canadiense strike, they now took an aggressive stance toward the unions. The manufacturers knew that orders from the Allies would diminish as their economies recovered from the war.⁴¹ Conscious that

³⁸Times (London), 16 April 1919, p. 11

³⁹Comin Colomer, Historia, p. 208.

⁴⁰Pla y Armengol, Impresiones, pp. 33, 34.

⁴¹The post-war recession did not occur until 1920.

hard times were coming and aware of the strength of the sindicatos unicos, the employers preferred to confront the CRT immediately rather than later. Many employers believed that their survival depended on eliminating the CRT before it became even more powerful.⁴²

The manufacturers sincerely believed that they should have unimpeded control over their shops and factories. "The master must be the master," they would say; otherwise, there would be chaos. Without unions, they contended, there would be harmony, better production and, ultimately, greater well-being for the workers.⁴³

The Catalan bourgeoisie, like middle-class groups across Europe and America⁴⁴ were alarmed by the specter of a "red revolution" in 1919. The revolutions in Russia, Hungary and Germany; the massive strikes in Italy; the widespread unrest in Spain; all caused grave concern among middle-class Spaniards. Newspapers such as El Soviet appeared, proclaiming:

"What we are and where we come from do not need to be expounded on. Nor do we need to delineate a program. We are revolutionaries and for the revolution we will struggle without rest. For the revolution we will labor in the papers, in the courts and on the streets... The perseverance and tenacity of the Russian Bolsheviks demolished the injustice of the great ex-Czar. The weaker Bourbon emperor cannot resist the push of the Spanish Bolsheviks...Our hour has arrived and, whether our enemies like it or not, we will initiate the struggle which will give us victory."⁴⁵

⁴²Meaker, Revolutionary Left, p. 167.

⁴³Pla y Armengol, Impresiones, pp. 33, 34.

⁴⁴In the United States, for example, several states passed laws against "criminal syndicalism". See: U.S. Congress, House. Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice, H. Doc. 153, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1920, p. 23.

⁴⁵El Soviet (Madrid), 19 December 1918, p. 1.

Although the insurrectionist tenor of this publication was directly opposed to the moderate position of Seguí and Pestaña, the Catalan bourgeoisie tended to lump all radicals together. By closing the unions and jailing the syndicalist leaders of the CRT, however, the authorities helped the secret anarchist groups gain control over the workers.⁴⁶

As the anarchist groups gained influence in the unions, which were now operating underground, terrorist activity increased substantially. During both of the recent strikes the terrorists had been comparatively quiet but between April 24 and July 16, the anarchists staged over twenty attacks, killing three employers and injuring several others. They also poisoned three horses belonging to a brewery, set a fire and exploded several bombs.⁴⁷

On July 19, the de Koenig band of counterterrorists struck back, murdering Pablo Sabater, the president of the Dyer's sindicato. The same day the police killed another union activist "for resisting arrest."⁴⁸ Thousands of workmen attended Sabater's funeral. During the procession, the workers defied a police order and marched down Gran Via. The police moved in and attempted to stop the marchers. In the ensuing scuffle, the coffin fell to the ground. The police then placed a guard around the coffin until the authorities agreed to permit the funeral march to proceed. "As each day passes," the Times correspondent reported, "feeling in Barcelona becomes more bitter."⁴⁹

⁴⁶Tunon de Lara, El Movimiento, p. 615.

⁴⁷Farre Morego, Los Atentatos, pp. 229, 230.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Times (London), 1 August 1919, p. 11.

Work stoppages and boycotts on the part of the workers and lock-outs on the part of the employers increased as the violence spread. By August about 70,000 workers were idle.⁵⁰

In the meantime, the government which had instituted the harsh repression of the CRT was tottering. On May 7, the King had dissolved the Cortes because it could not agree on a budget. Parliamentary elections in June returned three different groups of conservatives; four liberal groups; Republicans, Reformists, Regionalists, Carlists and Socialists.⁵¹ From these delegates, it proved impossible for Maura to form a lasting government, on July 20, he fell from power. The next day Joaquin Sanchez de Toca, a Conservative, formed a new government which was committed to a policy of reconciliation and pacification in Catalonia and Andalusia.⁵²

The new government lifted martial law and appointed Julio Amado as Civil Governor of Barcelona. Amado later made the following report to the Cortes:

...When I arrived in Barcelona (in August), I found the syndicalist organizations absolutely in the power of the anarchist elements, directed completely by terrorist groups...Those elements such as Pestaña, Seguí and others did not direct the organizations. They were either in jail or fleeing persecution.⁵³

⁵⁰Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 179.

⁵¹Times (London), 23 May, p. 11; June 1919, p. 11.

⁵²Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 178.

⁵³Julio Amado, speech in the Cortes, December 1919, quoted in Tuñon de Lara, Movimiento, p. 615.

Amado immediately initiated talks with Seguí, who had been in hiding. Negotiations were quickly arranged between representatives of the employers and the unions. In a gesture of goodwill, on September 2, the Madrid government issued a decree of amnesty for political offenses.⁵⁴ On September 9, a provisional agreement was reached in which the sindicatos were again legalized and all strikes and lockouts would be ended. It was also agreed that there would be an immediate resumption of work. All present disputes would be resolved by a Mixed Commission made up of an equal number of employers and workers under the direction of the Mayor of Barcelona.⁵⁵

Neither the anarchists, the majority of employers, nor the Army were satisfied with this agreement. The sudden shift toward cooperation with the bourgeoisie repulsed the anarchists. To them the Mixed Commission, headed by the Mayor, represented a violation of the anarchist principle of direct action. Also, the anarchists continued to view the huge increase in the membership of the CRT as a sign to revolt. They were frustrated to find the moderate syndicalists both regaining control over the sindicatos and steering them away from a revolutionary path. Some anarchist pistoleros vented their frustration by attacking syndicalist leaders. There were several attempts on Seguí and Pestaña but it was impossible to know whether they were meant to be warnings or were genuine murder attempts.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Times (London), 4 September 1919, p. 9.

⁵⁵Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 179.

⁵⁶Ibid, pp. 179, 180.

Many of the Catalan employers had become as intransigent as the anarchists. The Employer's Federation of Barcelona was reorganized on August 9. It emerged as a disciplined, truculent organization, affiliated on a national level with other employer organizations. On September 3, the Barcelona Federation declared:

The development of syndicalism has created a situation in national production which is neither materially nor morally supportable.

Apparently, the Spanish government does not understand that, by granting concession after concession, they are submitting employers to an impossible regimen of humiliations and material burdens...Spanish employers cannot continue watching the government blindly obeying the machinations of labor.

Convinced that the government would only respond to a strong and organized force, the employers intended to build a formidable national organization of employers. This body, they predicted, would be strong enough to exercise, "an irresistible influence over public figures in all socio-economic questions."⁵⁷

The Employer's Federation did not limit itself to the political sphere, however. With the support of the Army, it also practiced a form of "direct action" not unlike that of the anarchist. In addition to funding the de Koenig band, the Federation used blacklists and lock-outs against the unions.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Segundo Congreso Patronal de la Confederación Patronal Española (Barcelona: Imprenta Elyeveriana, 1919), p. 5, 6.

⁵⁸ There were some progressive thinkers within the Employer's Federation. Sebastian Llado, president of the Employer's Union of Masonry, for example, presented a profit-sharing plan which he felt would entice employees to work efficiently and avoid strikes. See: Segundo Congreso Patronal de la Confederación Patronal Española, p. 222.

From September through mid-November the industrial conflict in Barcelona was actually carried out on two levels. On one level, the syndicalist leaders, Governor Amado, the Mayor of Barcelona and some employers labored diligently to reach a working solution whereby the Catalonian economy could return to normal operation. On a second level, the anarchist pistoleros conducted an underground war with the de Koenig gunmen who were organized from the Captain-General's office and financed by the Employer's Federation.

At first it appeared as though the moderates would prevail. At the end of September, Pestaña and Seguí went to Madrid where they defended their policies before overflowing crowds of workers.⁵⁹ Pestaña spoke triumphantly of the achievements of the Sindicatos Unicos:

In spite of repressions, in spite of persecutions, in spite of everything, the Sindicatos of Barcelona, today, after six months of tyrannical and cruel struggle, find themselves in a vastly superior position than every before. Now, do you understand the importance of our organization? Do you believe that craft unions would have survived?"⁶⁰

Pestaña was openly critical of the anarchists. "Direct action," he declared mockingly, "is more than taking to the streets and beating up squirrels (scabs)." Direct action, he explained, was when "workers treat directly with those with whom they have a grievance." In this sense, the Mixed Commission was consistent with the anarchist principle of direct action. In reference to anarchist terrorism, Pestaña asserted:

⁵⁹At this point the CRT was at the zenith of its power. It had not only survived four months of repression; it had grown more rapidly than ever before: from about 100,000 in January to over 300,000 in September.

⁶⁰Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 372.

"We do not need to murder employers and workers in order to prevail in our struggle; (this) would strike us as repulsive."⁶¹

Seguí leveled fundamental criticisms against the anarchist position. The anarchists, according to Seguí, were merely "letting off steam" rather than giving the workers a viable program. Seguí maintained that neither the anarchist groups nor the Socialist Party could ensure that the complex economic machinery would continue to operate properly "after the social transformation." The only force capable of preparing the workers to take over the economic organism was "precisely syndicalism."⁶²

Seguí insisted, furthermore, that syndicalism still needed time to prepare Spanish workers for the responsibilities of power:

What would happen right now, comrades and friends, if the revolution, triumphant all over Europe...should come knocking on our door? You answer for me. We are not prepared. We have no organization. We would... have to say to the bourgeoisie: "No, we do not wish to accept that responsibility; wait a minute; wait for us to orient ourselves; we do not know what to do."⁶³

Seguí expressed serious misgivings about the revolutions in Hungary, Russia and Germany which, in his opinion, had occurred before the workers were ready. A successful revolution in Spain, he felt, would have to be made sometime in the future after the most extensive preparations, "In the place of the Anarchists' revolutionary immediacy," observed Gerald Meader, "Seguí preached a doctrine of salvation through

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 367, 401.

⁶² Pestana, Angel, and Salvador Seguí, El sindicalismo libertario en Cataluna, quoted in Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 182.

⁶³ Ibid.

organization."⁶⁴

When Seguí and Pestaña returned to Barcelona in mid-October, the prospects of reaching a compromise solution seemed good. On October 11, a Royal Decree established the Mixed Commission as a legal body and, on November 2, Seguí and Jose Molins, Secretary of the Local Federation of Trade Unions in Barcelona, signed the Royal Decree on behalf of the CRT. Work on the Mixed Commission went apace: by November 12 an agreement was reached.⁶⁵

According to the compromise settlement, the Mixed Commission would become a permanent body empowered to arbitrate labor disputes, to set minimum wages for each locality and each industry and to suggest appropriate social legislation to the government. The agreement also stated that all strikes and lock-outs would end and there be a full return to work on November 14.⁶⁶

This compromise held out the promise of industrial peace in Barcelona for the first time since the beginning of the year. Unfortunately, the agreement collapsed immediately because it contained a vital flaw: the delegates for the employers actually represented just a small proportion of the Catalan employers. The majority of the employers had ceased to believe that coexistence with the unions was possible. Rather than negotiate with the unions, the Employer's Federation was now bent on destroying organized labor.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 185.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 182, 186.

The war between the pistoleros had continued in spite of the negotiations surrounding the Mixed Commission. On September 5, two anarchist pistoleros pulled off a sensational revenge of the murder of Pablo Sabater by gunning down the notorious Bravo Portillo. During September and October about one "social crime" per week occurred, resulting in three dead and several wounded.⁶⁸ The authorities were so apprehensive about the violence that 1,400 men were added to the police force of Barcelona in September.⁶⁹

The Employer's Federation seized upon the continued terrorism as a justification for an all-out attack against the CRT. The Federation publicly condemned the violent attacks on employers and it protested bitterly against the "suicidal passivity" of government officials. At the Second Congress of the Employer's Federation on October 20, the owners complained that "it is useless for us to raise our voices another time to those (government officials) responsible for looking after the lives and property of the people."⁷⁰

The employers decided to take matters into their own hands. On October 28, the Second Congress of Spanish Employers announced their decision to declare a lock-out throughout Spain on November 3. They released the following statement to the press:

⁶⁸Farre Morego, Los Atentatos, pp. 231, 232.

⁶⁹Times (London) 23 September 1919, p. 9.

⁷⁰Segundo Congreso Patronal, p. 54.

The pernicious influence exercised by a small minority over the proletarian classes is so considerable that we do not see any better or more radical way to put an end to it than by declaring a lock-out, by which the working classes who are the first victims of the syndicalist endeavors may be made aware of the errors into which they have been induced.⁷¹

The Sanchez de Toca Government deplored the threatened lock-out saying that to declare a lock-out "at a moment when the workers are asking nothing (is) foolish."⁷² The government also stated:

This is a grave measure when leveled against workers who are on strike. But, one should consider if it is just to throw employees who have not abandoned work out into the street and into the clutches of misery.⁷³

The next day, October 30, the employers lashed back in the press, proclaiming:

Those who cling doggedly to this ridiculously conjured argument...should know that the employer's federations will not abandon their present stance until the sacred store of power is held by men capable of exercising it...⁷⁴

The lock-out went into effect, as scheduled, on November 3. This was the day after Seguí and Molins signed the Royal Decree establishing the Mixed Commission. Employers all over Spain implemented the lock-out, determined to close all industries except those directly related to food supply and public service. They were not able to completely shut down

⁷¹Times (London), 1 November 1919, p. 11.

⁷²"The Lockout in Spain" The Literal Digest, 8 November 1919, p. 23.

⁷³Official Statement of the Sanchez de Toca Government, quoted in Comin Colomer, Historia de Anarquismo, p. 213.

⁷⁴Statement to the press by the Employer's Federation, quoted in Comin Colomer, Historia de Anarquismo, p. 214.

Barcelona but they succeeded in idling some 100,000 men.⁷⁵

The lock-out was declared as a protest against both the alleged crimes of the syndicalists and the government's failure to protect employers' interests. The employers were particularly dissatisfied with the new law granting the eight-hour day and they vowed to continue the lock-out until the Government resigned.⁷⁶

During the lock-out, it will be recalled, the Mixed Commission was hammering out an agreement, which was reached on November 12. On November 14, when work was scheduled to resume in Barcelona, the employers opened their shops and factories. Many employers, however, refused to readmit known syndicalist activities. This flagrant blacklisting outraged the workers throughout Catalonia. All the construction workers immediately went on strike in protest.⁷⁷

The employers countered by declaring a general lock-out on November 25. This lock-out, which idled 200,000 workers, lasted until January 26, 1920. By the end of the lock-out, the British consul in Barcelona reported that "the working class has been reduced to begging and it is impossible to walk the streets without being molested by beggars, mostly women-- carrying infants in their arms--who appear to be half-starved."⁷⁸

⁷⁶"Lockout in Spain," Literary Digest, p. 23; Times (London), 5 November 1919, p. 11

⁷⁷Tuñon de Lara, El Movimiento, p. 620.

⁷⁸Letter of Arthur L. Rowley to Sir Esme Howard, January 25, 1920, Quoted in Robert Kera, Red Years/Black Years, p. 46.

The lock-out resulted in an upsurge in terrorism by both sides. Almost every day there was a violent assault, a bomb explosion or a shooting. Dozens of men were wounded and several killed between November and January.⁷⁹ This vicious cycle of violence continued right up to the Pronunciamiento of Primo de Rivero. There were over 300 political assassinations in the Catalonia between 1919 and 1923. There can be little doubt that insecurity generated by this bloodletting helped prepare public opinion to accept the military dictatorship in 1923.⁸⁰

Within the CRT, the syndicalists and the anarchists disagreed over the proper response of the labor organization to the lock-out. Seguí felt that the CRT was not strong enough to challenge the employers. Bowing to circumstances, he urged the leaders of the CRT to wait out the lock-out. The anarchists, on the other hand, wanted to forcefully occupy the factories. By doing this, they hoped to set off the Spanish Revolution. Seguí was able to prevail upon the committees of the CRT and no factory occupations took place. For years afterwards, the anarchists would accuse the syndicalist leaders of throwing away a "beautiful revolutionary opportunity." Some syndicalists may have regretted the timid course they chose, for it did not produce a compromise solution.⁸¹

During the lock-out the Sanchez de Toca government fell (December 9) and with it fell the policy of reconciliation. Governor Amado, who left Barcelona the next day, bitterly recalled the Catalan employers as, "stubborn men, of profoundly retrograde opinions...who wish to smash the

⁷⁹Farre Morego, pp. 233-235.

⁸⁰Payne, Spanish Revolution, p. 57.

⁸¹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 188.

syndicalist organization and remold it to their desire and caprice."

The new Conservative government, led by Manuel Allendesalazar, appointed Count Salvatierra as the new Civil Governor of Barcelona on January 20.

Salvatierra as the new Civil Governor of Barcelona on January 20.

Salvatierra proved to be fiercely anti-labor: three days after his appointment he dissolved the CRT and closed its unions.⁸²

The Catalanian labor movement was permanently weakened by the general strike and lock-out of 1919. From January 1920 until the coming of the Dictatorship in 1923, the CRT steadily declined. In the established pattern of vigorous repression followed by reconciliation, the CRT was again permitted to operate legally in the summer of 1920. The CRT was never able to regain the strength and vitality that it had had in 1919 because of the sheer exhaustion of the workers. After a year of almost constant work stoppages, crowned by the devastating general lock-out, the workers were now subjected to the full brunt of the post-war recession.⁸³

Another factor in the decline of the CRT was the rise of a competitive labor organization, the Sindicatos Libres, during 1920. Although founded primarily by Catholic workmen, in the autumn of 1919, the Sindicatos Libres were non-religious and apolitical. They were established in response to a growing antipathy towards the excesses of the anarchists who increasingly controlled the unions of the CRT.⁸⁴ On the declining prestige of the CNT, Pestana wrote:

⁸²Junón de Lara, El Movimiento, p. 620; Francisco Madrid, Ocho meses y un día en el gobierno civil de Barcelona (Barcelona, Impresario Victoria, p. 42.

⁸³Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 314.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 318.

...the organization lost control of itself... then it lost its moral credibility...The CNT fell so low in public opinion that to call oneself a syndicalist was synonymous (and still is today, regrettably) with being a gunman, a troublemaker, an outlaw and a habitual criminal.⁸⁵

To many workmen, the most despicable practice of the anarchist groups was the forcible collection of union dues. By this practice, begun in late 1919, the anarchists groups supported the pistoleros. Pestana later claimed that "if the organization could get back today everything it spent on the pistoleros...the workers would be amazed by the mountains of money before their eyes." The workers reacted to the abuses of the anarchists by leaving the CRT in large numbers. "All the labor of years," lamented Pestana, was squandered in a moment."⁸⁶

⁸⁵Pestaña, La Trayectoria, p. 105.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 186, 189.

CONCLUSION

The most important consequence of the long and bitter industrial conflict of 1919 was that anarchist extremists were able to gain control over the CRT and, thus, steer it away from the moderating influence of Segui and Pestana. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the history of the CNT and, by extension, all of Spain might have been different if the moderate syndicalists had been able to achieve a clear ascendancy over the CRT in 1919. In spite of occasional lapses into revolutionary rhetoric, Segui and Pestana were attempting to build a large and viable labor organization, more concerned with immediate gains than with revolution. In the years after 1919, it is quite possible that a more-syndicalist CRT would have formed an alliance with Socialists and Republicans. Such an alliance may have brought down the monarchy and established a republic a decade earlier.

In subsequent years the moderate syndicalists were never able to extricate the CRT from the iron grip of the anarchist groups. Both Pestana and Segui later fell victim to the pistoleros. Pestana was wounded four times in an attack in 1922 and barely escaped death. The following year Segui was assassinated. It is impossible to ascertain, however, whether the pistoleros in these assaults were in the pay of the Employer's Federation, the Sindicatos Libres or anarchist action groups.¹

¹Meaker, Revolutionary Left in Spain, p. 457.

With the coming of the Dictatorship in 1923, Pestaña maintained that the CNT should cooperate with the government in order to retain its legality. The CNT actively resisted the Primo de Rivera, however, and was, consequently, outlawed in 1924. No national CNT Congresses were held again until 1931, although the CNT continued to function underground on a local level.² In the meantime, anarchists groups formed the Federación Anarquista Iberica (FAI) in 1927. The FAI was a small, semi-secret organization composed exclusively of anarchists and devoted to immediate revolution. In an effort to infiltrate and control the CNT, every member of the FAI was expected to join the CNT. Thus, the FAI represented a full return to Bakunin and his Alliance of Social Democracy.³

The FAI dominated the CNT when the Republic, formed by a coalition of Socialists and Republicans, came to power in 1931. The syndicalists moderates would almost certainly have come to terms with the new government but the FAI-dominated CNT launched a series of strikes and insurrections which led to the fall of the coalition in 1933. By that time Pestaña had been expelled from the CNT for criticizing the rash and fruitless activities of the anarchists. In 1932 Pestaña founded the Syndicalist Party and later sat as a delegate to the Cortes. His entrance into the political arena marked the culmination of his drift away from the anarchism of his youth.⁴

²Kern, Red Years/Black Years, 66.

³Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth, 184.

⁴Bookchin, The Spanish Anarchists, pp. 233-242.

This study has been devoted to demonstrating that 1919 was a pivotal year in the history of anarcho-syndicalism. If the syndicalist triumph of February and March could have been consolidated the CNT might have evolved in a different manner than it did. There were several converging forces which drove the workers of Catalonia to accept the leadership of the anarchists. Perhaps the most obvious was the refusal of the employers and the military to treat with moderate labor leaders. By arresting the visible leaders of the sindicatos, the authorities delivered control of the unions to the clandestine action groups. Another force operating in 1919 was the ideological ferment created by the Russian, German and Hungarian revolutions. The legacy of the war, in particular the influx of thousands of illiterate and displaced peasants, also strengthened the hand of the extremists. Finally, the intense particularism that pervaded Spanish society after the revolutionary summer of 1917 created a social milieu in which compromise was nearly impossible.

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