

# An Anarchist FAQ

## Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

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# Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

In this appendix of our FAQ we discuss and reply to various analyses of Spanish anarchism put forward by Marxists, particularly Marxist-Leninists of various shades. The history and politics of Spanish Anarchism is not well known in many circles, particularly Marxist ones, and the various misrepresentations and distortions that Marxists have spread about that history and politics are many. This appendix is an attempt to put the record straight with regards the Spanish Anarchist movement and point out the errors associated with the standard Marxist accounts of that movement, its politics and its history.

However, this appendix is of wider interest than just debunking Marxists as writers all too often seem to delight in misrepresenting the ideas and actions of the Spanish Anarchists. Sometimes the distortions are trivial, often they are quite serious, extremely misleading and ensure that anarchism cannot be understood or viewed as a serious political theory (we can understand why Marxists historians would seek this). Sometimes they can be subtle as when Ronald Fraser states that at the CNT's Saragossa congress in 1936 *"the proposal to create a libertarian militia to crush a military uprising was rejected almost scornfully, in the name of traditional anti-militarism."* [**Blood of Spain**, p. 101] Hugh Thomas makes the same claim, stating at *"there was no sign that anyone [at the congress] realised that there was a danger of fascism; and no agreement, in consequence, on the arming of militias, much less the organisation of a revolutionary army as suggested by Juan Garcia Oliver."* [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 181] However, what Fraser and Thomas omit to tell the reader is that this motion *"was defeated by one favouring the idea of guerrilla warfare."* [Peter Marshal, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 460] The Saragossa resolution itself it worth quoting:

*"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution . . . So, until the social revolution may have triumphed internationally, the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion . . . or against counter-revolution at home. It must also be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger to the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution . . . The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without . . . Let each commune have its weapons and means of defence . . . the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence . . . The confederal defence cadres, covering the centres of production, will be the most-valued auxiliaries in consolidating the gains of the revolution . . . The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes, which will be responsible for ensuring that defensive means are effectively organised nationwide."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

Fraser's and Hugh's omission is extremely serious -- it gives a radically false impression of anarchist politics. Their comments could lead a reader to think that anarchists, as Marxists falsely claim (see [section H.2.1](#)), do not believe in defending a revolution. As can be seen from the actual resolutions of the Saragossa conference, this is not the case. Indeed, given that the congress was explicitly discussing, along with many other issues, the question of *"defence of the revolution"* their omission seriously distorts the CNT's position and anarchist theory. As seen, the congress supported the need to arm the people and organise the defence

of the revolution by confederated communes (and so the efficient organisation of forces on a national level). Given that Thomas quotes extensively from the Saragossa resolution on libertarian communism we can only surmise that he forgot to read the section entitled "*Defence of the Revolution.*"

These kinds of omissions, however, ensure that anarchism is presented as an utopian and naive theory, unaware of the problems facing society. In reality, the opposite is the case -- the Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need to arm the people and resist counter-revolution and fascism by force. Regardless of Thomas' claims, it is clear that the CNT and FAI realised the danger of fascism existed and passed appropriate resolutions outlining how to organise an effective means of self-defence (indeed, as early as February 14 of that year, the CNT had issued a prophetic manifesto warning that right-wing elements were ready to provoke a military coup [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 273]). To state otherwise, while quoting from the document that discusses the issue, must be considered a deliberate lie.

Hopefully this appendix will go some way towards making Marxists -- and others -- investigate the actual facts of anarchism and Spanish anarchist history rather than depending on inaccurate secondary material (usually written by their comrades). As such, it is a supplement to [section I.8](#) and provides some background information on the Social Revolution of 1936.

Parts of this essay is based on the article "*Trotskyist Lies on Anarchism*" which appeared in **Black Flag** issue no. 211 and Tom Wetzel's article **Workers' Power and the Spanish Revolution**.

## 1. Were the Spanish Anarchists "*Primitive Rebels*"?

The thesis that the Spanish Anarchists were "*primitive rebels*," with a primitive understanding of the nature of revolution is a common one amongst Marxists. The main source for this kind of argument is Eric Hobsbawm's **Primitive Rebels**, a life-long member of the British Communist Party. While the obvious Stalinist nature of the author may be thought enough to alert the intelligent of its political biases, its basic thesis is repeated by many Marxists and Academics.

Before discussing Hobsbawm in more detail, it would be useful to refute some of the more silly things so-called serious historians have asserted about Spanish Anarchism. Indeed, it would be hard to find another social or political movement which has been more misrepresented or its ideas and activities so distorted by historians whose attitudes seem more supported by ideological conviction rather than history or investigation of social life.

One of the most common descriptions of Spanish anarchism is that it was "*religious*" or "*millenarium*" in nature. Hobsbawm himself accepts this conceptualisation, along with historians and commentators like Gerald Brenan and Franz Brokenau (who, in fact, did state "*Anarchism is a religious movement*" [Franz Borkenau, **The Spanish Cockpit**, p. 22]). Such use of religion was largely due to the influence of Juan Diaz del Moral, a lawyer and historian who was also a landowner. As Jerome R. Mintz points out, "*according to Diaz del Moral, the moral and passionate obreros conscientes [conscious workers -- i.e. workers who considered themselves to be anarchists] absorbed in their pamphlets and newspapers were akin to*

*frenzied believers in a new religion.*" [The Anarchists of Casas Viejas, p. 5f] However, such a perspective was formed by his class position and privileges and could not help but reflect them:

*"Diaz del Moral ascribed to the campesinos [of Andalusia] racial and cultural stereotypes that were common saws of his class. The sole cause for the waves of rural unrest, Diaz del Moral asserted, could be found in the psychology of the campesinos . . . He believed that the Andalusian field workers had inherited a Moorish tendency toward ecstasy and millenarianism that accounted for their attraction to anarchist teaching. Diaz del Moral was mystified by expressions of animosity directed toward him, but the workers considered him to be a seniorito, a landowner who does not labour . . . Although he was both scholarly and sympathetic, Diaz del Moral could not comprehend the hunger and the desperation of the campesinos around him . . . To Diaz del Moral, campesino ignorance, passion, ecstasy, illusion, and depression, not having a legitimate basis in reality, could be found only in the roots of their racial heritage."* [Op. Cit., pp. 5-6]

Hence the "religious" nature of anarchism -- it was one of the ways an uncomprehending member of the exploiting-class could explain working class discontent and rebellion. Unfortunately, this "explanation" has become common place in history books (partly reflected academics class interest too and lack of understanding of working class interests, needs and hopes). Perhaps it should not be too surprising to discover that Hobsbawm thought highly of Diaz del Moral's work "for which no praise is too high from the student of primitive social movements." [Primitive Rebels, p. 74f]

As Mintz argues, "at first glance the religious model seems to make anarchism easier to understand, particularly in the absence of detailed observation and intimate contact. The model was, however, also used to serve the political ends of anarchism's opponents. Here the use of the terms 'religious' and 'millenarium' stamp anarchist goals as unrealistic and unattainable. Anarchism is thus dismissed as a viable solution to social ills." He continues by arguing that the "oversimplifications posited became serious distortions of anarchist belief and practice" (as we shall see). [Op. Cit., p. 5 and p. 6]

Temma Kaplan's critique of the "religious" view is also worth mentioning. She argues that "the millenarium theory is too mechanistic to explain the complex pattern of Andalusian anarchist activity. The millenarian argument, in portraying the Andalusian anarchists as fundamentally religious, overlooks their clear comprehension of the social sources of their oppression." She concludes that "the degree of organisation, not the religiosity of workers and the community, accounts for mass mobilisations carried on by the Andalusian anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century." She also notes that the "[i]n a secular age, the taint of religion is the taint of irrationality." [Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868-1903, pp. 210-12 and p. 211] Thus, the Andalusian anarchists had a clear idea who their enemies were, namely the ruling class of the region. She also points out that, for all their revolutionary elan, the anarchists developed a rational strategy of revolution, channelling their energies into organising a trade union movement that could be used as a vehicle for social and economic change. Moreover, as well as a clear idea of how to change society they had a clear vision of what sort of society they desired -- one built around collective ownership and federations of workers' associations and communes.

Therefore the idea that anarchism can be explained in "religious" terms is fundamentally flawed. It basically assumes that the Spanish workers were fundamentally irrational, unable to comprehend the sources of their unhappiness nor able to define their own political goals and tactics and instead looked to naive theories which reinforced their irrationalities. In actuality, like most people, they were sensible, intelligent human beings who believed in a better life and were willing to apply their ideas in their everyday life. That historians apply patronising attitudes towards them says more about the historians than the campesinos.

This uncomprehending attitude to historians can be seen from some of the more strange assertions they make against the Spanish Anarchists. Gerald Brenan, Eric Hobsbawm and Raymond Carr, for example, all maintained that there was a connection between anarchist strikes and sexual practices. Carr's words give a flavour:

*"Austere puritans, they sought to impose vegetarianism, sexual abstinence, and atheism on one of the most backward peasantries of Europe . . . Thus strikes were moments of exaltation as well as demands for better conditions; spontaneous and often disconnected they would bring, not only the abolition of piece-work, but 'the day,' so near at hand that sexual intercourse and alcohol were abandoned by enthusiasts till it should dawn."* [Spain: 1808-1975, p. 444]

Mintz, an American anthropologist who actually stayed with the campesino's for a number of years after 1965, actually asked them about such claims. As he put it, the *"level-headed anarchists were astonished by such descriptions of supposed Spanish puritanism by over-enthusiastic historians."* [Op. Cit., p. 6] As one anarchist put it, *"[o]f course, without any work the husband couldn't provide any food at dinnertime, and so they were angry at each other, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. In that sense, yes, there were no sexual relations."* [quoted by Mintz, Op. Cit., p. 7]

Mintz traces the citations which allowed the historians to arrive at such ridiculous views to a French social historian, Angel Maraud, who observed that during the general strike of 1902 in Moron, marriages were postponed to after the promised division of the lands. As Mintz points out, *"as a Frenchman, Maraud undoubtedly assumed that everyone knew a formal wedding ceremony did not necessarily govern the sexual relations of courting couples."* [Op. Cit., p. 6f]

As for abstinence and puritanism, nothing could be further from the truth. As Mintz argues, the anarchists considered alcoholism as being *"responsible for much of the social malaise among many workers . . . Excessive drinking robbed the worker of his senses and deprived his family of food. Anarchist newspapers and pamphlets hammered out the evil of this vice."* However, *"[p]roscriptions were not of a puritanical order"* (and so there was no desire to "impose" such things on people) and quotes an anarchist who stated that *"coffee and tobacco were not prohibited, but one was advised against using them. Men were warned against going to a brothel. It was not a matter of morality but of hygiene."* As for vegetarianism, it *"attracted few adherents, even among the obreros conscientes."* [Op. Cit., pp. 86-7 and p. 88]

Moreover, academic mockery of anarchist attempts to combat alcoholism (and **not** alcohol as such) forgets the social context. Being academics they may not have experienced wage labour directly and so do not realise the misery it can cause. People turn to drink simply because their jobs are so bad and seek escape from the drudgery of their everyday lives. As Bakunin

argued, "*confined in their life like a prisoner in his prison, without horizon, without outlet . . . the people would have the singularly narrow souls and blunted instincts of the bourgeois if they did not feel a desire to escape; but of escape there are but three methods -- two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution.*" [**God and the State**, p. 16] So to combat alcoholism was particularly important as many workers turned to alcohol as a means of escaping the misery of life under capitalism. Thus Murray Bookchin:

*"[T]o abstain from smoking, to live by high moral standards, and to especially adjure the consumption of alcohol was very important at the time. Spain was going through her own belated industrial revolution during the period of anarchist ascendancy with all its demoralising features. The collapse of morale among the proletariat, with rampant drunkenness, venereal disease, and the collapse of sanitary facilities, was the foremost problem which Spanish revolutionaries had to deal with . . . On this score, the Spanish anarchists were eminently successful. Few CNT workers, much less a committed anarchist, would have dared show up drunk at meetings or misbehave overtly with their comrades. If one considers the terrible working and living conditions of the period, alcoholism was not as serious a problem in Spain as it was in England during the industrial revolution."* ["Introductory Essay", **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. xix-xxf]

Mintz sums up by stating "*[c]ontrary to exaggerated accounts of anarchist zeal, most thoughtful obreros conscientes believed in moderation, not abstinence.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Unfortunately Mintz's work, the product of years of living with and talking to the people actually involved in the movement, does not seem to have made much impact on the historians. Unsurprising, really, as history is rarely about the actions, ideas and hopes of working people.

However, to return to our main point -- Eric Hobsbawm's thesis that the Spanish anarchists were an example of "*pre-political*" groups -- the "*primitive rebels*" of his title.

Essentially, Hobsbawm describes the Spanish Anarchists -- particularly the Andalusian anarchists -- as modern-day secular mystics who, like the millenarians of the Middle Ages, were guided by the irrational belief that it was possible to will profound social change. The actions of the Spanish anarchist movement, he suggests, can be explained in terms of millenarian behaviour -- the belief that it was able to jump straight to utopia via an act of will. The Spanish farm and industrial workers, then, were unable to grasp the complexities of the economic and political structures that dominated their lives and so were attracted to anarchism. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism is marked by theoretical primitivism (anarchism, unlike Marxism, "*attracted no intellectuals, and produced no theorist of interest*" [Hobsbawm, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83]) and a primitive understanding of revolution and this explained why anarchism was popular with Spanish workers, particularly farm workers. It told the workers that by spontaneously rising up together they could overthrow the forces of repression and create the new millennium.

Obviously, we cannot refute Hobsbawm's claims of anarchism's theoretical primitivism in this appendix, the reader is invited to consult the main FAQ. We will note that his assertion that anarchists believe in spontaneous, overnight uprisings is false. Rather, we see revolution as a **process** in which day-to-day struggle and organisation play a key role -- it is not seen as occurring independently of the on-going class struggle or social evolution. While we discuss

the nature of an anarchist social revolution in [section J.7](#), we can present a few quotes by Bakunin to refute Hobsbawm's claim:

*"Revolutions are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals. They come about through the force of circumstances and are independent of any deliberate ill or conspiracy."* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 139]

And:

*"It is impossible to rouse people by artificial means. Popular revolutions are born by the actual force of events . . . It is impossible to bring about such a revolution artificially. It is not even possible to speed it up at all significantly . . . There are some periods in history when revolutions are quite simply impossible; there are other periods when they are inevitable."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 183]

As Brian Morris correctly argues, *"Bakunin denies that a social revolution could be made by the will of individuals, independent of social and economic circumstances. He was much less a voluntarist than his Marxist critics make out . . . he was . . . aware that the social revolution would be a long process that may take many years for its realisation."* [**Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, pp. 138-9] To aid the process of social revolution, Bakunin supported the need for *"pioneering groups or associations of advanced workers who were willing to initiate this great movement of self-emancipation."* However, more is needed -- namely popular working class organisations -- *"what is the organisation of the masses? . . . It is the organisation by professions and trades . . . The organisation of the trade sections . . . bear in themselves the living seed of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 252 and p. 255]

Therefore, Bakunin saw revolution as a process which starts with day-to-day struggle and creation of labour unions to organise that struggle. As he put it himself:

*"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution . . . the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** . . . It will [also] propagandise its principles . . . Lastly, the International will expand and organise across frontiers of all countries, so that when the revolution -- brought about by the force of circumstances -- breaks out, the International will be a real force and will know what it has to do. Then it will be able to take the revolution into its own hands and give it a direction that will benefit the people: an earnest international organisation of workers' associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 109-10]

However, while quoting Bakunin refutes part of his thesis, Hobsbawm does base his case on some actual events of Spanish Anarchist history. Therefore we need to look at these cases and show how he gets these wrong. Without an empirical basis, his case obviously falls even without quotes by Bakunin. Luckily the important examples he uses have been analysed by people without the ideological blinkers inherent in Leninism.

While we shall concentrate on just two cases -- Casa Viejas in 1933 and the Jerez rising of 1892 -- a few general points should be mentioned. As Jerome Mintz notes, Hobsbawm's *"account is based primarily on a preconceived evolutionary model of political development rather than on data gathered in field research. The model scales labour movements in accord with their progress toward mass parties and central authority. In short, he explains how anarchosyndicalists were presumed to act rather than what actually took place, and the uprising at Casa Viejas was used to prove an already established point of view. Unfortunately, his evolutionary model misled him on virtually every point."* [Op. Cit., p. 271] We should also note his "model" is essentially Marxist ideology -- namely, Marx's assertion that his aim for mass political parties expressed the interests of the working class and all other visions were the products of sectarians. Mintz also points out that Hobsbawm does not live up to his own model:

*"While Hobsbawm's theoretical model is evolutionary, in his own treatment anarchism is often regarded as unchanging from one decade to the other. In his text, attitudes and beliefs of 1903-5, 1918-20, 1933, and 1936 are lumped together or considered interchangeable. Of course during these decades the anarchosyndicalists had developed their programs and the individuals involved had become more experienced."* [Op. Cit., p. 271f]

Hobsbawm believed that Casas Viejas was the classic *"anarchist"* uprising -- *"utopian, millenarian, apocalyptic, as all witnesses agree it to have been."* [Op. Cit., p. 90] As Mintz states, *"the facts prove otherwise. Casas Viejas rose not in a frenzy of blind millenarianism but in response to a call for a nation-wide revolutionary strike. The insurrection of January 1933 was hatched by faistas [members of the FAI] in Barcelona and was to be fought primarily there and in other urban centres. The uprisings in the countryside would be diversionary and designed to keep the civil guard from shifting reinforcements. The faista plot was then fed by intensive newspaper propaganda, by travelling orators, and by actions undertaken by the [CNT] defence committees. Representatives of the defence committees from Casas Viejas and Medina had received instructions at a regional meeting held days before. On January 11, the anarchosyndicalists of Casas Viejas believed that they were joining their companeros who had already been at the barricades since January 8."* [Op. Cit., p. 272]

Hobsbawm argued that the uprising occurred in accordance with an established economic pattern:

*"Economic conditions naturally determined the timing and periodicity of the revolutionary outbreaks -- for instance, social movements tended to reach a peak intensity during the worse months of the year -- January to March, when farm labourers have least work (the march on Jerez in 1892 and the rising of Casas Viejas in 1933 both occurred early in January), March-July, when the proceeding harvest has been exhausted and times are lean."* [Op. Cit., p. 79]

Mintz states the obvious:

*"In reality, most agricultural strikes took place in May and June, the period of the harvest and the only time of the year when the campesinos had any leverage against the landowners. The uprising at Casas Viejas occurred in January precisely because it was **not** an agricultural strike. The timing of the insurrection, hurriedly called to*

*coincide with a planned railway strike that would make it difficult for the government to shift its forces, was determined by strategic rather than economic considerations."* [Op. Cit., p. 273]

As for the revolt itself, Hobsbawm asserts that:

*"Secure from the outside world, [the men] put up the red and black flag of anarchy and set about dividing the land. They made no attempt to spread the movement or kill anyone."* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

Which, as Mintz clearly shows, was nonsense:

*"As is already evident, rather than securing themselves from the rest of world, the uprising at Casas Viejas was a pathetic attempt to join in an ill-fated national insurrection. With regard to his second point, there was neither the time nor the opportunity to 'set about dividing the land.' The men were scattered in various locations guarding roads and paths leading to the town. There were no meetings or discussions during this brief period of control. Only a few hours separated the shooting at the barracks and the entrance of the small [government] rescue force from Alcala. Contrary to Hobsbawm's description of peaceful enterprise, at the outset the anarchists surrounding the barracks had fired on the civil guards, mortally wounding two men."* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

As can be seen, Hobsbawm was completely wrong about the uprising itself and so it cannot be used as evidence for his thesis. On other, less key issues, he was equally wrong. Mintz gives an excellent summary:

*"Since kinship is a key feature in 'primitive' societies, according to Hobsbawm, it was a major factor in the leadership of the sindicato [union] in Casas Viejas.*

*"There is no evidence that kinship had anything to do with leadership in the anarchist movement in Casa Viejas or anywhere else. The reverse would be closer to the truth. Since the anarchists expressed belief in universal brotherhood, kinship ties were often undermined. In times of strike or in carrying out any decision of the collective membership, obreros conscientes sometimes had to act counter to their kinship demands in order to keep faith with the movement and with their companeros.*

*"Hobsbawm's specific examples are unfortunately based in part on errors of fact. . .*

*"Hobsbawm's model [also] requires a charismatic leader. Accordingly, the inspired leader of the uprising is said to be 'old Curro Cruz ('Six Fingers') who issued the call for revolution . . . '*

*[. . .]*

*"This celebration of Seisdedo's role ['Six Fingers'], however, ignores the unanimous view of townspeople of every class and political persuasion, who assert that the old man was apolitical and had nothing to do with the uprising . . . every observer and participant in the uprising agrees that Seisdedos was not the leader and was never*

*anything other than a virtuous charcoal burner with but a slight interest in anarchosyndicalism.*

[. . .]

*"Should the role of charismatic leader be given to someone else in the town? This was not a case of mistaken identity. No single person in Casas Viejas could lay claim to dominating the hearts and minds of the men. . . The sindicato was governed by a junta [committee]. Among the cast of characters there is no sign of charismatic leadership . . ." [Op. Cit., pp. 274-6]*

Mintz sums up by stating *"Hobsbawm's adherence to a model, and the accumulation of misinformation, led him away from the essential conflicts underlying the tragedy and from the reality of the people who participated in it."* [Op. Cit., p. 276]

The Jerez uprising of 1892 also fails to provide Hobsbawm with any empirical evidence to support his claims. Indeed, as in Casas Viejas, the evidence actually works against him. The events of the uprising are as follows. Just before midnight of 8th January 1892, several hundred workers entered the town of Jerez crying *"Long live the revolution! Long live Anarchy!"* Armed with only rocks, sticks, scythes and other farm equipment, they marched toward the city jail with the evident intention of releasing its prisoners -- who included many political prisoners, victims of the government's recent anti-anarchist campaign. A few people were killed and the uprising dispersed by a regiment of mounted troops.

Hobsbawm claims this revolt as evidence for his *"primitive rebels"* thesis. As historian George R. Esenwein argues:

*"[T]he Jerez incident cannot be explained in terms of this model. What the millenarian view fails to do in this instance is to credit the workers with the ability to define their own political goals. This is not to deny that there were millenarian aspects of the rising, for the mob action of the workers on the night of 8 January indicates a degree of irrationalism that is consistent with millenarian behaviour. But . . . the agitators seem to have had a clear motive in mind when they rose: they sought to release their comrades from the local jail and thereby demonstrate their defiance of the government's incessant persecution of the International [Workers' Association] movement. However clumsily and crudely they expressed their grievance, the workers were patently aiming to achieve this objective and not to overthrow the local government in order to inaugurate the birth of a libertarian society."* [Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain: 1868-1898, p. 184]

Similarly, many Marxists (and liberal historians) point to the *"cycle of insurrections"* that occurred during the 1930s. They usually portray these revolts as isolated insurrections organised by the FAI who appeared in villages and proclaimed libertarian communism. The picture is one of disorganisation, millenarianism and a belief in spontaneous revolution inspired by a few militants and their daring actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *"cycle of insurrections"* was far more complex than this, as Juan Gomez Casas makes clear:

*"Between 1932 and 1934 . . . the Spanish anarchists tried to destroy the existing social order through a series of increasingly violent strikes and insurrections, which*

*were at first spontaneous, later co-ordinated.*" [Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI, p. 135]

Stuart Christie stresses this point when he wrote "[i]t has been widely assumed that the cycle of insurrections which began in . . . January 1933 were organised and instigated by the FAI . . . In fact the rising had nothing to do with the FAI. It began as an entirely spontaneous local affair directed against a local employer, but quickly mushroomed into a popular movement which threatened to engulf the whole of Catalonia and the rest of Spain . . . [CNT militant] Arturo Parera later confirmed that the FAI had not participated in the aborted movement 'as an organisation.'" [We, the Anarchists, p. 66] While the initial revolts, such as those of the miners of Alto Llobregat in January 1932, were spontaneous acts which caught the CNT and FAI by surprise, the following insurrections became increasingly organised and co-ordinated by those organisations. The January 1933 revolt, as noted above, was based around a planned strike by the CNT railway workers union. The revolt of December 1933 was organised by a National Revolutionary Committee. Both revolts aimed at uprisings all across Spain, based on the existing organisations of the CNT -- the unions and their Defence committees. Such a degree of planning belies any claims that Spanish Anarchists were "*primitive rebels*" or did not understand the complexities of modern society or what was required to change it.

Ultimately, Hobsbawm's thesis and its underlying model represents Marxist arrogance and sectarianism. His model assumes the validity of the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on mass political parties based on hierarchical, centralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians. It was for this reason that Marx, faced with the increased influence of Bakunin, overturned the First International's original basis of free discussion with his own concept of what a real workers' movement should be.

Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement would also diverge. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies. The general policies of the International would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected the free political development that flowed from local needs. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common programme of "*political action*" (i.e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what he considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International -- and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor that of his followers -- as can be seen, Hobsbawm (mis)interpreted anarchism and its history thanks to this Marxist model and vision.

Once we look at the anarchist movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that rather than being a movement of "*primitive rebels*" Spanish Anarchism was a movement of working class people using valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals -- tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the

Marxist model for what it is -- just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement. Moreover, as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct. Therefore, rather than being "*primitive rebels*" or sectarian politics forced upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to build a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist political party.

## 2. How accurate is Felix Morrow's book on the Spanish Revolution?

It is fair to say that most Marxists base their criticisms of the Spanish Anarchism, particularly the revolution of 1936, on the work of American Trotskyist Felix Morrow. Morrow's book **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, first published in 1938, actually is not that bad -- for some kinds of information. However, it is written as Trotskyist propaganda and all too often Morrow is inaccurate, being over-eager to bend reality to fit the party line. This is particularly the case when discussing the actions and ideas of the CNT and FAI and when discussing the activities of his fellow Trotskyists in Spain, the Bolshevik-Leninists. We discuss the first set of inaccuracies in the following sections, here we discuss the second, Morrow's comments on the Spanish Trotskyists as this shows the book's limitations.

The Bolshevik-Leninists, an obscure sect who perhaps numbered 20 members at most, are transformed by Morrow into the only ones who could save the Spanish Revolution -- because they alone were members of the Fourth International, which Morrow's own party was affiliated to. As he put it:

*"Only the small forces of the Bolshevik-Leninists. . . clearly pointed the road for the workers."* [**Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 191]

And:

*"Could that party [the party needed to lead the revolution] be any but a party standing on the platform of the Fourth International?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 248]

And so on. As we will make clear in the following discussion, Morrow was as wrong about this as he was about anarchism.

So what of the Bolshevik-Leninists? Morrow's description of its "*small forces*" was, to say the least, an understatement:

*"Trotsky's hopes... rested on the very limited forces of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists. At the beginning of the war there had been no organised Trotskyist group in Spain... the Bolsheviks-Leninist group consisted mainly of foreigners. It never had more than about thirty members and only appear to have produced three copies of its newspaper during the course of the war. An internal report, written in December 1936 by some of its members leaves little doubt to the group's initial weakness. The first problem was that the best militants when they first arrived in Spain were anxious to prove themselves and most went to the front instead of 'organising a solid nucleus' in the rearguard. There remained in the rear 'only a handful of incompetents, careerists and adventurers.' and soon the group found itself 'without any organisation*

*and completely disoriented'. As foreigners, they lacked 'solid links with the working class', had 'an insufficient knowledge of the language or the habits of the masses' and came up against 'enormous difficulties in their political work'.* [Andy Durgan, "Trotsky, The POUM and the Spanish Revolution", pp. 43-74, **Journal of Trotsky Studies**, No. 2, 1994, p. 62]

Significantly, while every other left-wing party, group or union massively increased its membership during this period, the Trotskyists stayed tiny so suggesting that its message was less than convincing. This may have been, in part, due to anarchists informing the working class of the reality of Trotsky in power for many years, forcing the POUM to stress that it aimed at dictatorship "by the entire laboring class" and opposed any attempt "to convert the dictatorship of the proletariat into a party dictatorship" (as we discuss in [section 12](#), Trotsky in 1937 was still arguing for the dictatorship of the party). [quoted by Victor Alba, **Spanish Marxism vs Soviet Communism**, p. 131] However, while the number of organised Trotskyists did not increase much, the number of Trotskyist groups doubled as "from November 1936 onwards, there were two competing Trotskyist groups in Spain", with an attempt to reunify the two groups in January 1937 failing due to "a refusal to discuss the existing political differences of opinion." The Bolshevik-Leninists had "around thirty [members], the Trotskyists from the 'Le Soviet' GBL about eight, and Cell 72 of the POUM around a dozen." [Agustin Guillamon, **Insurrection: The Bloody Events of May 1937 in Barcelona**, p. 328 and p. 331fn] The poor condition of Trotskyism in Spain and its lack of influence and growth should show that Morrow's grasp of the situation and needs of the revolution were lacking.

The POUM -- a far more significant Marxist party in Spain, though still small compared to the anarchists -- is also written up as far more important than it was, and slagged off for failing to lead the masses to victory (or listening to the Bolshevik-Leninists or Trotsky). The Fourth Internationalists "offered the POUM the rarest and most precious form of aid: a consistent Marxist analysis" (never mind Spanish workers needing guns and solidarity!). [Op. Cit., p. 105] But when such a prepared programme was offered to the POUM by a representative of the Fourth International -- only two hours after arriving in Spain, a quarter of an hour into a meeting with its leaders, according to its newspaper [quoted by Morrow, Op. Cit., p. 139] -- the POUM were not interested and it has been both attacked (and claimed as their own) by Trotskyists ever since.

It is Morrow's attacks on anarchism, though, that have most readily entered leftist folklore -- even among Marxists who reject Leninism. Some of Morrow's criticisms are fair enough -- but these were voiced by anarchists before Morrow put pen to paper, as shown when he quotes and accepts the analyses of anarchists like Camillo Berneri ("*Beneri had been right*") and praises Durruti ("*the greatest military figure produced by the war*") -- while also sticking the boot into anarchism. The illogical nature of this approach can be seen when Morrow praises Indeed, Durruti's analysis but he is transformed into "*no theoretician, but an activist leader of masses. . . his words express the revolutionary outlook of the class-conscious workers.*" [Op. Cit., p. 153, p. 224 and p. 250] Of course, Durruti's words, activity and outlook did not spring out of thin air but rather, to state the obvious, were informed by and reflected his anarchist politics, history, activity and vision (which in turn reflected his experiences and needs as a member of the CNT and the working class).

Typically for today's left, perhaps, the most quoted sections of Morrow's book are the most inaccurate. In the next eight sections we discuss some of the most inaccurate claims. After

that we point out that Morrow's analysis of the militias is deeply ironic given Trotsky's actions as leader of the Red Army. Then we discuss some of Morrow's inaccurate assertions about anarchism in general.

Of course, some of the errors we highlight in Morrow's work are the product of the conditions in which it was written -- thousands of miles from Spain in America, dependent on papers produced by Spanish Marxists, Anarchists and others. We cannot blame him for such mistakes (although we can blame the Trotskyist publisher who reprints his account without indicating his factual errors and the Marxist writers who repeat his claims without checking their accuracy). We **do**, however, blame Morrow for his errors and misrepresentations of the activities and politics of the Spanish Anarchists and anarchism in general. These errors derive from his politics and the all-too-common inability of Marxists to understand anarchism. Worse, he also seems unaware of facts about his own ideology and its defining event, the Russian Revolution. This leads to the ironic situation of praising the CNT and FAI for policies which were explicitly rejected by Trotsky when he was in power.

By the end of our discussion we hope to show why anarchists argue that Morrow's book is deeply flawed and its objectively skewed by its author's politics and so cannot be taken at face value. It may bring comfort to those Marxists who look for ready-made answers and are prepared to accept the works of hacks at face-value. Those who want to learn from the past -- instead of re-writing it -- will have to look elsewhere.

### 3. Did a "*highly centralised*" FAI control the CNT?

According to Morrow, "*Spanish Anarchism had in the FAI a highly centralised party apparatus through which it maintained control of the CNT*". [Op. Cit., p. 100] In reality, the FAI -- the Iberian Anarchist Federation -- was founded, in 1927, as a confederation of regional federations (including the Portuguese Anarchist Union). These regional federations, in turn, co-ordinated local and district federations of highly autonomous anarchist affinity groups. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*"Like the CNT, the FAI was structured along confederal lines: the affinity groups were linked together in a Local Federation and the Local Federation in District and Regional Federations. A Local Federation was administered by an ongoing secretariat, usually of three persons, and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. This body comprised a sort of local executive committee. To allow for a full expression of rank-and-file views, the Local Federation was obliged to convene assemblies of all the **faistas** in its area. The District and Regional Federations, in turn, were simply the Local federation writ large, replicating the structure of the lower body. All the Local Districts and Regional Federations were linked together by a Peninsular Committee whose tasks, at least theoretically, were administrative. . . [A FAI secretary] admits that the FAI 'exhibited a tendency towards centralism' . . . Yet it must also be emphasised that the affinity groups were far more independent than any comparable bodies in the Socialist Party, much less the Communist. . . the FAI was not an internally repressive organisation . . . Almost as a matter of second nature, dissidents were permitted a considerable amount of freedom in voicing and publishing material against the leadership and established policies."* [The Spanish Anarchists, pp. 197-8]

And:

*"Most writers on the Spanish labour movement seem to concur in the view that, with the departure of the moderates, the CNT was to fall under the complete domination of the FAI . . . But is this appraisal correct? The FAI . . . was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks. . . They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies -- a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*

*"The FAI, moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed 'line' like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all **faistas** could mechanically guide their actions."* [Op. Cit., p. 224]

So, while the FAI may have had centralising tendencies, a "highly centralised" political party it was not. Further, many anarcho-syndicalists and affinity groups were not in the FAI (though most seem to have supported it), and many FAI members put loyalty to the CNT (the anarcho-syndicalist union confederation) first. For instance, according to the minutes of the FAI national plenum of January-February 1936:

*"The Regional Committee [of Aragon, Rioja, and Navarra] is completely neglected by the majority of the militants because they are absorbed in the larger activities of the CNT"* [quoted by Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI**, p. 165]

Likewise, a report of the Regional Federation of the North stated:

*"One of the reasons for the poor condition of the FAI was the fact that almost all the comrades were active in the defence groups of the CNT"* [quoted by Gomez Casas, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168]

Anarchists were obviously the main influence in the CNT. Indeed, the CNT was syndicalist when it was founded in 1910, 17 years before the FAI was born, and had committed itself to libertarian communism at its second national congress in 1919, 8 years before the FAI came into being. Morrow, however, was not the first person to assert "FAI control" of the CNT existed. In fact, this claim of was an invention of a reformist minority within the union -- people like Angel Pestana, ex-CNT National Secretary, who wanted to turn the CNT into a politically "neutral" union and who later showed what he meant by forming the Syndicalist Party and standing for Parliament (the Cortes). In the struggle against the reformists, anarcho-syndicalists -- inside the FAI or not -- voted for people they trusted to run CNT committees. The reformists (called **Treinistas**) lost, split from the CNT (taking about 10% of the membership with them), and the myth of "*FAI dictatorship*" was born. Rather than accept that the membership no longer supported them, the **Treinistas** consoled themselves with tales that a minority, the FAI, had taken control of the CNT.

In reality, due to its decentralised and federal structure, the FAI could not have had the sort of dominance over the CNT that is often attributed to it. At union congresses, where policies and the programme for the movement were argued out: "*delegates, whether or not they were members of the FAI, were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership*

*meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions.*" [Juan Gomez Casas, **Op. Cit.**, p. 121]

The union committees were typically rotated out of office frequently and their members continued to work as wage-earners. In a movement so closely based on the shop floor, the FAI could not maintain influence for long if they ignored the concerns and opinions of co-workers. Moreover, only a minority of the anarcho-syndicalist activists in the CNT belonged to the FAI and, as Juan Gomez Casas points out, FAI militants frequently had a prior loyalty to the CNT:

*"As a minority organisation, the FAI could not possibly have had the kind of control attributed to it . . . in 1931 . . . there were fifty CNT members for each member of a FAI group. The FAI was strongly federalist, with its groups at the base freely associated. It could not dominate an organisation like the CNT, which had fifty times as many members and was also opposed to hierarchy and centralism. We know that FAI militants were also CNT militants, and frequently they were loyal first to the CNT. Their influence was limited to the base of the organisation through participation in the plenums of militants or unions meetings . . . The myth of the FAI as conqueror and ruler of the CNT was created basically by the **Treinistas**"* [Op. Cit., pp. 133-4]

Part of the problem may come from the tendency of historians and opponents of anarchism to project notions derived from hierarchical organisations, such as political parties or social-democratic unions, onto the CNT, so thinking that there were bureaucratic structures which could be seized and welded after an institutional coup. As one historian with a better grasp of the CNT's nature indicates:

*"Some historians have suggested that the FAI orchestrated a seizure of power within the CNT to oust the moderate leadership. Such a view is based on a serious misjudgement about the nature of the CNT, which was a 'bottom-up' and not a 'topdown' organisation . . . [W]hen the moderates dominated the CNT National Committee during 1931, the union 'leadership' was never really in a position to exert control over the rank-and-file. Moreover, given the decentralised, federalist structure of the CNT, there was no organisational apparatus to seize. Meanwhile, the FAI lacked any real organisational coherence until around 1934" 35 and was in no position to 'seize' control of the CNT in 1931, when it had around 2,000 activists throughout Spain.*" [Chris Ealham, **Anarchism and the City**, p. 100]

Therefore, Morrow is (knowingly or not) reating an argument which was produced by the reformist wing of the CNT after it had lost influence in the union rank-and-file. Perhaps he judges the FAI by his own standards? After all, the aim of Leninists is for the vanguard party to control the labour unions in their countries. Anarchists reject such a vision and believe in union autonomy -- influence of political parties and groups should only exist in as much as they influence the rank-and-file who control the union. Rather than aim to control the CNT, the FAI worked to influence its membership. In the words of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

*"There is not a single militant who as a 'FAIista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who us exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

In other words, the FAI "controlled" the CNT only to the extent it influenced the membership -- who, in fact, controlled the organisation. We must also note that Ascaso's comment echoes Bakunin's that the *"purpose of the Alliance [i.e. anarchist federation] is to promote the Revolution . . . it will combat all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people, either by cliques or individuals. The Alliance will promote the Revolution only through the NATURAL BUT NEVER OFFICIAL INFLUENCE of all members of the Alliance."* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 387]

Regardless of Morrow's claims, the FAI was a federation of autonomous affinity groups in which, as one member put it, *"[e]ach FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding . . . they had no . . . opportunity or jurisdiction . . . to foist a party line upon the grass-roots."* [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28] There was co-ordination in a federal structure, of course, but that did not create a *"highly centralised"* party-like organisation. Morrow judged the FAI according to his own standards, squeezing it into his ideological vision of the world rather than reporting the reality of the situation (see Stuart Christie's work for a more detailed refutation of the usual Marxist and Liberal inventions of the activities and nature of the FAI).

In addition, Morrow's picture of the FAI implicitly paints the CNT as a mere *"transmission belt"* -- to use Lenin's term -- for that organisation (and so a re-production of the Bolshevik position on the relationship of the labour unions and the revolutionary party). Such a picture, however, ignores the CNT's character as a non-hierarchical, self-managed mass movement which had many tendencies within it. It also fails to understand the way anarchists seek to influence mass organisations -- not by assuming positions of power but by convincing their fellow workers' of the validity of their ideas in policy making mass assemblies (see [section J.3.6](#) for more details). Likewise, they reflect Leninist prejudices about centralism, the notion that centralism is automatically more efficient and effective than federalism, so looking at the success of the FAI in spreading anarchist ideas within the CNT he concluded that it must have been *"highly centralised"* because it was highly effective.

In other words, Morrow's claims are simply false and express a total lack of understanding of the nature of the CNT, the FAI and their relationship. They reflect his own ideological assumptions on the relationship between revolutionaries and the masses.

## **4. What is the history of the CNT and the Communist International?**

Morrow states that the *"tide of the October Revolution had, for a short time, overtaken the CNT. It had sent a delegate to the Comintern [Communist International] Congress in 1921. The anarchists had then resorted to organised fraction work and recaptured it . . . Henceforward . . . the FAI . . . maintained control of the CNT."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As we will discuss, in reality the CNT sent two delegations to Russia -- one which was agreed at its 1919 Second Congress and which attended the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 and the later one which Morrow refers to. This is unsurprisingly, for as we noted in [section A.5.5](#), the Russian Revolutions of 1917 had inspired anarchists across the world, with many (particularly Russian exiles) travelling to Russia to participate in it (whether freely, like Voline, or, in the case of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, after being deported for being dangerous radicals). Likewise, many anarchist groups and syndicalist unions sent delegations to Russia to show solidarity with the revolution, to get first-hand reports of developments and to learn from it in order to produce revolutions in their own countries. However, when these delegations returned home and reported on what they had seen in both Russia and in the Comintern, most libertarians were horrified and rejected Bolshevism. The grim reality of Bolshevik Russia (see, for example, , rather than "*fraction work*" by anarchists, explains the CNT's disaffiliation from the Comintern.

Partly it is the inability of the Communist Party and its Trotskyist off-shoots to dominate the CNT which explains Morrow's comments. Seeing anarchism as "petty bourgeois" it is hard to combine this with the obvious truth that a mass, revolutionary, workers' union could be so heavily influenced by anarchism rather than Marxism. Hence the need for anarchist "control" of the CNT: it allows Trotskyists to ignore dangerous ideological questions. As J. Romero Maura notes, the question why anarchism influenced the CNT "*in fact raises the problem why the reformist social democratic, or alternatively the communist conceptions, did not impose themselves on the CNT as they managed to in most of the rest of Europe. This question . . . is based on the false assumption that the anarcho-syndicalist conception of the workers' struggle in pre-revolutionary society was completely at odds with what the **real** social process signified (hence the constant reference to religious', 'messianic', models as explanations).*" He argues that the "*explanation of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist success in organising a mass movement with a sustained revolutionary **elan** should initially be sought in the very nature of the anarchist concept of society and of how to achieve revolution.*" ["*The Spanish Case*", **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 78 and p. 65] Once we do that, we can see the weakness of Morrow's (and others) fixation on the FAI -- having dismissed the obvious reason for anarchist influence, namely its practicality and valid politics, there can only be "control by the FAI."

However, the question of affiliation of the CNT to the Comintern is worth discussing as it indicates the differences between anarchists and Leninists. As will be seen, the truth of this matter is somewhat different to Morrow's claims and indicates well his distorted vision.

As noted, Morrow started his account with a factual error: the CNT in fact sent two delegations to the Comintern. At its 1919 national congress, the CNT discussed the Russian Revolution and accepted a proposition that linked it to the federalist-wing of the First International:

*"The Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo declares itself a firm defender of the principles that guided the First International, as conceived by Bakunin . . . Declares that it affiliates, provisionally, to the Third International, due to its revolutionary character, whilst the International Congress is organised and held in Spain, to define the basic principles that will govern the true International of workers."* [quoted by Jason Garner, **Goals and Means**, p. 89]

It went on to re-state its long-standing anarchist aims:

*"Bearing in mind that the tendency that has the greatest force at the heart of the workers' organisations of all countries is that which leads to the complete, total and absolute liberation of humanity morally, economically and politically, and considering that this objective cannot be achieved until the land and the instruments of production and exchange are socialised, and the tyrannical power of the state disappears, [we] propose to the congress, that in agreement with the essence of the proposals of the workers' International, [it] declares that the ultimate goal of the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo in Spain is libertarian communism."* [quoted by Garner, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 89-90]

So while the CNT voted to provisionally affiliate with the Communist International, it also reiterated its libertarian politics -- a politics fundamentally at odds with the Bolshevik ideology. This position is not surprising, given the lack of concrete information of what was happening in Russia under the Bolsheviks, lack of awareness of what the Bolsheviks actually stood for and libertarian support for the overthrow of the Tsarist regime and bourgeois Provisional government in 1917. Hence the need for the CNT to send a delegation to Russia in order to investigate at first hand the new regime and what it actually stood for.

In June 1920, Angel Pestana arrived in Moscow and represented the CNT at the Second Congress of the Communist International. He was arrested when he arrived back in Spain and so could not give his eye-witness account of the strangulation of the revolution and the deeply dishonest manipulation of the congress by the Communist Party. A later delegation arrived in April 1921, headed by Andres Nin and Joaquin Maurin professing to represent the CNT. Actually, Nin and Maurin represented virtually no one but the Lerida local federation (their stronghold). Their actions and claims were disavowed by a plenum of the CNT the following August.

How did Nin and Maurin manage to get into a position to be sent to Russia? Simply because of the repression the CNT was under at the time. This was the period when Catalan bosses hired gun men to assassinate CNT members and the police exercised the notorious practice known as *ley de fugas* (shot while trying to escape). In such a situation, the normal workings of the CNT came under much stress and *"with the best known libertarian militants imprisoned, deported, exiled, if not murdered outright, Nin and his group managed to hoist themselves on to the National Committee . . . Pestana's report not being available, it was decided that a further delegation should be sent . . . in response to Moscow's invitation to the CNT to take part in the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions."* [Ignacio de Llorens, **The CNT and the Russian Revolution**, p. 8] Juan Gomez Casas confirms this account:

*"At a plenum held in Lerida in 1921, while the CNT was in disarray [due to repression] in Catalonia, a group of Bolsheviks was designated to represent the Spanish CNT in Russia . . . The restoration of constitutional guarantees by the Spanish government in April 1922, permitted the anarcho-syndicalists to meet in Saragossa in June 11 . . . [where they] confirmed the withdrawal of the CNT from the Third International and the entrance on principle into the new [revolutionary syndicalist] International Working Men's Association."* [**Anarchist Organisation: History of the FAI**, p. 61]

We should note that along with pro-Bolshevik Nin and Maurin was anarchist Gaston Leval. Leval quickly got in touch with Russian and other anarchists, helping some imprisoned

Russia anarchists get deported after bringing news of their hunger strike to the assembled international delegates. By embarrassing Lenin and Trotsky, Leval helped save his comrades from the prison camp and so saved their lives. By the time Leval arrived back in Spain, Pestana's account of his experiences had been published -- along with accounts of the Bolshevik repression of workers, the Kronstadt revolt, the anarchist movement and other socialist parties. These accounts made it clear that the Russian Revolution had become dominated by the Communist Party and the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" little more than dictatorship by the central committee of that party. Indeed, leading Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev had openly admitted this at the Comintern's Second Congress in 1920:

*"[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class . . . [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party."* [**Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920**, vol. 2, p. 928 and pp. 151-2]

Unsurprisingly, then, Pestana report was negative in terms of both the new regime and on whether the CNT should remain affiliated. [*"Report on the action taken by the delegate Angel Pestana at the second congress of the third international which was presented by him to the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo"*, **Revolutionary Russia**, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 39-103]

Moreover, the way the two internationals operated violated basic libertarian principles. Firstly, the "*Red Labour International completely subordinated trade unions to the Communist Party.*" [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 38] This completely violated the CNT principle of unions being controlled by their members (via self-management from the bottom up). Secondly, the congresses' methodology in its debates and decision-making were alien to the CNT tradition. In that organisation self-management was its pride and glory and its gatherings and congresses reflected this. Pestana could not fathom the fierce struggle surrounding the make-up of the chairmanship of the Comintern congress:

*"Pestana says that he was particularly intrigued by the struggle for the chairmanship. He soon realised that the chair was the congress, and that the Congress was a farce. The chairman made the rules, presided over deliberations, modified proposals at will, changed the agenda, and presented proposals of his own. For a start, the way the chair handled the gavel was very inequitable. For example, Zinoviev gave a speech which lasted one and one-half hours, although each speaker was supposedly limited to ten minutes. Pestana tried to rebut the speech, but was cut off by the chairman, watch in hand. Pestana himself was rebutted by Trotsky who spoke for three-quarters of an hour, and when Pestana wanted to answer Trotsky's attack on him, the chairman declared the debate over."* [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 37-8]

In addition, Pestana "*also protested the way in which speakers were chosen. Theoretically each delegate could speak on every issue, but the chair selected 'the most capable ones' . . . Nor did they vote by national delegation, only by individual delegate. It had been agreed to count the vote proportionally, but the agreement was not kept, and the Russian Communist Party assured for itself a comfortable majority.*" Worse, "*certain decisions were made behind the scenes and never reached the assembly at all.*" That is how the resolution that "[i]n the

*future worldwide Congresses of the Third International, participating trade union organizations will be represented by delegates from the Communist Party of their respective countries" was adopted while "[o]bjections to this decision were simply ignored." [Peirats, Op. Cit., p. 38]*

Many of the syndicalist delegates to this pantomime of a congress later meet in Berlin and founded the revolutionary syndicalist **International Workers' Association** based on union autonomy, self-management and federalism (see Wayne Thorpe's "**The Workers Themselves**": **Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923** for details). Unsurprisingly, once Pestana and Leval reported back to their organisation -- combined with other accounts from libertarians, from Spain or elsewhere -- the CNT rejected the Bolshevik Myth and re-affirmed the libertarian principles it had proclaimed at its 1919 congress. At a plenum of the CNT in 1922, the organisation withdrew its provisional affiliation and voted to join the syndicalist International formed in Berlin. As one historian summarises:

*"The CNT withdrew from the Profintern because, in line with revolutionary syndicalist doctrine, the vast majority of its members opposed party political influence in the unions. The weakness of the communist-syndicalist position was amply demonstrated when a lull in the repression carried out against the CNT in early 1922 led to the release of the detained militants; as a result they were abruptly removed from their positions and their policy towards Moscow overturned . . . As [leading CNT militant Salvador] Segui proclaimed at Zaragoza that the CNT's split from the Profintern resulted from the fact that 'a chasm separates us from Russia, both in ideology and in tactics'." [Garner, Op. Cit., pp. 111]*

Furthermore, the CNT was not alone: *"Significantly the majority of organisations that attended the London [syndicalist] congress of 1913 (or their successor organisations) could be found amongst those that would eventually form a new International Working Men's Association (IWMA) at the Berlin congress of December 1922 to January 1923 . . . Just as had occurred with the majority of CNT militants, members of the other organisations underwent a gradual evolution from outright support for both the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism to a position whereby they differentiated between the aims of the former and the politics of the latter."* [Garner, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 113-4] It must be stressed that while anarchists were influential in most, but by no means all, of the IWMA's founding unions, these were not anarchist but revolutionary syndicalist. As such, the notion that the failure to Bolshevise the CNT was the result of Anarchist "*fraction work*" is simply nonsense -- the Comintern was rejected by most syndicalist unions and their militants across the world.

Therefore, rather than the anarchists conducting "*fraction work*" to "*recapture*" the CNT, the facts are the pro-Bolshevik National Committee of 1921 came about due to the extreme repression the CNT was subjected to, with militants were being imprisoned or assassinated in the streets. In this context it is easy to see how an unrepresentative minority could temporarily gain influence in the National Committee. Moreover, it was CNT plenary session which revoked the organisations provisional affiliation to the Comintern -- that is, a regular meeting of mandated and accountable delegates. In other words, by the membership itself who had been informed of what had actually been happening under the Bolsheviks. In addition, it was this plenum which agreed affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** recently founded by syndicalists and anarchists horrified by the Bolshevik dictatorship.

Thus the decision of the CNT in 1922 (and the process by which this decision was made) follow exactly the decisions and processes of 1919. That congress agreed to provisionally affiliate to the Comintern until such time as a real workers' International inspired by the ideas of Bakunin was created. The only difference was that this International was formed in Germany, not Spain. Given this, it is impossible to argue that the anarchists "*recaptured*" the CNT. The few pro-Bolsheviks in the CNT simply benefited from the impact of State repression against the union as well as the lack of reliable information on the Bolshevik regime from trusted (i.e., non-bourgeois) sources. Once both of these were reduced, their position became as untenable as continued CNT association with the Bolshevik regime and their controlled Internationals:

*"Due to the ongoing repression borne by the CNT, its flirtation with Communism lasted longer than would otherwise have been the case. Angel Pestana, its only delegate to attend the second Comintern Congress in Moscow, in the summer of 1920, could not have been more disappointed by his experience. Arrested and held in Italy for two months on his return journey and then imprisoned in Barcelona for 15 more months, he was prevented for a long time from sharing his conclusions with his comrades but his stay in prison was largely used to prepare his report on [Russian] Communism. In June 1922, at long last, Pestana was able to put forward his views in a national gathering at Zaragoza, where, by an overwhelming majority . . . the CNT duly broke its links with the Comintern. It was ludicrous to expect that a federalist mass organization of this stamp would be prepared to subordinate its initiatives to a small [Spanish Communist Party] that itself was blindly following Moscow's dictates. Furthermore, Anarcho-Syndicalists were by then aware of the bitter attacks levelled against the Bolsheviks by leading European Anarchists and the growing frustration of many Leftists with the authoritarian and repressive character of the Soviet state. The brief romance with the Comintern of the CNT, the largest working-class force in Spain, thus ended."* [Francisco J. Romero Salvado, "*The Comintern Fiasco in Spain: The Borodin Mission and the Birth of the Spanish Communist Party*", pp. 153-177, **Revolutionary Russia**, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 166]

As can be seen, Morrow's comment presents a radically false image of what happened during this period. Rather than resort to "*fraction work*" to "*recapture*" the CNT, the policies of the CNT in 1919 and 1922 were identical. Moreover, the decision to disaffiliate from the Comintern was made by a confederal meeting of mandated delegates representing the rank-and-file as was the original. The anarchists simply continued to influence the membership of the organisation as they had always done. Moreover, the concept of "*recapture*" displays no real understanding of how the CNT worked -- each syndicate was autonomous and self-managed. There was no real officialdom to take over, just administrative posts which were unpaid and conducted after working hours and so each syndicate would ignore any unrepresentative minority.

However, Morrow's comments allow us to indicate some of the key differences between anarchists and Leninists -- the CNT rejected the Comintern because it violated its principles of self-management, union autonomy and equality and built party domination of the union movement in its place.

## **5. Why did the CNT not join the Workers' Alliance?**

Morrow in his discussion of the struggles of the 1930s implies that the CNT was at fault in not joining the Socialist UGT's "*Workers' Alliance*" (**Alianza Obrera**). This was first put forward by the Marxist-Leninists of the BOC (Workers and Peasants Bloc -- later to form the POUM) after their attempts to turn the CNT into a Bolshevik vanguard failed [Paul Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 154]. Socialist Party and UGT interest began only after their election defeat in 1933. By 1934, however, there existed quite a few alliances, including one in Asturias in which the CNT participated. Nationally, however, the CNT refused to join with the UGT and this, Morrow implies, led to the defeat of the October 1934 uprising (see [next section](#) for a discussion of this rebellion).

However, Morrow fails to provide any relevant historical background to understand the CNT's decision. Moreover, their reasons **why** they did not join have a striking similarity to Morrow's own arguments against the "Workers' Alliance" (which may explain why he does not mention them). In effect, the CNT is damned for having policies similar to Morrow's but having principles enough to stick to them.

First, we must discuss the history of UGT and CNT relationships in order to understand the context within which the CNT made its decision. Unless we do this, Morrow's claims may seem more reasonable than they actually are.

From 1931 (the birth of the Second Spanish Republic) to 1933 the Socialists had been in a coalition government with the Republicans and had attacked the CNT (a repeat, in many ways, of the UGT's collaboration with the quasi-fascist Primo de Rivera dictatorship of 1923-30). Laws were passed, with Socialist help, making lightning strikes illegal and state arbitration compulsory. CNT-organised strikes were violently repressed and the UGT often providing scabs as, for example, during the CNT Telephone Company strike of 1931. This strike gives in indication of the role of the socialists during its time as part of the government in which Socialist Largo Caballero was the Minister of Labour:

*"The UGT . . . had its own bone to pick with the CNT. The telephone syndicate, which the CNT had established in 1918, was a constant challenge to the Socialists' grip on the Madrid labour movement. Like the construction workers' syndicate, it was a CNT enclave in a solidly UGT centre. Accordingly, the government and the Socialist Party found no difficulty in forming a common front to break the strike and weaken CNT influence.*

*"The Ministry of Labour declared the strike illegal and the Ministry of the Interior called out the Civil Guard to intimidate the strikers . . . Shedding all pretence of labour solidarity, the UGT provided the **Compania Telefonica** with scabs while **El Socialista**, the Socialist Party organ, accused the CNT of being run by **pistoleros**. Those tactics were successful in Madrid, where the defeated strikers were obliged to enrol in the UGT to retain their jobs. So far as the Socialists were concerned, the CNT's appeals for solidarity had fallen on deaf ears. . .*

*"In Seville, however, the strike began to take on very serious dimensions. . . on July 20, a general strike broke out. . . and serious fighting erupted in the streets. This strike . . . stemmed from the walkout of the telephone workers . . . pitched battles took place in the countryside around the city between the Civil Guard and the agricultural workers. Maura, as minister of interior, decided to crush the 'insurrection' ruthlessly. Martial law was declared and the CNT's headquarters was reduced to shambles by*

*artillery fire. After nine days, during which heavily armed police detachments patrolled the streets, the Seville general strike came to an end. The struggle in the Andalusian capital left 40 dead and some 200 wounded.*" [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 221-2]

Elsewhere, "*[d]uring a Barcelona building strike CNT workers barricaded themselves in and said they would only surrender to regular troops. The army arrived and then machine-gunned them as soon as they surrendered.*" [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 33] In short, the republican-socialist government repressed the CNT with violence as well as using the law to undermine CNT activities and strikes.

Morrow fails to discuss this history of violence against the CNT. He mentions in passing that the republican-socialist coalition government "*[i]n crushing the CNT, the troops broadened the repression to the whole working class.*" He states that "*[u]nder the cover of putting down an anarchist putsch in January 1933, the Civil Guard 'mopped up' various groups of trouble makers. An encounter with peasants at Casas Viejas, early in January 1933, became a **cause celebre** which shook the government to its foundations.*" However, his account of the Casas Viejas massacre is totally inaccurate for he that "*the little village . . . , after two years of patient waiting for the Institute of Agrarian Reform to divide the neighbouring Duke's estate, the peasants had moved in and begun to till the soil for themselves.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 22]

Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, we must note that the land workers (who were not, in the main, peasants) were members of the CNT. Secondly, as we noted in [section 1](#), the uprising had nothing to do with land reform. The CNT members did not "*till the soil*", rather they rose in insurrection as part of a planned CNT-FAI uprising based on an expected rail workers strike (the "*anarchist putsch*" Morrow mentions). The workers were too busy fighting the Civil and Assault Guards to till anything. He is correct in terms of the repression, of course, but his account of the events leading up to it is not only wrong, it is misleading (indeed, it appears to be an invention based on Trotskyist ideology rather than having any basis in reality). Rather than being part of a "*broadened . . . repression [against] the whole working class,*" it was actually part of the "*putting down*" of the anarchist revolt. CNT members were killed -- along with a dozen politically neutral workers who were selected at random and murdered. Thus Morrow downplays the role of the Socialists in repressing the CNT and FAI -- he presents it as general repression rather than a massacre resulting from the defeat of a CNT revolt. Unsurprisingly, he even quotes a Stalinist paper stating that 9,000 political prisoners were in jail in June 1933 before adding these were "*mostly workers.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 23] Yes, they were mostly workers, CNT members in fact: "*In mid-April [1933]. . . the CNT launched a massive campaign to release imprisoned CNT-FAI militants whose numbers had now soared to about 9 000.*" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 231-2] Needless to say, during and after CNT insurrections in Catalonia in 1932, and the much wider insurrections of January and December 1933 (9,000 and 16,000 CNT members jailed, respectively) Socialist solidarity was nil -- but, then, these revolts had been repressed by a government which the Socialist Party was a member of.

To state the obvious, the socialists had been part of a government which repressed CNT strikes and revolts, banned its unions, imprisoned and killed its members, passed laws to restrict their ability to strike and use direct action as well as provided scabs during strikes. Little wonder that Peirats states that in 1934 "*[i]t was difficult for the CNT and the FAI to get used to the idea of an alliance with their Socialist oppressors.*" [**Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 94]

It is **only** in this context can we understand the events of 1934 and the refusal of the CNT to join the UGT's alliance. Morrow, needless to say, does not present this essential context and so the reader cannot understand why the CNT acted as it did in response to belated Socialist appeals for "unity." Instead, Morrow implies that CNT-FAI opposition to "workers alliances" were due to them believing *"all governments were equally bad."* [Op. Cit., p. 29] Perhaps if Morrow had presented an honest account of the repression the republican-socialist government had inflicted on the CNT then the reader could make an informed judgement on why anarchist opposition to the socialist proposals existed.

Moreover, as well as the recent history of socialist repression and scabbing, there was also the experience of a similar alliance between the CNT and UGT that had occurred in 1917. The first test of the alliance came with a miners strike in Andalusia, and a *"CNT proposal for a joint general strike, to be initiated by UGT miners and railway workers, had been rejected by the Madrid Socialists . . . the miners, after striking for four months, returned to work in defeat."* Little wonder that *"the pact was in shreds. It was to be eliminated completely when a general strike broke out in Barcelona over the arrests of the CNT leaders and the assassination of Layret. Once again the CNT called upon the UGT for support. Not only was aid refused but it was denied with an arrogance that clearly indicated the Socialists had lost all interest in future collaboration. . . The strike in Catalonia collapsed and, with it, any prospect of collaboration between the two unions for years to come."* [Bookchin, Op. Cit., pp. 175-6]

Of course, such historical context would confuse readers with facts and so goes unmentioned by Morrow.

In addition, there was another reason for opposing the "workers' alliances" -- particularly an alliance between the UGT and CNT. Given the history of UGT and CNT pacts plus the actions of the UGT and socialists in the previous government it was completely sensible and politically principled. This reason was political and flowed from the CNT's libertarian vision. As Durruti argued in 1934:

*"The alliance, to be revolutionary, must be genuinely working class. It must be the result of an agreement between the workers' organisation, and those alone. No party, however, socialist it may be, can belong to a workers' alliance, which should be built from its foundations, in the enterprises where the workers struggle. Its representative bodies must be the workers' committee chosen in the shops, the factories, the mines and the villages. We must reject any agreement on a national level, between National Committees, but rather favour an alliance carried out at the base by the workers themselves. Then and only then, can the revolutionary drive come to life, develop and take root."* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 154]

Orobon Fernandez argued along similar lines in Madrid's **La Tierra**:

*"Revolutionary proletarian democracy is direct management of society by the workers, a certain bulwark against party dictatorships and a guarantee of the development of the revolution's forces and undertakings. . . what matters must is that general guidelines are laid down so that these may serve as a platform of the alliance and furnish a combative and constructive norm for the united forces . . . [These include:] acceptance of revolutionary proletarian democracy, which is to say, the will of the majority of the proletariat, as the common denominator and determining factor*

*of the new order of things. . . immediate socialisation of the means of production, transportation, exchange, accommodation and finance . . . federated according to their area of interest and confederated at national level, the municipal and industrial organisations will maintain the principle of unity in the economic structure.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 74-5]

The May 1936 Saragossa congress of the CNT passed a resolution concerning revolutionary alliances which was obviously based on these arguments. It stated that in order *"to make the social revolution an effective reality, the social and political system regulating the life of the country has to be utterly destroyed"* and that the *"new revolutionary order will be determined by the free choice of the working class."* In addition, the *"most absolute unity of action is vital to the defence of the new social order. Only through concerted defence will it be possible to defend the revolution from the attack of national and foreign capitalism."* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 100-1] Diego Abad de Santillan, the same year, wrote of *"an alliance rising from the heart of the proletariat, and from the centers of production. It must be for a united front of the producers to assure all who work the full mastery of their product."* [**After the Revolution**, p. 114]

Only such an alliance, from the bottom up and based on workers' self-management could be a revolutionary one. Indeed, any pact not based on this but rather conducted between the leaders at the top of the organisations would be a pact of the CNT with the bureaucracy of the UGT -- and remove any possibility of creating genuine bodies of working class self-management (as the history of the Civil War proved). Indeed, Morrow seems to agree:

*"The broad character of the proletarian insurrection was explained by the Communist Left (Trotskyist). It devoted itself to efforts to build the indispensable instrument of the insurrection: workers' councils constituted by delegates representing all the labour parties and unions, the shops and streets; to be created in every locality and joined together nationally . . . Unfortunately, the socialists failed to understand the profound need of these Workers' Alliances. The bureaucratic traditions were not to be so easily overcome . . . the socialist leaders thought that the Workers' Alliances meant they would have merely to share leadership with the Communist Left and other dissident communist groups . . . actually in most cases they [Workers' Alliances] were merely 'top' committees, without elected or lower-rank delegates, that is, little more than liaison committees between the leadership of the organisations involved."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 27-8]

Bar the reference to *"labour parties,"* Morrow's *"indispensable instrument"* is identical to anarchist arguments against taking part in the *"Workers' Alliances"* created by the UGT and for the creation of genuine alliances from the bottom-up. Thus Morrow faults the CNT for trying to force the UGT to form a **real** workers' alliance by not taking part in what Morrow himself admits were *"little more than liaison committees between the leadership"*! Also, Morrow argues that *"[w]ithout developing soviets -- workers' councils -- it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie"* and he asks *"[h]ow could party agreements be the substitute for the necessary vast network of workers' councils?"* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 89 and p. 114] Which was, of course, the CNT-FAI's argument. It seems strange that Morrow faults the CNT for trying to create real workers' councils, the *"indispensable instrument"* of the revolution, by not taking part in a *"party agreements"* urged by the UGT which would undermine real attempts at rank-and-file unity from below.

Of course, Morrow's statement that "*labour parties and unions*" should be represented by delegates as well as "*the shop and street*" contradicts claims it would be democratic as it would mean that some workers would have multiple votes (one from their workplace, one from their union and one from their party -- indeed, as discussed in [section H.6.1](#), the Bolsheviks artificially maintained majorities in soviets in the face of falling popular support by packing them with "delegates" from organisations they controlled). Moreover, it would mean that parties would have an influence greater than their actual support in the working class -- something a minuscule group like the Spanish Trotskyists would obviously favour as would the bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Little wonder the anarchists urged a workers' alliance made up of actual workers rather than an organisation which would allow bureaucrats, politicians and sects more influence than they actually had or deserved.

In addition, the "Workers' Alliances" were not seen by the UGT and Socialist Party as an organisation of equals. Rather, in words of historian Paul Preston, "*from the first it seemed that the Socialists saw the Alianza Obrera was a possible means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the PSOE and UGT were relatively weak.*" [Op. Cit., p. 154] The Socialist Party allowed regional branches of the Alianza Obrera to be formed only if they could guarantee Party control would never be lost. [Adrian Schubert "*The Epic Failure: The Asturian Revolution of October 1934*", in **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 127] Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, "*in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the Alianza Obrera*" [Spain: 1808-1975, pp. 634-5f] And only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members -- the Catalan **Socialist Union** -- left in protest over PSOE domination while in Madrid the Alianza was "*dominated by the Socialists, who imposed their own policy.*" [Preston, Op. Cit., p. 157 and p. 154] Indeed, as Jose Peirats notes, in Asturias where the CNT had joined the Alliance, "*despite the provisions of the terms of the alliance to which the CNT had subscribed, the order for the uprising was issued by the socialists. In Oviedo a specifically socialist, revolutionary committee was secretly at work in Oviedo, which contained no CNT representatives.*" [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, vol. 1, p. 78] Largo Caballero's desire for trade union unity in 1936 was from a similar mould: "*The clear implication was that proletarian unification meant Socialist take-over.*" Indeed, "*[i]f the use that [Caballero] made of the Alianza Obreras in 1934 had revealed anything, it was that the domination of the working class movement by the UGT meant far more to Largo Caballero than any future prospect of revolution.*" [Preston, Op. Cit., p. 270]

As can be seen, the CNT's position seemed a sensible one given the nature and activities of the "Workers' Alliance" in practice. Also it seems strange that, if unity was the UGT's aim, that a CNT call, made by the national plenary in February 1934, for information and for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, met with no reply. [Peirats, Op. Cit., p. 75]

Thus, the reasons why the CNT did not join in the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" are clear. As well as the natural distrust towards organisations that had repressed them and provided scabs to break their strikes just one year previously, there were political reasons for opposing such an alliance. Rather than being a force to ensure revolutionary organisations springing from the workplace, the "Workers' Alliance" was little more than pacts between the bureaucrats of the UGT and various Marxist Parties to secure the domination of the Socialist Party leadership. This was Morrow's own argument, which also provided the explanation why such an alliance would weaken any real revolutionary movement.

That is exactly what happened in July, 1936, when the CNT did forsake its anarchist politics and joined in a "Workers' Alliance" type organisation with other anti-fascist parties and unions to set up the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias" (see [section 20](#)). Thus Morrow himself provides the explanation of the CNT's **political** rationale for being wary of the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" while refusing to provide the historical context the decision was made.

However, while the CNT's refusal to join the "Workers' Alliance" outside of Asturias may have been principled (and sensible), it may be argued that it was the only organisation at the time with revolutionary potential (indeed, this would be the only argument Trotskyists could put forward to explain their hypocrisy). Such an argument would be false for two reasons.

Firstly, such Alliances may have potentially created a revolutionary situation but they would have hindered the formation of working class organs of self-management such as workers' councils (soviets). This was the experience of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias and of the Asturias revolt -- in spite of massive revolutionary upheaval such councils based on delegates from workplace and community assemblies were **not** formed.

Secondly, the CNT policy of "Unity, yes, but by the rank-and-file" was a valid method of "from the bottom up solidarity." This can be seen from just two examples -- Aragon in 1934 and Madrid in 1936. In Aragon, there was a *"general strike that had totally paralysed the Aragonese capital throughout April 1935, ending . . . on 10 May. . . the Zaragoza general strike had been a powerful advertisement of the value of a united working-class front . . . [However,] no formal agreement . . . had been reached in Zaragoza. The pact there has been created on a purely circumstantial basis with a unity of trade-union action achieved in quite specific circumstances and generated to a considerable extent by the workers themselves."* [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 72] In Madrid, April 1936 (in the words of Morrow himself) *"the CNT declared a general strike . . . The UGT had not been asked to join the strike, and at first had denounced it . . . But the workers came out of all the shops and factories and public services . . . because they wanted to fight, and only the anarchists were calling them to struggle."* [Op. Cit., p. 41]

Thus Morrow's comments against the CNT refusing to join the Workers' Alliance do not provide the reader with the historical context required to make an informed judgement of the CNT's decision. Moreover, they seem hypocritical as the CNT's reasons for refusing to join are similar to Morrow's own arguments against the Workers' Alliance. In addition, the CNT's practical counter-proposal of solidarity from below had more revolutionary potential as it was far more likely to promote rank-and-file unity and aid the creation of self-managed organisations such as workers' councils.

## 6. Was the October 1934 revolt sabotaged by the CNT?

Again, following Morrow, Marxists often allege that the Socialist and Workers Alliance strike wave, of October 1934, was sabotaged by the CNT. To understand this allegation, it is necessary to understand the background to October 1934 and the split in the workers' movement between the CNT and the UGT (unions controlled by the reformist Socialist Party, the PSOE).

Socialist conversion to "revolution" occurred only after the elections of November 1933. In the face of massive and bloody repression by the republican-socialist government (see [last section](#)), the CNT-FAI had agitated for a mass abstention at the polling booth. The election saw the republicans and socialists lose their majority and all the laws they had passed against the CNT were used against them. When cabinet seats were offered to the non-republican (fascist or quasi-fascist) right, in October 1934, the PSOE/UGT called for a national general strike. In only three areas did events develop beyond a mere strike -- Madrid, Catalonia and Asturias -- and in all three, as will be shown, the CNT tried to take part but was faced with socialist hostility.

This hostility manifested itself from the start as the socialists did not inform the CNT beforehand of the strike. This lack of communication predated the events of October, with a call by the CNT, on the 13th of February 1934, for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, had met with no reply. As Peirats argues, "*[t]hat the absence of the CNT did not bother [the UGT and Socialist Party] is clear from their silence in regards to the [CNT's] National Plenary's request.*" [Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 96] Rhetoric aside, the Socialist Party's main aim in October seems to have been to force new elections, so they could again form a (mildly reformist) coalition with the Republicans (their programme for the revolt was written by right-wing socialist Indalecio Prieto and seemed more like an election manifesto prepared by the Liberal Republicans than a programme for revolutionary change). This was the viewpoint of the CNT which feared it would be used as cannon-fodder to help produce another government that would attack it. Such fears were hardly disabused during the events of October, as will be seen.

According to Morrow, the "*backbone of the struggle was broken . . . when the refusal of the CNT railroad workers to strike enabled the government to transport goods and troops*" and that "*[o]nly the failure of the rebellion elsewhere enabled the government to concentrate its full force on Asturias.*" If there has been *three Asturiases, the revolution would have been successful.*" [Op. Cit., p. 30 and p. 31] Sadly, he presents no reference to support his claim on the CNT railroad workers and, as we will see, the failure of the revolt in its three main areas had nothing to do with troops arriving by train and far more to do with the incompetence of those organising them. It should also be noted that the government had declared martial law -- placing any striking railway workers in a very dangerous position. Moreover, outside of Catalonia, the majority of the railway workers belonged to the UGT. [Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 90f] So, railway workers "*were represented by two competing unions -- the Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario of the UGT . . . and the CNT-affiliated FNIFF . . . The UGT . . . controlled the large majority of the workers. [In 1933] Trifon Gomez, secretary of the UGT union, did not believe it possible to mobilise the workers, few of whom had revolutionary aspirations.*" [Jerome R. Mintz, **The Anarchists of Casa Viejas**, p. 178]

This would suggest that Morrow's assertion can be questioned without looking at the details of the revolts in Madrid, Barcelona and Asturias. However, these revolts should be discussed as this will show the baseless nature of Morrow's assertion for during October the only real centre of resistance was in Asturias while the Madrid and Barcelona revolts were fiascoes. In short, CNT action or inaction was not cause for the defeat of the October 1934 revolt -- particularly as the CNT took an active part in events in Asturias and tried to do so in Barcelona and Madrid but were stopped by their organisers.

This is most obvious in Barcelona. According to Morrow, Catalonia "should have been the fortress of the uprising" and that "[t]errribly discredited for their refusal to join the October revolt, the anarchists sought to apologise by pointing to the repression they were undergoing at the time from Companys." [Op. Cit., p. 30 and p. 32] More recently, a historian repeated some of his claims:

*"In Asturias, in October 1934, the Alianza Obrera (Workers' Alliance) . . . launched the largest workers' insurrection in Europe since the 1871 Paris Commune . . . The immediate cause of the rising was the news that the quasi-fascist CEDA was about to form a coalition government with the Radicals in Madrid . . . In Catalonia, however, the CNT leaders were locked in their local war against the Generalitat and the rest of the Catalan Left. So, while the ERC-controlled Generalitat was, for many republicans, the 'bulwark of the Republic', for Catalan anarchists devolution had resulted in a historic offensive by the ERC-controlled police against the CNT. The repression of the Catalan CNT - which far exceeded anything the organisation faced in areas under the jurisdiction of the Spanish Right - made it impossible for Barcelona cenetistas to support the Generalitat . . . However, the opposition of the CNT and FAI to the development of the Alianza Obrera, the Catalan anti-fascist alliance, . . . was narrow-sighted sectarianism. The introspective Catalan CNT, thus, opposed the October 1934 mobilisation on the grounds it was a 'political' action designed to change the government of the day and not to make a genuine social revolution. Consequently, as Asturian workers fought for the survival of the 'Asturian Commune', Francisco Ascaso, *Nosotros* member and secretary of the Catalan CRT, issued a call to the Barcelona proletariat to return to work from a radio station controlled by the Spanish Army. And so the Catalan radicals remained aloof from the revolution that they had desired for so long." [Chris Ealham, **Anarchism and the City**, p. 164]*

Morrow and Ealham fail to mention a few important facts.

Firstly, the uprising in Catalonia was pushed for and led by **Estat Catala** which had "temporary ascendancy over the other groups in the *Esquerra*" (the Catalan Nationalist Party which was the Catalan government). "Companys felt obliged to yield to Dencas' [the leader of *Estat Catala*] demand that Catalonia should take this opportunity for breaking with Madrid." *Estat Catala* "was a Youth movement . . . and composed mostly of workmen and adventurers -- men drawn from the same soil as the **sindicatos libres** [boss created anti-CNT yellow unions] of a dozen years before -- with a violent antagonism to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. It had a small military organisation, the **escamots**, who wore green uniforms. It represented Catalan Nationalism in its most intransigent form: it was in fact Catalan Fascism." [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, pp. 282-3] Gabriel Jackson calls it a "quasi-fascist movement within the younger ranks of the *Esquerra*." [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939**, p. 150] Ronald Fraser terms it "the extreme nationalist and proto-fascist" wing of the party. [**Blood of Spain**, p. 535] Hugh Thomas notes "the fascist colouring of Dencas ideas." [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 135]

In other words, Morrow attacks the CNT for not participating in a revolt organised and led by Catalan Fascists (or, at best, near fascists).

Secondly, far from being apologetics, the repression the CNT was suffering from Dencas' police forces was very real and was occurring right up to the moment of the revolt. The

*"Anarchists bitterly resented the way in which the Generalitat had followed a repressive policy against them in the previous months. This had been the work of the Generalitat's counsellor for public order, Josep Dencas, leader of the quasi-fascist, ultra-nationalist party Estat Catala."* [Paul Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 176] This confirms anarchist accounts of the rising. As Peirats points out:

*"On the eve of the rebellion the Catalan police jailed as many anarchists as they could put their hands on . . . The union offices had been shut for some time. The press censor had completely blacked out the October 6th issue of **Solidaridad Obrera** . . . When the woodworkers began to open their offices, they were attacked by the police, and a furious gunfight ensued. The official radio . . . reported . . . that the fight had already begun against the FAI fascists . . . In the afternoon large numbers of police and *escamots* turned out to attack and shut down the editorial offices of **Solidaridad Obrera**." [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 98-9]*

In other words, the first shots fired in the Catalan revolt were against the CNT by those in revolt against the central government.

Why were the first shots of the revolt directed at members of the CNT? Simply because they were trying to take part in the revolt in an organised and coherent manner as urged by their Regional Committee. In spite of the mass arrests of anarchists and CNT militants the night before by the Catalan rebels, the Catalan Regional Committee issued a clandestine leaflet that stated that the CNT *"must enter the battle in a manner consistent with its revolutionary anarchist principles . . . The revolt which broke out this morning must acquire the characteristics of a popular act through the actions of the proletariat . . . We demand the right to intervene in this struggle and we will take this."* A leaflet had to be issued as **Solidaridad Obrera** was several hours late in appearing due to censorship by the Catalan state. The workers had tried to open their union halls (all CNT union buildings had been closed by the Catalan government since the CNT revolt of December 1933) because the CNT's leaflet had called for the *"[i]mmediate opening of our union buildings and the concentration of the workers on those premises."* [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 85] The participation of the CNT in the revolt as an organised force was something the Catalan rebels refused to allow and so they fired on workers trying to do so. Indeed, after shutting down **Solidaridad Obrera**, the police then tried to break up the CNT's regional plenum that was then in session, but fortunately it was meeting on different premises and so they failed. [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 85-6] Given this, it is unsurprising that Juan Gomez Casas argues as follows:

*"The situation [in October 1934] was especially difficult in Catalonia. The Workers' Alliance . . . declared a general strike. Luis Companys, president of the Catalan Parliament, proclaimed the Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic . . . But at the same time, militants of the CNT and the FAI were arrested . . . **Solidaridad Obrera** was censored. The Catalan libertarians understood that the Catalan nationalists had two objectives in mind: to oppose the central government and to destroy the CNT. Jose Dencas, Counsellor of Defence, issued a strict order: 'Watch out for the FAI' . . . Luis Companys broadcast a message on October 5 to all 'citizens regardless of ideology.' However, many anarchosindicalist militants were held by his deputy, Dencas, in the underground cells of police headquarters." [Op. Cit., pp. 151-2]*

Hence the paradoxical situation in which the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and FAI members found themselves in during this time. As Abel Paz notes, "[f]or the rank and file Catalan worker . . . the insurgents . . . were actually orienting their action in order to destroy the CNT. After that, how could they collaborate with the reactionary movement which was directing its blows against the working class? Here was the paradox of the Catalan uprising of October 6, 1934." [**Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 158]

So during the Catalan revolt, *"the CNT had a difficult time because the insurgents were its worst enemies."* [Peirats, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 98] However, the complexity of the actual situation does not bother the reader of Morrow's work as it is not reported. Little wonder, as Peirats argues, the *"absurd contention according to which the confederal proletariat of Catalonia betrayed their brethren in Asturias melts away in the face of a truthful narration of the facts."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 86] As for the CNT proclaiming a return to work, the assault on Asturias started on the 7th of October, the day which Companys had surrendered to the army. Given the fact that the organisers of the revolt had surrendered the *Catalan Regional Committee of the CNT, unaware of events then taking place in the Asturias, ordered a return to work after two days general strike.* [Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 86]

The Catalanian uprising lasted only ten hours. As such, Morrow understates the matter when he suggests that *"[i]n Catalonia, which should have been the fortress of the uprising, dependence on the petty-bourgeois government of Companys proved fatal; more fearful of arming the workers than of capitulating to Gil Robles, Companys broadcast reassuring statements until, surrounded by Madrid troops, he abjectly surrendered."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] In reality, the *"Generalitat was incapable of revolting successfully, but demonstrated its efficiency in persecuting the CNT."* [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 354]

Yet even here Morrow misleads his readers and not, this time, by omission. The notion that the Catalan revolt was defeated using *"Madrid troops"* is not true. The timings of events shows beyond doubt that the troops used were locally based: *"At 8:00 p.m. on the sixth Companys announced [Catalan state in the Spanish Federal Republic] from a balcony at Generalitat headquarters . . . The military commander of the Barcelona district . . . declared martial law throughout Catalonia at 9:00 p.m., only an hour after Companys' announcement, and by 11:30 that night a small army detachment had moved light artillery into place for bombardment of the Generalitat . . . Companys surrendered the Generalitat at 6:00 a.m."* [Stanley G. Payne, **Spain's first democracy**, pp. 216-7] *"Although the Generalitat had far more armed men than the 500 mustered by the Barcelona army garrison",* notes Paul Preston, *"Dencas refused to mobilise them claiming later that they were inadequately armed. Since the working class had also been denied arms the army was able to trundle artillery through the narrow streets and the Generalitat surrendered in the early hours of the 7th."* [**Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 176]

In summary, therefore, Morrow expected the membership of the Catalan CNT and FAI to join in a struggle started and directed by Catalan fascists, whose leaders in the government were arresting and shooting them, censoring their press, closing their union offices and refusing them a role in the revolt as self-organised forces. We think that sums up the validity of Trotskyism as a revolutionary theory quite well.

In Madrid, the revolt was slightly less farcical. The UGT gave the government 24 hours notice of the general strike, allowing the state to round up the Socialist "leaders," seize arm

depots and repress the insurrection before it got started [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 30]. As Bookchin argues, the "massive strike in Madrid, which was supported by the entire left, foundered for want of arms and a revolutionary sense of direction." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 245] He continues:

*"As usual, the Socialists emerged as unreliable allies of the Anarchists. A revolutionary committee, established by the CNT and FAI to co-ordinate their own operations, was denied direly needed weapons by the UGT. The arms, as it turned out, had been conveniently intercepted by government troops. But even if they had been available, it is almost certain that the Socialists would not have shared them with the Anarchists. Indeed, relationships between the two major sectors of the labour movement had already been poisoned by the failure of the Socialist Youth and the UGT to keep the CNT adequately informed of their plans or confer with Anarchosyndicalist delegates. Despite heavy fighting in Madrid, the CNT and FAI were obliged to function largely on their own. When, at length, a UGT delegate informed the revolutionary committee that Largo Caballero was not interested in common action with the CNT, the committee disbanded."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246]

Historian Paul Preston confirms that in Madrid "Socialists and Anarchists went on strike . . ." and that "the Socialists actually rejected the participation of Anarchist and Trotskyist groups who offered to help make a revolutionary coup in Madrid." [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] Moreover, "when [CNT] delegates travelled secretly to Madrid [from Aragon] to try to co-ordinate support for the revolutionary Asturian miners, they were rebuffed by the UGT leadership." [Graham Kelsey, **Anarchism in Aragon**, p. 73] This, it should be noted, reflected that "[i]n Aragon some anarchist groups did engage in outbursts of their own, and a general strike in Zaragoza lasted from 6 to 9 October, with libertarian communism briefly declared in a few small towns." [Stanley G. Payne, **Spain's first democracy**, p. 217]

Bookchin correctly states that "Abad de Santillan was to observe with ample justification that Socialist attempts to blame the failure of the October Insurrection on Anarchist abstention was a shabby falsehood" and quotes him: "Can there be talk of abstention of the CNT and censure of it by those who go on strike without warning our organisation about it, who refuse to meet with the delegates of the National Committee [of the CNT], who consent to let the Lerroux-Gil Robles Government take possession of the arms deposits and let them go unused before handing them over to the Confederation and the FAI?" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 246]

Therefore, in two of the three centres of the revolt, the uprising was badly organised and quickly repressed (thanks, in part, to the actions of the Socialists themselves). Little wonder Peirats asks:

*"Although it seems absurd, one constantly has to ask whether the Socialists meant to start a true revolution [in October 1934] in Spain. If the answer is affirmative, the questions keep coming: Why did they not make the action a national one? Why did they try to do it without the powerful national CNT? Is a peaceful general strike revolutionary? Was what happened in Asturias expected, or were orders exceeded? Did they mean only to scare the Radical-CEDA government with their action?"* [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, pp 95-6]

The only real centre of resistance was in Asturias. Here, the CNT had joined the Socialists and Communists in a "Workers Alliance" but, and against the alliance's terms, the Socialists alone gave the order for the uprising -- and the Socialist-controlled Provincial Committee starved the CNT of arms. This despite the CNT having over 22 000 affiliates in the area (to the UGT's 40 000). We discuss the activities of the CNT during the revolt in Asturias later (in [section 20](#)) and so will not do so here. However, as Morrow suggests that the CNT railway workers refusal to strike allowed the government to transport troops to break the struggle, it is worthwhile to discuss the repression in Asturias as it was the only area where major troop transportation was needed. Regardless of Morrow's suggestion, the main government attack was from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops - against the port and CNT stronghold (15 000 affiliates) of Gijon (and, we must stress, the Socialists and Communists refused to provide the anarchists of these ports with weapons to resist the troop landings).

Thus Morrow's claim is somewhat at odds with the actual events of the October uprising and, moreover, he seems alone in this as no other historian makes this claim (for example, Hugh Thomas in **The Spanish Civil War**, Raymond Carr in **Spain: 1808-1975**, Paul Preston in **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, Gabriel Jackson, **The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939**). Instead, these accounts reflect those of anarchists ones - but, of course, these are not Trotskyists and so can be ignored. However, for objective readers such an omission might be significant.

Indeed, when these other historians **do** discuss the crushing of the Asturias revolt they all stress the fact that the troops came from the sea. For example, Raymond Carr writes of "*its brutal repression by the Moroccan Army*". [**Spain: 1808-1975**, p. 635] Paul Preston notes that "[w]ith CEDA approval, Franco . . . insisted on the use of troops from Africa . . . they shipped Moorish mercenaries to Asturias." [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 177] Gabriel Jackson likewise records that the government "*feared to send in the regular Army because of the strong possibility that the Spanish conscripts would refuse to fire on the revolutionaries -- or even desert to them. The War Minister . . . , acting on the advice of Generals Franco and Goded, sent in contingents of the Moroccan **regulares** and of the Foreign Legions.*" These troops arrived "*at the ports of Aviles and Gijon.*" [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931-1939**, p. 157] This is echoed by Richard A. H. Robinson, who recounts that it "*was soon decided [by the government] that the [Asturias] rebellion could only be crushed by experienced, professional troops. The other areas of Spain could not be denuded of their garrisons in case there were other revolutionary outbreaks. Franco therefore called upon Colonel Yague to lead a force of Moorish regulars to help re-conquer the province from the rebels.*" [**The Origins of Franco's Spain**, pp. 190-1] Stanley G. Payne gives a more detailed account of the state's attack:

*"Army reinforcements were soon being rushed toward the region . . . Eduardo Lopez Ochoa . . . head[ed] the main relief column . . . he began to make his way eastward [from Galicia] with a modest force of some 360 troops in trucks, half of whom had to be detached on the way to hold the route open. Meanwhile . . . in the main Asturian coastal city of Gijon . . . reinforcements first arrived by sea on the seventh, followed by larger units from the Moroccan Protectorate on the tenth."* [**Spain's First Democracy**, p. 219]

No mention of trains in these accounts, so indicating that Morrow's assertions are false. The main attack on Asturias, and so the transportation of troops and goods, was by *ship* with

some troop movement by trucks, not by trains. Even Morrow has to acknowledge that the Asturians "*held off the Foreign Legion and Moorish troops*" although he does not ponder how trains would have been able to transport them there. [Op. Cit., p. 31]

Significantly, the accounts by these historians are similar to those made by anarchists. For example, Abel Paz:

*"On October 5, Madrid ordered General Bosch, the military leader in Leon, to bring his troops (two infantry regiments) to Asturias. He could not transport them by train because revolutionaries had blown up the Los Fierros Bridge. He had to move them in trucks, but workers entrenched in Vega del Rey held them back for two weeks. General Lopez Ochoa suffered the same fate when workers detained his forces in the narrow Penaflor gorge while they tried to go from Galicia to Asturias . . . The Ministry of War was distressed to learn that workers had stopped General Bosch and General Lopez in their tracks. Fortunately, they thought, General Franco had anticipated such problems and ordered Foreign Legion troops and Moroccan Regulars to set off for Gijon. . . Authorities loaded the warships **Libertad**, **Jaime I**, and **Miguel de Cervantes** with African troops and they set off for Gijon. **Libertad** was the first to arrive. It began bombing intensely on October 7, which covered the landing of a Marine Infantry battalion . . . but it was ultimately unable to resist the bombardment and the overwhelming number of troops (now including Regulars from Morocco, members of the Foreign Legion, and the Eighth Battalion of Hunters from Africa)." [Durruti in the Spanish Revolution, pp. 358-360]*

And Jose Peirats:

*"Almost simultaneously with the revolutionary advance in Oviedo, the first of the government's motorised columns appeared on the borders of Asturias. The revolutionaries were forced to divide their forces to confront the threat. In the south and in the east, the push of government columns, including one led by Lieutenant Colonel JosÃ© Solchaga Zena, was contained. A third column under General Eduardo Lopez Ochoa y Portuondo was advancing from Galicia and was harried throughout its progress along the Corunha highway before being intercepted at Grado. . . The shortage of weapons and ammunition and the ongoing naval bombardment led to the capture of Gijon . . . Under naval protection, Foreign Legion and regular troops landed on the beaches and made their way inland" [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, Vol. 1, p. 78]*

It must also be noted that the account of the revolt by POUM member Victor Alba likewise makes no mention of the use of trains. [Spanish Marxism and Soviet Communism, pp. 71-9] Asturian POUM member Manuel Grossi's eye-witness account of the revolution (**The Asturian Uprising: Fifteen Days of Socialist Revolution**) makes no mention of the arrival of troops by train but does mention motorised forces and warships (along with attacks by aircraft).

In addition, the academics we have quoted point to other reasons for the defeat of the revolt -- the amazingly bad organisation of it by the Socialist Party. Raymond Carr sums up the overwhelming opinion of the historians when he says that "[a]s a national movement the revolution was a fiasco." [Op. Cit., p. 633] The failure of both the Barcelona and Madrid

revolts was directly attributable to the policies and actions of the Socialists who controlled the "Workers' Alliances" in both areas. Hence Paul Heywood:

*"[A]n important factor which contributed to the strikes' collapse and made the state's task easier was the underlying attitude of the Socialists. For all the talk of united action by the Left, the Socialists still wished to dominate any combined moves. Unwilling to cede its traditional hegemony, the PSOE rendered the Alianzas obrera necessarily ineffective . . .*

*"Thus, there was little genuine unity on the Spanish Left. Moreover, the strike was very poorly planned. Differences within the PSOE meant that there was no agreement even as to the programme of the strike. For the . . . leftists, it represented the initiation of a full-scale Socialist revolution; for . . . the centrists in the party, the aim of the strike was to force Alcala-Zamora to reconsider and invite the Socialists back into a coalition government with the Republicans."* [Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain 1879-1936 pp. 144-5]

Significantly, Heywood argues that "*[o]ne thing, however, did emerge from the October strike. The example of Asturias provided a pointed lesson for the Left: crucially, the key to the relative success of the insurrection there was the participation of the CNT in an effective Alianza obrera. Without the CNT, the Asturian rising would have been as short-lived and as easily defeated as those in Madrid and Barcelona.*" [Op. Cit., p. 145]

The real failure of the Asturias revolt did not lie with the CNT, it lay (unsurprisingly enough) with the Socialists. This was the case even in Asturias itself, for despite CNT pleas, the Socialists refused to provide them with arms so allowing Gijon to fall after a bloody struggle and so become the main base for the crushing of the entire region: "*Arriving at the ports of Aviles and Gijon on October 8, these troops were able to overcome the resistance of the local fishermen and stevedores. The revolutionary committees here were Anarchist dominated. Though they had joined the rising and accepted the slogan UHP [Unity, Proletarian Brothers], the Socialists and Communists of Oviedo clearly distrusted them and had refused arms to their delegate the day before.*" [Gabriel Jackson, Op. Cit., p. 157]

Yet, as Brenan correctly notes, "*[f]rom the moment that Barcelona capitulated and the rising in Madrid fizzled out, the miners [in Asturias] were of course doomed.*" [Op. Cit., p. 286] Anarchists can agree with Morrow that the lack of successful revolts elsewhere ensured the defeat of Asturias uprising but the failure for this lies with the Spanish Marxists, not anarchists. Before and during the revolt, the Socialists ignored the CNT and even in Asturias refused to cooperate with it while in Catalonia their allies repressed its members when they tried to join in. As such, attempts to blame anarchists is adding insult to injury -- unless, of course, anarchists are simply there to provide cannon fodder to achieve the plans of socialist leaders to seize power for themselves.

As can be seen, Morrow's account of the October Insurrection of 1934 leaves a lot to be desired. The claim that the CNT was responsible for its failure cannot withstand a close examination of the events. Indeed, by providing the facts which Morrow does not provide we can safely say that the failure of the revolt across Spain rested squarely with the PSOE and UGT. They badly organised it, they failed to co-operate or even communicate with CNT when aid was offered, they relied upon the enemies of the CNT in Catalonia and refused arms to the CNT in both Madrid and Asturias.

Unfortunately, Morrow's assertions have become commonplace in the ranks of the Left and have become even more distorted in the hands of his Trotskyist readers who seem never to bother checking his claims (or, apparently, reading anarchist books on the subject). For example, we find the British Trotskyist Nick Wrack arguing that the *"Socialist Party called a general strike and there were insurrectionary movements in Asturias and Catalonia, In Madrid and Catalonia the anarchist CNT stood to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."* He continues by asserting that *"[i]n Asturias the anarchist militants participated under the pressure of the masses and because of the traditions of unity in that area. However, because of their abstentionist stupidity, the anarchists elsewhere continued to work, even working trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection."* [*"Marxism, Anarchism and the State"*, pp. 31-7, **Militant International Review**, no. 46, p. 34]

It's hard to work out where to start in this travesty. We will start with the simple errors. The CNT **did** take part in the strike in Madrid while, in Catalonia, the *"insurrectionary movement"* was organised and led by Catalan Fascists who arrested CNT and FAI militants the night before the uprising and fired upon CNT members when they tried to open their union halls to take part in it (continuing a policy of repression against the CNT the Catalan government had pursued for months). His comments about *"anarchists"* working the trains is just plain silly, as it was railway workers who did that and this is irrelevant as the government used ships and trucks to move troops to Asturias, not trains. As for transporting *"Moorish troops"*, he does not ponder why forces **based in Morocco** would require trains to get them to Asturias rather than ships...

Morrow has a lot to answer for.

## 7. Were the Friends of Durruti Marxists?

It is sometimes claimed that the **Friends of Durruti** (FoD) Group which formed during the Spanish Revolution were Marxists or represented a *"break with"* anarchism and a move towards Marxism. Both these assertions are false. We discuss whether the FoD represented *"break with"* anarchism in the [next section](#) while [Section 9](#) discusses their links (or, more correctly, their lack of links) with Trotskyists in Spain. Here we show that claims of the FoD being Marxists are false.

The FoD were formed in March 1937 by anarchist militants who had refused to submit to Communist-controlled "militarisation" of the workers' militias. During the May Days -- the government attack against the revolution two months later -- they were notable for their calls to stand firm and crush the counter-revolution. During and after the May Days, the leaders of the CNT asserted that the FoD were Marxists (which was quite ironic as it was the CNT leaders who were acting as Marxists in Spain usually did by joining with bourgeois governments). This was a slander, pure and simple.

The best source to refute claims that the FoD were Marxists (or becoming Marxist) or that they were influenced by, or moved towards, the Bolshevik-Leninists is the work of Agustin Guillamon who appears to be a Marxist (of the Italian "left-communist" kind) and no anarchist (indeed he states that the *"Spanish Revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat."*) [**The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939**, p.

108]). That indicates that his account can be considered objective and not anarchist wishful thinking.

So were the FoD Marxists? Guillaumon makes it clear -- no, they were not. In his words, "[t]here is nothing in the Group's theoretical tenets, much less in the columns of [their newspaper] *El Amigo del Pueblo*, or in their various manifestos and handbills to merit the description 'marxist' being applied to the Group [by the CNT leadership]. They were simply an opposition to the CNT's leadership's collaborationist policy, making their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology." [Op. Cit., p. 61] He stresses this in his conclusion:

*"The Friends of Durruti was an affinity group, like many another existing in anarcho-syndicalist quarters. It was not influenced to any extent by the Trotskyists, nor by the POUM. Its ideology and watchwords were quintessentially in the CNT idiom: it cannot be said that they displayed a marxist ideology at any time . . . They were against the abandonment of revolutionary objectives and of anarchism's fundamental and quintessential ideological principles, which the CNT-FAI leaders had thrown over in favour of anti-fascist unity and the need to adapt to circumstances . . . in order to return it to its class struggle roots."* [Op. Cit., p. 107]

Jaime Balius (a leading member of the group and writer of its 1938 pamphlet **Towards a Fresh Revolution**) was moved to challenge the charges of "marxist" levelled at him in the fourth issue of *El Amigo del Pueblo*:

*"I will not repay defamatory comment in kind. But what I cannot keep mum about is that a legend of marxism has been woven about my person and I should like the record put straight . . . Do they call me a marxist because I am against collaborationism and because I understand our position to be a source of strength only to our enemies? Am I called a marxist because I have been candid enough to write and bring to public attention what other comrades only dare say around the cafe table? . . . I require an explanation . . . It grieves me that at the present time there is somebody who dares call me a Marxist when I could refute with unanswerable arguments those who hang such an unjustified label on me. . . I have heard it said that we should be making politics -- in as many words, comrades -- in an abstract sense, and virtually no one protested. And I, who have been aghast at countless such instances, am dubbed a marxist just because I feel, myself to be a one hundred percent revolutionary . . . On returning from exile in France in the days of Primo de Rivera . . . I have been a defender of the CNT and the FAI. . . In spite of my paralysis, I have done time in prison and been taken in manacles to Madrid for my fervent and steadfast championship of our organisations and for fighting those who once were friends of mine Is that not enough? . . .*

*"So where is this marxism of mine? Is it because my roots are not in the factory? . . .*

*"The time has come to clarify my position. It is not good enough to say that the matter has already been agreed. The truth must shine through. As far as I am concerned, I call upon all the comrades who have used the press to hang this label upon me to spell out what makes me a marxist." ["In self defence: I demand an explanation", **Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library**, no. 11 (1997), p. 1-5]*

Indeed, it "takes only a cursory reading of the issues of *El Amigo del Pueblo* to register that *Balius* and the Friends of Durruti were not only not Marxists but were not in any way influenced by Marxism." [Agustin Guillamon, **Insurrection**, p. 330] This is confirmed by POUM activist Victor Alba who notes that "[a]lthough rumors describing the Friends of Durruti as a group under the influence of the POUM or of 'Trotskyists' have been taken up by many historians, there is no evidence that the Friends was anything but a spontaneous offshoot within the CNT." [Op. Cit., p. 192]

## 8. Did the Friends of Durruti "break with" anarchism?

Morrow claims that the Friends of Durruti (FoD) "represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism." [Op. Cit., p. 247] The truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Before discussing his assertion in more detail a few comments are required. Typically, in Morrow's topsy-turvy world, all anarchists like the FoD (Morrow also includes the Libertarian Youth, the "politically awakened" CNT rank and file, local FAI groups, etc.) who remained true to anarchism and stuck to their guns (often literally) represented a break with anarchism and a move towards Marxism, the revolutionary vanguard party (no doubt part of the fourth International), and a fight for the "workers state." Those anarchists, on the other hand, who compromised for "anti-fascist unity" (but mainly to try and get weapons to fight Franco) are the real anarchists because "class collaboration . . . lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy." [Op. Cit., p. 101]

Morrow, of course, would have had a fit if anarchists pointed to the example of the Social Democrats who crushed the German Revolution or Stalin's Russia as examples that "rule by an elite lies concealed in the heart of Marxist philosophy." It does not spring into his mind that those anarchists he praises are the ones who show the revolutionary heart of anarchism. This can best be seen from his comments on the FoD, were not evolving towards "Marxism" but rather were trying to push the CNT and FAI back to its pre-Civil War politics and strategy. Moreover, as we show in [section 12](#), anarchism has always argued for self-managed working class organisations to carry out and defend a revolution. The FoD were simply following in the tradition founded by Bakunin.

In other words, we will show that they did not "break with" anarchism -- rather they refused to compromise their anarchism in the face of "comrades" who thought winning the war meant entering the government. This is clear from their leaflets, paper and manifesto. As will become obvious, their so-called "break with" anarchism actually just restates pre-war CNT policy and organisation.

For example, their leaflets, in April 1937, called for the unions and municipalities to "replace the state" and for no retreat: "We have the organs that must supplant a State in ruins. The Trade Unions and Municipalities must take charge of economic and social life." [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, **The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939**, p. 38] The following year saw the FoD manifesto repeat this call ("the state cannot be retained in the face of the unions"), and made three demands as part of their programme:

*"I - Establishment of a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.*

*"This body will be organised as follows: members of the revolutionary Junta will be elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. Account is to be taken of the number of comrades away at the front . . . The Junta will steer clear of economic affairs, which are the exclusive preserve of the unions.*

*"The functions of the revolutionary Junta are as follows:*

- "a) The management of the war*
- "b) The supervision of revolutionary order*
- "c) International affairs*
- "d) Revolutionary propaganda.*

*"Posts to come up regularly for re-allocation so as to prevent anyone growing attached to them. And the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the Junta's activities.*

*"II - All economic power to the syndicates.*

*"Since July the unions have supplied evidence of the great capacity for constructive labour. . . It will be the unions that structure the proletarian economy.*

*"An Economic Council may also be set up, taking into consideration the natures of the Industrial Unions and Industrial federations, to improve on the co-ordination of economic activities.*

*"III - Free municipality.*

*[...]*

*"The Municipality shall take charge of those functions of society that fall outside the preserve of the unions. And since the society we are going to build shall be composed exclusively of producers, it will be the unions, no less, that will provide sustenance for the municipalities. . .*

*"The Municipalities will be organised at the level of local, comarcal and peninsula federations. Unions and municipalities will maintain liaison at local, comarcal and national levels." [Towards a Fresh Revolution, pp. 29-30]*

This programme basically repeats pre-war CNT policy and organisation and so cannot be considered as a *"break with"* anarchist or CNT politics or tradition.

There are of course differences in translation between various Spanish anarchists texts with, for example, *"municipality"* being used for a community grouping often translated as *"commune"*. Regardless of the term used, it referred to the same thing in both an urban and rural context, namely *"all the residents"* in a community *"meeting in assembly (council) with full powers to administer and order local affairs, primarily production and distribution."* This was supplemented, particularly in urban areas, by *"the union"* which *"brings individuals together, grouping them according to the nature of their work . . . First, it groups the workers of a factory, workshop or firm together, this being the smallest cell enjoying autonomy with regard to whatever concerns it alone . . . The local unions federate with one another, forming*

*a local federation, composed of the committee elected by the unions, and of the general assembly that, in the last analysis, holds supreme sovereignty." In addition, the "national federations [of unions] will hold as common property the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops" and the "free municipality will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations." [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 25, p. 24, p. 29 and p. 26]*

This description comes from a classic pre-war anarchist pamphlet by Issac Puente first published in 1933 and, as can be seen, is identical to points two and three of the FoD Programme. It did not, however, address the question of defence of the social revolution (as the subject of the pamphlet was to explain the nature of libertarian communism rather than how to achieve it. This **was** addressed in the CNT's 1936 Zaragoza revolution which, likewise, projected a communal and industrial federations as the framework of a free society:

*"Once the libertarian commune has been established in each locality, we shall set the new mechanisms of society to work. The producers of each sector or trade, organised in their unions and workplaces, will freely determine the manner in which this is to be organised. . . The point of liaison within the commune and in the workplace will be the workshop and factory council, which will form agreements with other work centres . . . statistical and production councils. . . will federate with one another until they comprise a network of all the producers within the Iberian Confederation . . . the industrial producersâ€™™ associations and the agricultural producersâ€™™ associations alike are to federate at national level. . .*

*"We must erect the political expression of our revolution upon the triple base: individual, commune and federation. . . Consequently, the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits. . . Communes are to federate at county and regional levels. . . Amalgamated, these communes are to make up an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes. . .*

*"Defence of the revolution. We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution . . . whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion. . . or against counter-revolution at home. . . The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without . . . Let each commune have its weapons and means of defence. . . The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes, which will be responsible for ensuring that defensive means are effectively organised nationwide." [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1., pp. 105-110]]*

The similarities between the programme of the FoD and the pre-war CNT are obvious, with both advocating a federation of communes and workplaces to manage society and to defend the revolution. Moreover, just as its Congresses were the supreme policy-making body in the CNT itself, they envisioned a similar body emanating from the rank-and-file assemblies to make the guiding decisions for a socialised economy. This vision can be found Abad Diego de Santillan's book describing his views on the economic structure of an anarchist society which had a "Federal Council of Economy" which "receives its orientation from below and

*operates in accordance with the resolutions of the regional and national assemblies" while the "local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat" in the "cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution." [After the Revolution, p. 86 and p. 80] Again, this is reflected in the FoD's programme.*

However, it is the first point one their programme, namely, the call for a *"Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council."* It is here that Morrow -- followed by a host of other Marxists -- claim the FoD broke with anarchism towards Marxism: *"Of special significance were the Friends of Durruti, for they represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, **juntas** or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism, and the necessary state measures of repression against the counter-revolution . . . the development of the Friends of Durruti was a harbinger of the future of all revolutionary workers in the CNT-FAI."* [Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] Nothing could be further from the truth.

Part of the problem is the all-too-common problem of Marxists being ignorant of anarchist ideas. Leninists seem to confuse the need to defend a revolution, which anarchists support, with a State, which anarchists do not support (see [section H.2.1](#)). Likewise, they confuse all forms of social organisation with a specific form of it, the State, and think that any form of co-operation equates to centralism (and so willfully misunderstand federalism). As such, they seem unaware that anarchists have long supported the idea of workers' councils (or soviets) as an expression of working class power to control their own lives (and so society) -- indeed, far longer than Marxists. Thus we find Bakunin arguing that the *"future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* Anarchists *"attain this goal . . . by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses."* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 198] These councils of workers' delegates (workers' councils) would be the basis of the commune and defence of the revolution:

*"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . constitute the Commune . . . [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 170-1]

Kropotkin echoed this vision:

*"Developed in the course of history to establish and maintain . . . the ruling class . . . what advantages could the State provide for abolishing . . . [its] privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in **their** unions, **their** federations, completely outside the State?"*

*"The idea of independent Communes for the **territorial** groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings by **social functions** -- the two interwoven*

*and providing support to each to meet the needs of society -- allowed the anarchists to conceptualise in a real, concrete, way the possible organisation of a liberated society. . . These . . . groupings, covering each other like a network, would thus allow the satisfaction of all social needs: consumption, production and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence . . .* [Modern Science and Anarchy, pp. 164-5]

For Malatesta, it was equally obvious that a revolution would need defending: *"The creation of voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to reestablish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution".* [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 166]

During the Russian Revolution, the anarchist-influenced Makhnovist movement put these ideas into practice when they helped to organise a Military-Revolutionary Council to co-ordinate military activity alongside regional soviet congresses and local soviets. A regional soviet congress *"established a regional Revolutionary Military Council (Soviet) of peasants, workers and partisans"* as *"a kind of general directing body for the fight against [the counter-revolutionary forces of] Petlura and Denikin, to maintain and support, during the fighting, the economic and social relations among the workers themselves and also between them and the partisans, to take care of the needs for information and control, finally to put into practice the various measures which were adopted by the congress and which might be taken up by succeeding conferences"*. Its role was *"to carry out all the economic, political, social and military decisions made at the congress . . . it was not at all an authoritarian organ. Only strictly executive functions were assigned to it. It confined itself to carrying out the instructions and decisions of the congress. At any moment, it could be dissolved by the congress and cease to exist."* [Voline, The Unknown Revolution, p. 577]

This perspective can also be seen in the words of the German anarcho-syndicalist H. Ruediger (member of the IWA's secretariat in 1937) when he argued that for anarchists *"social re-organisation, like the defence of the revolution, should be concentrated in the hands of working class organisations -- whether labour unions or new organs of spontaneous creation, such as free councils, etc., which, as an expression of the will of the workers themselves, from below up, should construct the revolutionary social community."* [quoted in The May Days in Barcelona, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 71] In this he was repeating the IWA's principles:

*"Revolutionary Syndicalism is the confirmed enemy of every form of economic and social monopoly, and aims at its abolition by means of economic communes and administrative organs of field and factory workers on the basis of a free system of councils . . . Although enemies of all forms of organised violence in the hands of any Government, the Syndicalists do not forget that the decisive struggle between the Capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow, will not take place without serious collisions. They recognise violence, therefore, as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of the land. Just as this expropriation cannot be commenced and carried to a successful issue except by the revolutionary economic organisation of the workers, so also the defence of the revolution should be in the hands of these economic organisations, and not in*

*those of the military or other organisations operating outside the economic organs."*  
["Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 2, Iain McKay (ed.), pp. 291-4]

In other words, anarchists **do** support democratic organs of power when they are **directly** democratic (i.e. self-managed). "*The basic idea of Anarchism is simple,*" argued Voline, "*no party . . . placed above or outside the labouring masses . . . ever succeeds in emancipating them . . . Effective emancipation can only be achieved by the **direct, widespread, and independent action of those concerned, of the workers themselves**, grouped, not under the banner of a political party . . . but in their own class organisations (productive workers' unions, factory committees, co-operatives, et cetera) on the basis of concrete action and self-government.*" Anarchists oppose **representative** organs of power as these are governments and so based on minority power and subject to bureaucratic deformations which ensure **un-**accountability from below. Anarchists argue "*that, by its very nature, political power could not be exercised except by a very restricted group of men at the centre. Therefore this power - the **real** power -- could not belong to the soviets. It would actually be in the hands of the party.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p, 197 and p. 213]

Thus Morrow's argument is flawed on the basic point that he does not understand anarchist theory or the nature of an anarchist revolution (also see [section 12](#)).

As well as reflecting anarchist theory, and more importantly given the Spanish context, the FoD's vision has a marked similarity to pre-war CNT organisation, policy and vision (unsurprisingly, given that this would obviously reflect anarchist theory as well). This means that the idea of a National Defence Council was not the radical break with the CNT as Morrow suggests. Before the civil war the CNT had long had its defence groups, federated at regional and national level, alongside its unions organised in a similar fashion. At all levels, there were assemblies, plenums, congresses as well as committees and councils (**juntas**). Historian Jerome Mintz provides a good summary:

*"The policies and actions of the CNT were conducted primarily by administrative juntas, beginning with the sindicato, whose junta consisted of a president, secretary, treasurer, and council members. At each step in the confederation, a representative [sic! -- delegate] was sent to participate at the next organisational level -- from sindicato to the district to the regional confederation, then to the national confederation. In addition to the juntas, however, there were two major committee systems established as adjuncts to the juntas that had developed some autonomy: the **comites pro presos**, or committees for political prisoners, which worked for the release of prisoners and raised money for the relief of their families; and the **comites de defensa**, or defence committees, whose task was to stockpile weapons for the coming battle and to organise the shock troops who would bear the brunt of the fighting."* [**The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 141]

Thus we see that the CNT had its "*juntas*" (which means council or committee and so does not imply any authoritarianism) as well as "*defence committees*" which were elected by democratic vote in the union organisations decades before the FoD existed. The Defence Committees (or councils) were a CNT insurgent agency in existence well before July 1936 and had, in fact, played a key role in many insurrections and strikes (the CNT insurrection of December 1933, for example, had been co-ordinated by a National Revolutionary Committee. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 235])

In short, the "break with" anarchism Morrow presents was, in fact, an exact reproduction of the way the CNT had traditionally operated and advocated prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The only "break" that **did** occur after the 19th of July was that of the CNT and FAI ignoring its politics and history in favour of "anti-fascist unity" and a UGT-style "Workers' Alliance" with all anti-fascist unions and parties (see [section 20](#)).

During the war itself, these ideas were not forgotten for in early September 1936, a National Plenum of the CNT saw the Catalan delegation ("as had the Madrid delegates a month before") propose a "National Revolutionary Council (Junta)" composed of representatives of the CNT and the UGT, with this "Junta composed of the unions" being publicly advocated in **Solidaridad Obrera**. Another National Plenum mid-month saw a "proposal to form a Junta de Defensa to coordinate the regionally organised anti-fascist committees . . . officially adopted" although it would also have four Republican representatives alongside the five from the CNT and UGT. [Danny Evans, **Revolution and the State** pp. 48-9] Regional Defence Councils would follow a similar pattern. The resolution read as follows:

*"at present no solution is possible without a more effective co-ordination of forces and the establishment of some body capable of successfully marshalling these forces to defeat fascism at the front while guaranteeing economic reconstruction in the rearguard . . . the CNT believes it necessary to participate in a national organism empowered to provide leadership in the areas of defence and in political and economic affairs. . . The establishment in Madrid of a National Defence Council made up of personnel from all the antifascist political groupings in the following proportions: five delegates from the UGT ( Marxists), five from the CNT and four republicans. The National Defence Council will be chaired by Largo Caballero. . . A federalist approach at local, provincial, regional and national level in both political administrative and economic affairs, with the creation of defence councils at those levels and the abolition of councils, local and civil governments. Regions will be empowered to ensure proportionality of the antifascist forces within the regional defence councils"* [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, Vol. 1, p. 163]

Largo Caballero rejected the idea. The Regional Defence Council of Aragon was, however, formed shortly afterwards, "in line with recent CNT regional committee plenums". [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 172] Morrow does mention this body -- "the anarchist-controlled Council for the Defence of Aragon" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 111] -- but fails to relate it to anarchist politics.

Unsurprisingly, for in Aragon the CNT-FAI remained true to anarchism and created a defence council, so if Morrow had discussed the events in Aragon in context he would have had to draw the conclusion that the FoD were not a "conscious break with the traditional anti-statism of anarchism" but rather were an expression of it -- for anarchists had long seen the need for co-ordinated revolutionary defence and had not rejected Marxism because it failed to recognise this necessity. In short, the need for councils (**juntas**) had been reflected in CNT theory, policy and structure for decades.

This can be seen from the comments made after the end of the war by a FoD group in exile which clearly argued for a return to the principles of anarchism and the pre-war CNT. They argued not only for workers' self-organisation and self-management as the basis of the revolution but also for the pre-war CNT idea of a workers' alliance from the bottom up rather than a UGT-style one at the top (see [section 5](#)):

*"We are enemies of class collaboration with the capitalist class and with the middle class. Workers' administration necessitates workers' control. A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers' organisations as was the case in July, 1936, when the CNT-FAI were masters . . . We incline to the view that it is necessary to form a Revolutionary Alliance; a Workers' Front; where no one would be allowed to enter and take their place except on a revolutionary basis . . . "* ["The Friends of Durruti Accuse", **Class War on the Home Front**, Wildcat Group (ed.), p. 34]

As can be seen, the FoD were consistently arguing for a federation of workers' associations as the basis of the revolution. In this they were loyally following Bakunin's basic arguments and the ideas of anarchism as well as the policies of the CNT before and during the first few months of the Civil War. Rather than the FoD breaking with anarchism, it is clear that it was the leading committees of the CNT and FAI which actually broke with the politics of anarchism and the tactics, ideas and ideals of the CNT. As Jaime Balius, one of the FoD's main activists, put it in 1976:

*"We did not support the formation of Soviets; there were no grounds in Spain for calling for such. We stood for 'all power to the trade unions'. In no way were we politically orientated . . . Ours was solely an attempt to save the revolution; at the historical level it can be compared to Kronstadt because if there the sailors and workers called for 'all power to the Soviets', we were calling for all power to the unions."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 381]

"Political" here meaning "state-political" -- a common anarchist use of the word. According to Fraser, the *"proposed revolutionary junta was to be composed of combatants from the barricades."* [Op. Cit., p. 381] This echoes Bakunin's comment that the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [Op. Cit., pp. 170-1] Ironically, Morrow, rightly, talks of the need for organising *"a central committee of defence, based on representation from the barricades"* during the May Days of 1937 but seems unaware that he is repeating Marx's foe in the First International. [Op. Cit., p. 163] Perhaps Bakunin also *"represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism"?*

To stress the point, the FoD did not represent a *"break with"* anarchism or the CNT tradition. To claim otherwise shows either an ignorance or misunderstanding of anarchist politics and the CNT.

Similar comments apply to Guillamon's suggestion that because the FoD thought that libertarian communism had to be *"impose[d]"* and *"defended by force of arms"* their position represented an *"evolution within anarchist thought processes."* Yet from Bakunin onwards, revolutionary anarchism has been aware of the need for an insurrection to create an anarchist society by destroying both the state and capitalism as well as defending it from attempts to reimpose hierarchy and class. To say that would *"impose"* libertarian socialism is meaningless for it confuses an act of liberation with an act of oppression (that Engels made the same mistake does not make it any more correct or logical -- see [section H.4.7](#)). Ending hierarchy is not to *"impose"* upon those who wish hierarchy to continue (and are in a position of power, so **imposing their wills on others**). As for his claim that the FoD's *"revolutionary junta"* was the equivalent of what *"others call the vanguard or the revolutionary party"* cannot be supported as it is clear that this junta was not seen as a form of delegated power by

rather as a means of organising and defending the revolution under the direct control of the union assemblies.

It may be argued that the FoD's manifesto states that they are "*introducing a slight variation in anarchism into our programme. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta*" and that the CNT "*was utterly devoid of revolutionary theory. We did not have a concrete programme. We had no idea where we were going.*" [Op. Cit., p. 29 and pp. 15-6] Surely this implies that they saw themselves as having moved away from anarchism and CNT policy?

Far from it, given that the CNT had a programme which it failed to apply. This was because there was a failure to discuss what to do when faced with isolation within Spain in the face of a military coup and the unwillingness of the UGT leaders to embrace the social revolution. As Vernon Richards later noted:

*"the lack of any discussion [at the Zaragoza Congress in May] of the problems that might face the organisation during the revolutionary period. Or more specifically, what was to be the attitude of the organisation on the morrow of the defeat of the military putsch when it found itself suddenly at the head of the revolutionary movement. Such a possibility could easily be envisaged in Catalonia, if not in the provinces under the central government. Perhaps for the rank and file the answer was a simple one: the social revolution. But in the light of subsequent actions, for the leadership of the CNT it was not as simple as all that. Yet these problems and doubts were not faced at the congress, and for these serious omissions of foresight . . . the revolutionary workers paid dearly in the months that followed."* [Lessons Of The Spanish Revolution, p. 267]

So while it is clear that the FoD's "new" position was nothing of the kind (given its clear links with anarchist theory and prior CNT policies, it was elemental anarchist principles), it was "new" in respect to the policy the CNT ("anarchism") was then conducting -- a policy they justified by a **very** selective use of anarchist theory and principles. In the face of this, the FoD could claim they were presenting a new variation in spite of its obvious similarities to pre-war CNT policies and anarchist theory. Thus the claim that the FoD saw their ideas as some sort of departure from traditional anarchism cannot be maintained, given the obvious links this "new" idea had with the past policies and structure of the CNT. As Guillaumon makes it clear, the FoD made "*their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology*" and "*[a]t all times the Group articulated an anarcho-syndicalist ideology, although it also voiced radical criticism of the CNT and FAI leadership. But it is a huge leap from that to claiming that the Group espoused marxist positions.*" [Op. Cit., p. 61 and p. 95]

Moreover, the social revolution that spontaneously occurred after July 19th was essentially economic and social (i.e. "*apolitical*") and not "*anti-political*" (i.e. the destruction of the state machine along with capitalism). Yet this "*apolitical*" anarchism came about post-July 19th when the CNT-FAI (ignoring anarchist theory and CNT policy and history) **ignored** the state machine rather than destroying it and supplanting it with libertarian organs of self-management. Such a revolution would soon come to grief on the shores of the (revitalised) state machine -- as the FoD correctly argued had happened. Hence a manifesto in June 1937 signed by the FoD, Libertarian Youth groups and the POUM:

*"To conquer Franco we had to overcome Companys and Caballero. To conquer fascism we had to smash the bourgeoisie and their Stalinist and socialist allies. The*

*capitalist state had to be destroyed completely and be replaced by workers' power based in committees of the working class. Apolitical anarchism has failed...*" [quoted by Gomez Casa, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

Needless to say, what members of the POUM and anarchists thought was meant by "*workers' power*" would have differed considerably and a similarity of words should not be confused with a similarity in practice (in 1917, for example, what anarchists and Bolsheviks meant by "*All Power to the Soviets*" was radically different and only became obvious once the latter had seized power). However, this does not mean that the FoD had introduced "*a slight variation*" into their anarchism does makes not sense post-July 1936 for the "*apolitical*" line of the CNT-FAI had obviously failed and a new departure was required -- even if this was in fact a **return** to basic revolutionary anarchist ideas.

One last comment. Morrow states that the "*CNT leadership . . . expelled the Friends of Durruti*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 189] This is not true. The CNT leadership did **try** to expel the FoD. However, as Balias points out, the "*higher committees order[ed] our expulsion, but this was rejected by the rank and file in the trade union assemblies and at a plenum of FAI groups held in the Casa CNT-FAI.*" [quoted by Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 73] Thus the CNT leadership could never get their desire ratified by any assembly of unions or FAI groups. Unfortunately, Morrow gets his facts wrong again and so presents a false impression of the relationship of the CNT leadership and the rank and file.

## 9. Were the Friends of Durruti influenced by Trotskyists?

Morrow implies that the Bolshevik-Leninists "*established close contacts with the anarchist workers, especially the 'Friends of Durruti'*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139] The truth, as usual, is somewhat different.

To prove this we must again turn to Guillamon's work in which he dedicates a chapter to this issue. He begins this chapter by stating:

*"It requires only a cursory perusal of **El Amigo del Pueblo** or Balias's statements to establish that the Friends of Durruti were never marxists, nor influenced at all by the Trotskyists or the Bolshevik-Leninist Section. But there is a school of historians determined to maintain the opposite and hence the necessity for this chapter."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 94]

He stresses that the FoD "*were not in any way beholden to Spanish Trotskyism is transparent from several documents*" and notes that while the POUM and Trotskyists displayed "*an interest*" in "*bringing the Friends of Durruti under their influence*" this was "*something in which they never succeeded.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 96 and p. 110] Indeed, in terms of before May 1937, FoD leading member Jaime Balias states that the FoD "*had no contact with the POUM, nor with the Trotskyists.*" After the May Days, this had not changed as witnessed by E. Wolf's letter to Trotsky in July 1937 which stated that it "*will be impossible to achieve any collaboration with them . . . Neither the POUMists nor the Friends would agree to the meeting [to discuss joint action].*" [quoted by Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 104 and pp. 97-8]

In short, the Friends of Durruti did not establish "*close contacts*" with the Bolshevik-Leninists after the May Days of 1937. While the Bolshevik-Leninists may have wished for

such contacts, the FoD did not. They were, of course, contacts of a limited kind but no influence or significant co-operation. Little wonder Badius stated in 1946 that the *"alleged influence of the POUM or the Trotskyists upon us is untrue."* [quoted by Guillamon, **Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

As POUM activist Victor Alba notes, the recollections of Trotskyist Pavel Thalman *"do not correspond with the accounts of others. Perhaps the most serious such instance involves the relationship between Moulin, the young member of the Trotskyist group around Munis, and the anarchist grouping of the Friends of Durruti."* It *"would have the reader believe that the Friends were virtually under the guidance of Moulin"* and it seems *"motivated by a 'Trotskyist' disbelief in the ability of the anarchists to do anything 'really revolutionary' or even commonsensical without the intervention of Marxists. Such considerations have led other commentators, including some eminent historians, to ascribe to Badius a clearly nonexistent former membership in the B.O.C. [a forerunner of the POUM]"*. [**Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism**, pp. 296-7]

It is hardly surprising that the FoD were not influenced by Trotskyism. After all, they were well aware of the policies Trotsky introduced when he was in power (not least the imprisonment and shooting of anarchists). Moreover, while the programme of the Bolshevik-Leninists was similar in rhetoric to the anarchist vision, the fundamental question was whether they actually **meant** it or not (not, as discussed in sections [12](#) and [13](#)). Irish Anarchist Jack White put it well at the time:

*"Mr. Emile Burns, in his book **Communism, Capitalism, and the Transition**, has put the matter in a nutshell, not only as regards what should happen in theory but what did actually happen in the Russian Revolution. He might have been writing of the revolution that the simple Spanish 'Trotskyites' thought they were defending. 'All executive positions,' writes Mr. Burns, 'which had formerly been filled by appointment from above had to be made elective and the elected persons had to be subject to recall at any moment by the bodies that elected them; therefore from the first day of the revolution the command of armed forces was taken over by elected deputies; the factory workers were armed and fought all the most vital battles; the officials in State Departments were replaced by workers; the managers in the factories were replaced or controlled by councils of workers; the existing Law Courts were abolished and Workers' Courts with elected judges took their place; wherever Soviet order was established, elected workers' Committees took the place of appointed officials.'*

*"Now that is precisely the kind of order that the Spanish 'Trotskyites', in common with other Spanish 'uncontrollables', thought they were fighting to preserve and maintain from May 2nd to 7th in Barcelona.*

*"But I would hate to be thought a 'Trotskyite', for I remember it was Trotsky who helped to smash all that sort of thing at Kronstadt. So I must perforce be an 'uncontrollable'. . . And an 'uncontrollable' is an Anarchist who has stuck to Anarchy and who is not, therefore, primarily concerned with the shades or strata of Capitalism, but with revolution by direct action . . . The first false step in Spain was the association of Anarchist leaders with the Government and the State. Had they given all their energies to co-ordination and unified command of CNT Collectives and Anarchist military units, instead of sacrificing Anarchist principles and control to compromises with a Government, the uncontrollables would have remained in control*

*of themselves and ready for co-ordinated action with other sections*" [*The Meaning of Anarchism*", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 3, Iain McKay (ed.), pp. 43-5]

And, of course, the Trotskyists activities during the May Days amounted to little more than demanding that the workers' do what they were already doing (as can be seen from the leaflet they produced, which as George Orwell noted, *"merely demanded what was happening already"* [**Homage to Catalonia**, p. 221]). As usual, the *"vanguard of the proletariat"* were trying to catch up with the proletariat -- and what the FoD and other anarchists were advocating.

## 10. What does the Friends of Durruti's programme tell us about Trotskyism?

Morrow states that the FoD's *"slogans included the essential points of a revolutionary program: all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 133] It is useful to compare Leninism to these points to see if that provides a revolutionary programme.

Firstly, as we argue in more detail in [section 11](#), Trotsky abolished the democratic organs of the Red Army. Lenin's rule also saw the elimination of the factory committee movement and its replacement with one-man management appointed from above (see [section 17](#)). Both these events occurred before the start of the Russian Civil War in May 1918. Moreover, neither Lenin nor Trotsky considered workers' self-management of production as a key aspects of socialism. On this level, Leninism in power did not constitute a *"revolutionary program."*

Secondly, Leninism does **not** call for *"all power to the working class"* or even *"workers' power"* to manage their own affairs. To quote Trotsky, in an article written in 1937, *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard."* The working classes' role is one of supporting the party: *"Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power. In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* [*Stalinism and Bolshevism*", **Writings 1936-7**, p. 426] This, as we discuss in [section H.3.11](#), was considered to be amongst the *"Lessons of October."*

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power -- *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 424] So much for *"workers' power"* -- unless you equate that with the *"power"* to give your power, your control over your own affairs, to a minority who claim to represent you. Indeed, Trotsky even attacks the idea that workers' can achieve power directly via organs of self-management like workers' councils (or soviets):

*"Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 430]

In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat is, in fact, expressed by *"the party dictatorship."* In this Trotsky follows Lenin who asserted that:

*"The mere presentation of the question -- 'dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders or dictatorship (party) of the masses?' -- testifies to most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking . . . classes are led by political parties. . . "* ["'Left-wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder", **Collected Works**, vol. 31, p. 41]

As has been made clear above, the FoD being anarchists aimed for a society of generalised self-management, a system in which working people directly controlled their own affairs and so society. As these words by Lenin and Trotsky indicate they did not aim for such a society, a society based on *"all power to the working class."* Rather, they aimed for a society in which the workers would delegate their power into the hands of a few, the revolutionary party, who would exercise power **on their behalf**. The FoD meant exactly what they said when they argued for *"all power to the working class"* -- they did not mean this as a euphemism for party rule. In this they followed Bakunin:

*"[T]he federated Alliance of all labour associations . . . will constitute the Commune . . . there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times. . . An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set . . . [and] to reorganise along revolutionary lines . . . and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of those deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . Thus it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the . . . Revolution, founded upon . . . the ruins of States, will emerge triumphant. . ."*

*"Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations . . . being organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation . . ."* [**No God, No Masters**, vol. 1, pp. 155-6]

And:

*"Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so-called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 160]

As can be seen, Bakunin's vision is precisely, to use Morrow's words, *"all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power."* Thus the FoD's programme is not a *"break with"* anarchism (as we discussed in more detail in [section 8](#)) but rather in the tradition started by Bakunin -- in other words, an anarchist programme. It is Leninism, as can be seen, which rejects this in favour of all power to the representatives of the working class (i.e. party) which it confuses with the working class as a whole.

Given that Morrow asserts that "*all power to the working class*" was an "*essential*" point of "*a revolutionary program*" we can only conclude that Trotskyism does not provide a revolutionary programme -- rather it provides a program based, at best, on representative government in which the workers' delegate their power to a minority or, at worse, on party dictatorship **over** the working class (the experience of Bolshevik Russia would suggest the former quickly becomes the latter, and will be justified by Bolshevik ideology).

By his own arguments, here as in so many other cases, Morrow indicates that Trotskyism is not a revolutionary movement or theory.

## **11. Why is Morrow's comments against the militarisation of the militias ironic?**

Morrow denounces the Stalinist militarisation of the militias as their "*campaign for wiping out the internal democratic life of the militias*" and notes that they "*sought to set an 'example' by handing their militias over to government control, helping to institute the salute, supremacy of officers behind the lines, etc. . . The example was wasted on the CNT masses . . . The POUM reprinted for distribution in the militias the original Red Army Manual of Trotsky, providing for a democratic internal regime and political life in the army.*" [Op. Cit., p. 126]

Morrow states that he supported the "*democratic election of soldiers' committees in each unit, centralised in a national election of soldiers' delegates to a national council.*" Moreover, he attacks the POUM leadership because it "**forbade** election of soldiers' committees" and argued that the "*simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army.*" Thus the POUM ensured its "*ten thousand militiamen were controlled bureaucratically by officials appointed by the Central Committee of the party, election of soldiers' committees being expressly forbidden.*" [Op. Cit., p. 127, p. 128 and pp. 136-7]

Again, Morrow is correct: a revolutionary working class militia **does** require self-management, the election of delegates, soldiers' councils and so on. Indeed, Bakunin stressed the need for workers and peasants to "*arm themselves and organize volunteer guerrilla units . . . turn the defense of the towns over to the armed people's militias . . . the peasants, like the industrial city workers, should unite by federating the fighting battalions, district by district, thus assuring a common coordinated defense against internal and external enemies.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 189-190] That is **exactly** why the CNT militia organised in this fashion (and, we must note, they were only applying the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI -- i.e. anarchism -- to the militias). The militia columns were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

*"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one centuria, which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty centurias make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the centurias have their say. . . although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."*  
[No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 256-7]

In other words, Morrow is arguing for an **anarchist** solution to the problem of defending the revolution and organising those who were fighting fascism. We say anarchist for good reason. What is ironic about Morrow's comments and description of "*workers' control of the army*" is that these features were **exactly** those eliminated by Trotsky when he created the Red Army in 1918. Indeed, Trotsky acted in **exactly** the same way as Morrow attacks the Stalinists for acting (and they used many of the same arguments as Trotsky did to justify it). As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

*"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 37]

Brinton notes that "[f]or years, Trotskyist literature has denounced these reactionary facets of the Red Army as examples of what happened to it 'under Stalinism.'" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 37f] This claim was, amazingly enough, also made by Trotsky himself. In 1935 he re-wrote history by arguing that "[i]n the fire of the cruel struggle [of the Civil War], there could not be even a question of a privileged position for officers: the very word was scrubbed out of the vocabulary." Only "after the victories had been won and the passage made to a peaceful situation" did "the military apparatus" try to "become the most influential and privileged part of the whole bureaucratic apparatus" with "the Stalinist bureaucracy . . . gradually over the succeeding ten to twelve years" ensuring for them "a superior position" and giving them "ranks and decorations." ["How Did Stalin Defeat the Opposition?," **Writings, 1935-36**, pp. 175-6]

In fact, "ranks and decorations" and "superior" positions were introduced by Trotsky **before** the outbreak of the Civil War in May 1918. On March 28th, 1918, Trotsky gave a report to the Moscow City Conference of the Communist Party. In this report he stated that "*the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree*" and that the Bolsheviks "*fac[ed] the task of creating a regular Army.*" Why the change? Simply because the Bolshevik Party held power ("*political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited*"). ["*Work, Discipline, Order*", **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, pp. 46-7] Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

*"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* ["*Work, Discipline, Order*," **Op. Cit.**, vol. 1, p. 47]

Of course, most workers' are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Elected officials do not necessary reflect the interests of those who

elected them. That is why anarchists have always supported **delegation** rather than representation combined with decentralisation, federalism, strict accountability and the power of instant recall. In a highly centralised system (as created by the Bolsheviks and as exists in most social democratic trade unions) the ability to recall an administration is difficult as it requires the agreement of a majority of people across the whole organisation to get rid of the ruling group. Thus there are quite a few grounds for fearing the appointment of commanders by the government -- no matter which party makes it up.

As another irony of history, Morrow quotes a Bolshevik-Leninist leaflet (which "*points the road*") as demanding "[e]qual pay for officers and soldiers." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 191] Obviously these good Trotskyists had -- as Morrow appears likewise to have -- no idea what their hero actually wrote on this subject or did when in power. While one of the basic principles of the anarchist militia was equality between all members. Delegates received the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes as the rest of the unit. Not so in the Red Army. Trotsky thought, when he was in charge of it, that inequality was "*in some cases . . . quite explicable and unavoidable*" and that "[e]very Red Army warrior fully accepts that the commander of his unit should enjoy certain privileges as regards lodging, means of transport and even uniform." Unfortunately, because soldier democracy had been abolished by decree, we have no idea whether the rank and file of the Red Army agreed with him. For Trotsky, privilege "*is, in itself, in certain cases, inevitable*" but "[o]stentatious indulgence in privilege is not just evil, it is a crime." Hence his desire for "*more*" equality rather than equality -- to aim for "*eliminating the most abnormal [!] phenomena, softening [!] the inequality that exists*" rather than abolish it as they did in the CNT militias. ["*More Equality!*", **How the Revolution Armed**, vol II, p. 116, p. 117 and p. 119]

Of course, such inequalities that existed in the Red Army are to be expected in an autocratically run organisation. The inequality inherent in hierarchy, the inequality in power between the order giver and order taker, will, sooner or later, be reflected in material inequality -- whether in the Red Army or elsewhere across the "workers' state". All Trotsky wanted was for those in power to be respectable in their privilege rather than showing it off. The anarchist militias did not have this problem because being libertarian, delegates were subject to recall and power rested with the rank and file, **not** an elected government. Given this, we have to wonder how long the Spanish Trotskyists' egalitarian demands would have survived once they had acquired power -- if the experience of Trotsky in power is anything to go by, not very long.

If, as Morrow argues, the "*simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army*" then Trotsky's regime in the Red Army ensured the defeat of proletarian control of that organisation. The question Morrow raises of who would control the army, the working class or the bourgeois failed to realise the real question -- who was to control the army, the working class, the bourgeois or the state bureaucracy. Trotsky ensured that it would be the latter -- indeed, the repression of strikes and other working class protest by the Red Army and Cheka under Lenin and Trotsky shows that this was the case (see [section H.6.3](#)). So Morrow's own arguments indicate the anti-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism.

Of course some Trotskyists know what Trotsky actually did when he held power and try and present apologetics for his obvious destruction of soldiers' democracy. One argues that the "*Red Army, more than any other institution of the civil war years, embodied the contradiction between the political consciousness and circumstantial coercion. On the one hand the*

*creation of a Red Army was a retreat: it was a conscripted not a voluntary army; officers were appointed not elected . . . But the Red Army was also filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness.*" [John Rees, "In Defence of October", pp. 3-82, **International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 46]

This argument is weak for two reasons.

Firstly, the regressive features of the Red Army appeared **before** the start of the Civil War. It was a political decision to organise in this way, a decision **not justified at the time in terms of circumstantial necessity**. Indeed, far from it (like most of the other Bolshevik policies of the period). Rather it was justified under the rather dubious rationale that workers did not need to fear the actions of a workers' state. Circumstances were not mentioned at all nor was the move considered as a retreat or as a defeat. It was not even considered as a matter of principle.

This perspective was reiterated by Trotsky after the end of the Civil War. Writing in 1922, he argued that:

*"There was and could be no question of controlling troops by means of elected committees and commanders who were subordinate to these committees and might be replaced at any moment . . . [The old army] had carried out a social revolution within itself, casting aside the commanders from the landlord and bourgeois classes and establishing organs of revolutionary self-government, in the shape of the Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies. These organisational and political measures were correct and necessary from the standpoint of breaking up the old army. But a new army capable of fighting could certainly not grow directly out of them . . . The attempt made to apply our old organisational methods to the building of a Red Army threatened to undermine it from the very outset. . . the system of election could in no way secure competent, suitable and authoritative commanders for the revolutionary army. The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class. Commanders were selected and tested by the organs of the Soviet power and the Communist Party. Election of commanders by the units themselves -- which were politically ill-educated, being composed of recently mobilised young peasants -- would inevitably have been transformed into a game of chance, and would often, in fact, have created favourable circumstances for the machinations of various intriguers and adventurers. Similarly, the revolutionary army, as an army for action and not as an arena of propaganda, was incompatible with a regime of elected committees, which in fact could not but destroy all centralised control."* ["The Path of the Red Army", **How the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, pp. 7-8]

If a "circumstantial" factor exists in this rationale, it is the claim that the soldiers were "politically ill-educated." However, **every** mass movement or revolution **starts** with those involved being "politically ill-educated." The very process of struggle educates them politically. A key part of this radicalisation is practising self-management and self-organisation -- in other words, in participating in the decision making process of the struggle, by discussing ideas and actions, by hearing other viewpoints, electing and mandating delegates. To remove this ensures that those involved **remain** "politically ill-educated" and, ultimately, incapable of self-government. It also contains the rationale for continuing party dictatorship:

*"If some people . . . have assumed the right to violate everybody's freedom on the pretext of preparing the triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power."* [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 52]

As can be seen from their arguments for party dictatorship, this was a conclusion which Lenin, Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks **did** draw (see, for example, [section 12](#)).

In addition, Trotsky's rationale refutes any claim that Bolshevism is somehow "fundamentally" democratic. The ramifications of it were felt everywhere in the soviet system as the Bolsheviks ignored the "wrong" democratic decisions made by the working masses and replaced their democratic organisations with appointees from above. Which means, to state the obvious, appointment from above, the dismantling of self-government, and so on are *"in accordance with the principles"* of Trotskyism. These comments were not made in the heat of the civil war, but afterward during peacetime. Notice Trotsky admits that a *"social revolution"* had swept through the Tsarist army. His actions, he also admits, reversed that revolution and replaced its organs of *"self-government"* with ones identical to the old regime. When that happens it is usually called by its true name: **counter**-revolution.

For a Trotskyist, therefore, to present themselves as a supporter of self-managed militias is the height of hypocrisy. The Stalinists repeated the same arguments used by Trotsky and acted in exactly the same way in their campaign against the CNT militias. Certain acts have certain ramifications, no matter who does them or under what government. In other words, abolishing democracy in the army will generate autocratic tendencies which will undermine socialistic ones **no matter who does it**. The same means cannot be used to serve different ends as there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the results obtained -- that is why the bourgeoisie do not encourage democracy in the army or the workplace! Just as the capitalist workplace is organised to produce proletarians and capital along with cloth and steel, the capitalist army is organised to protect and reinforce minority power. The army and the capitalist workplace are not simply means or neutral instruments. Rather they are social structures which generate, reinforce and **protect** specific social relations. This is what the Russian masses instinctively realised and conducted a social-revolution in both the army and workplace to **transform** these structures into ones which would enhance rather than crush freedom and working class autonomy. The Bolsheviks reversed these movements in favour of structures which reproduced capitalist social relationships **and justified it in terms of "socialism."** Unfortunately, capitalist means would only generate capitalist ends.

It was for these reasons that the CNT and its militias were organised from the bottom up in a self-managed way. It was the only way socialists and a socialist society could be created -- that is why anarchists are anarchists, we recognise that a socialist (i.e. libertarian) society cannot be created by authoritarian organisations. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued *"[h]ow could an egalitarian and free society emerge from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible."* ["Circular to all the Federations of the International Workers' Association", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, Iain McKay (ed.), p. 216] Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed

to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to enforce minority rule!).

As such, Kropotkin was right to argue that it was "*a tragic error*" to think that "*the old organisation, slowly developed in the course of history to crush freedom, to crush the individual, to establish oppression on a legal basis, to create monopolists, to lead minds astray by accustoming them to servitude -- will lend itself perfectly to new functions: that it will become the instrument, the framework, to germinate a new life, to establish freedom and equality on economic foundations, to eradicate monopolies, to awaken society and march to the conquest of a future of freedom and equality!*" [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 275] As such, to abolish democracy on the pretext that people are not ready for it ensures that it will never exist. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that "*[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.*" [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Secondly, how can a "*socialist consciousness*" be encouraged, or continue to exist, without socialist institutions to express it? Such a position is idealistic nonsense, expressing the wishful notion that the social relationships people experience does not impact on those involved. In effect, Rees is arguing that as long as the leaders have the "right ideas" it does not matter how an organisation is structured. However, how people develop, the ideas they have, are influenced by the relations they create with each other -- autocratic organisations do not encourage self-management or socialism, they produce bureaucrats and subjects.

An autocratic organisation **cannot** encourage a socialist consciousness by its institutional life, only in spite of it. For example, the capitalist workplace encourages a spirit of revolt and solidarity in those subject to its hierarchical management and this is expressed in direct action -- by **resisting** the authority of the boss. It only generates a socialist perspective via resistance to it. Similarly with the Red Army. Education programs to encourage reading and writing does not generate socialists, it generates soldiers who are literate. If these soldiers do not have the institutional means to manage their own affairs, a forum to discuss political and social issues, then they remain order takers and any socialist conscious will wither and die.

The Red Army was based on the fallacy that the structure of an organisation is unimportant and it is the politics of those in charge that matter (Marxists make a similar claim for the state, so we should not be too surprised). However, it is no co-incidence that bourgeois structures are always hierarchical -- self-management is a politically educational experience which erodes the power of those in charge and transforms those who do it. It is to stop this development, to protect the power of the ruling few, that the bourgeois always turn to centralised, hierarchical structures -- they reinforce elite rule. You cannot use the same form of organisation and expect different results -- they are designed that way for a reason! To twitter on about the Red Army being "*filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness*" while justifying the elimination of the only means by which that consciousness could survive, prosper and grow indicates a complete lack of socialist politics and any understanding of materialist philosophy.

Trotsky did not consider how the abolition of democracy and its replacement with an autocratic system would effect the morale or consciousness of the soldiers subject to it. He argued that in the Red Army "*the best soldier does not mean at all the most submissive and uncomplaining.*" Rather, "*the best soldier will nearly always be sharper, more observant and critical than the others. . . by his critical comments, based on facts accessible to all, he will pretty often undermine the prestige of the commanders and commissars in the eyes of the*

*mass of the soldiers.*" However, not having a democratic army the soldiers could hardly express their opinion other than rebellion or by indiscipline. Trotsky, however, adds a comment that makes his praise of critical soldiers seem less than sincere. He states that *"counter-revolutionary elements, agents of the enemy, make conscious and skilful use of the circumstances I have mentioned [presumably excessive privilege rather than critical soldiers] in order to stir up discontent and intensify antagonism between rank and file and the commanding personnel."* [Op. Cit., p. 118] The question, of course, arises of who can tell the difference between a critical soldier and a *"counter-revolutionary element"*? Without a democratic organisation, soldiers are dependent (as in any other hierarchy) on the power of the commanders, commissars and, in the Red Army, the Bolshevik Secret Police (the Cheka). In other words, members of the very class of autocrats their comments are directed against.

Without democratic organisation, the Red Army could never be a means for creating a socialist society, only a means of reproducing autocratic organisation. The influence of the autocratic organisation created by Trotsky had a massive impact on the development of the Soviet State. According to Trotsky himself:

*"The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country."* [The Revolution Betrayed, p. 90]

Obviously Trotsky had forgotten who created the regime in the Red Army in the first place. He also seems to have forgotten that after militarising the Red Army, he turned his power to militarising workers (starting with the railway workers). He also forgets that Lenin had been arguing that workers' must *"unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour"* from April 1918 along with granting *"individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)"* and that *"the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers"* was, in fact, *"in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government"* simply because *"the history of revolutionary movements"* had *"shown"* that *"the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes."* He notes that *"[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy."* ["The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", Collected Works, vol. 27, pp. 267-9]

In other words, Lenin urged the creation of, and implemented, **bourgeois** forms of workplace management based on the appointment of managers from above. To indicate that this was not in contradiction with Soviet principles, he points to the example of **bourgeois** revolutions! As if bourgeois methods do not reflect bourgeois interests and goals. In addition, these *"dictators"* were given the same autocratic powers Trotsky claimed the demobilisation of the Red Army four years later had *"persistently introduced everywhere."* Yes, *"on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country"* but the process had started immediately after the October Revolution and was urged and organised by Lenin and Trotsky **before** the Civil War had started.

Lenin's support for appointment of (*"dictatorial"*) managers from above makes Trotsky's 1922 comment that the *"Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class"* take on a new light. ["The Path of the Red Army", How

**the Revolution Armed**, vol. I, p. 8] After all, Lenin argued for an economy system built from above via the appointment of managers before the start of the Civil War. The Red Army was created from above via the appointment of officers before the start of the Civil War. Things had certainly changed since Lenin had argued in **The State and Revolution** that "[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall **at any time**." This would "serve as the bridge between capitalism and socialism." [**The Essential Lenin**, p. 302] One major difference, given Trotsky's rationales, seems to be that the Bolsheviks were now in power and so election and recall without exception could be forgotten and replaced by appointment.

In summary, Trotsky's argument against functional democracy in the Red Army could, and was, used to justify the suppression of any democratic decision or organisation of the working class the Bolshevik government disapproved of. He used the same argument, for example, to justify the undermining of the Factory Committee movement and the struggle for workers' control in favour of one-man management (see [section 17](#)). Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will not stay democratic for long (and to remain the sovereign power in society, any state will have to eliminate it or, at the very least, bring it under central control -- as institutionalised in the USSR constitution of 1918).

Instead of seeing socialism as a product of free association, of working class self-organisation from the bottom up by self-managed organisations, Trotsky saw it as a centralised, top-down system. Of course, being a democrat of sorts he saw the Bolshevik Government as being elected by the mass of the population (or, more correctly, he saw it being elected by the national congress of soviets at least initially, for he soon advocated the necessity of the dictatorship of the party). However, his vision of centralisation of power provided the rationale for destroying functional democracy in the grass-roots -- and without healthy roots, any plant will wither and die. Little wonder, then, that the Bolshevik experiment proved such a disaster -- yes, the civil war did not help but the logic of Bolshevism has started to undermine working class self-management **before** is started.

Thus Trotsky's argument that the democratic nature of a workers' army or militia is irrelevant because a "workers' state" exists is flawed on many different levels. And the experience of Trotsky in power indicates well the poverty of Trotskyism -- his suggestion for a self-managed militia is pure anarchism with nothing to do with the experience of Bolshevism in power.

## **12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?**

Equally ironic as Morrow's comments concerning democratic militias (see [last section](#)) is his argument that the revolution needed to "give the factory committees, militia committees, peasant committees, a democratic character, by having them elected by all workers in each unit; to bring together these elected delegates in village, city, regional councils" and "a national congress." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Such a position is correct, such developments were required to ensure the success of the revolution. However, it is somewhat ironic that a Trotskyist would present them as somehow being opposed to anarchism when, in fact, they are pure anarchism. Indeed, anarchists were arguing in favour of workers' councils more than five decades before Lenin discovered the

importance of the Russian Soviets in 1917 (see [section H.3.10](#)). Moreover, as we will indicate, what is even more ironic is the fact that Trotskyism does not actually see these organs as an expression of working class power but rather as a means for the party to take power. In addition, we must also note that it was Lenin and Trotsky who helped undermine the Russian workers' factory committees, militia committees and so on in favour of party rule. We will discuss each of these ironies in turn.

Firstly, Morrow's stated position is exactly what Bakunin and the anarchist movement had been arguing since the 1860s (also see in [section 8](#)). To quote Bakunin:

*"Abstain from all participation in bourgeois radicalism and organise outside of it the forces of the proletariat. The basis of that organisation is entirely given: It is the workshops and the federation of the workshops; the creation of resistance funds, instruments of struggle against the bourgeoisie, and their federation not just nationally, but internationally. The creation of chambers of labour . . . Anarchy, that is to say the true, the open popular revolution: legal and political anarchy, and economic organisation, from top to bottom and from the circumference to the centre, of the triumphant world of the workers."* ["Letter to Albert Richard", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, Iain McKay (ed.), pp. 183-4]

And:

*"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 206]

Here is Kropotkin presenting the same vision:

*"socialists . . . should apply all their strength to bring about on a vast scale the transformation of the property system by the expropriation pure and simple of the present holders of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour, and of capital of every kind, and by the seizure of all such capital by the cultivators, the workers's™ organisations, and the agricultural and municipal communes. The task of expropriation must be carried out by the workers themselves in the towns and the countryside . . . the bases of this new organisation will be . . . the free federation of producer groups and the free federation of communes and of groups of independent communes."* ["The Anarchist Idea from the Point of View of its Practical Realisation", **Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 500-1]

And:

*"Complete independence of the Commune, the Federation of free Communes, and the social revolution within the Commune, that is to say trade unions for production replacing the statist organisation of the society that exists today"* [Op. Cit., p. 161]

Bakunin also mentions that those defending the revolution would have a say in the revolutionary structure -- the *"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Council composed of . . . delegates from each barricade . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates."* [Op. Cit.,

p. 171] This reflected Proudhon's suggestion during the 1848 Revolution on *"the right of the citizens to appoint . . . their military chiefs, the simple soldiers and national guards appointing the lower ranks of officers, the officers appointing their superiors."* *"Organised in this way,"* he argued, *"the army retains its civic feelings; it is then no longer a nation within the nation. . . in which the citizen as a naturalised soldier learns to fight against his own country."* In *"the eventuality of war, the army only owes its obedience to the representatives of the nation and the military chiefs appointed by them."* This is *"how the People has to organise its military in such a way as to simultaneously guarantee its defence and its liberties"*. [**Property is Theft!**, pp. 433-4] These ideas were obviously reflected in the democratic nature of the CNT militias.

As can be seen, Morrow's suggestion on how to push the Spanish Revolution forward just repeats the ideas of anarchism. Any one familiar with anarchist theory would not be surprised by this as they would know that we have seen a free federation of workplace and communal associations as the basis of a revolution and, therefore, a free society since the time of Proudhon. Thus Morrow's "Trotskyist" vision of a federation of workers' council actually reproduces basic anarchist ideas, ideas which pre-date Lenin's support for soviets as the basis of his *"workers' state"* by over half a century (we will indicate the fundamental difference between the anarchist vision and the Trotskyist in due course).

As an aside, and as we noted in [section H.1.4](#), these quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin make a mockery of Lenin's assertion that anarchists do not analyse *"what to put in the place of what has been destroyed [i.e. the old state machine] and how"* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 362] Anarchists have always suggested a clear answer to what we should *"replace"* the state with - - namely free federations of working class organisations created in the struggle against capital and state. While anarchists did not present a blueprint of what would occur after the revolution (and rightly so) we did provide a general outline in terms of a decentralised, free federation of self-managed workers' associations as well as linking these future forms of working class self-government with the forms generated in the current class struggle in the here and now (see [section I.2.3](#)). To suggest otherwise is to either be ignorant of anarchist theory or seek to deceive.

Similarly, Lenin's other assertion that anarchists think *it is of no use studying the concrete lessons of previous proletarian revolutions*" and *"think only of destroying the old state machine"* is equally baseless, as any one reading, say, Kropotkin's work would soon realise (for example, **The Great French Revolution, Modern Science and Anarchy** or his pamphlets **Revolutionary Government** and **The Paris Commune**). Starting with Bakunin, anarchists analysed the experiences of the Paris Commune and the class struggle itself to generalise political conclusions from them (for example, the vision of a free society as a federation of workers' associations is clearly a product of analysing the class struggle and looking at the failures of the Commune). Given that Lenin states in the same work that *"anarchists had tried to claim the Paris Commune as their 'own'"* suggests that anarchists **had** studied the 1871 uprising and he was aware of that fact. Of course, Lenin states that we had *"failed to give anything even approaching a true solution"* to *"what should supersede the 'old state machine'"* -- given that the solution anarchists proposed was a federation of workers' councils to smash the state, expropriate capitalism and defend the revolution his comments seem strange as this, according to **The State and Revolution**, is the "Marxist" solution as well (in fact, as we will soon see, Lenin played lip service to this and instead saw the solution as government by his party rather than the masses as a whole). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 362 and p. 350]

Thus, Morrow's vision of what was required for a successful revolution parallels that of anarchism. We shall now discuss where and how they differ.

The essential difference between the anarchist and Trotskyist vision of workers' councils as the basis of a revolution is what role these councils should play. For libertarians, these federations of self-managed assemblies is the actual framework of the revolution (and the free society it is trying to create). As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*"There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration . . . Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must **be** the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become 'fighting words,' not distinct panaceas. They must be created as **modes of struggle** against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions. . . The factory committees . . . must be managed directly by workers' assemblies in the factories. . . neighbourhood committees, councils and boards must be rooted completely in the neighbourhood assemble. They must be answerable at every point to the assembly, they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly. The specific gravity of society, in short, must be shifted to its base -- the armed people in permanent assembly." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 104-5]*

Thus the anarchist social revolution sees workers' councils as organs of working class self-management, the means by which they control their own lives and create a new society based on their needs, visions, dreams and hopes. They are not seen as means by which others, the revolutionary party, seized power **on behalf** of the people as Trotskyists do.

Harsh words? No, as can be seen from Morrow who is quite clear on the role of working class organisation -- it is seen purely as the means by which the party can take power. As he argues, there is *"no magic in the soviet form: it is merely the most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses. . . It would provide the arena in which the revolutionary party can win the support of the working class."* Initially the *"reformist majority in the executive committee would decline the assumption of state power. But the workers could still find in the soviets their natural organs of struggle until the genuinely revolutionary elements in the various parties banded together to win a revolutionary majority in the congress and establish a workers' state."* In other words, the *"workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . can only be brought into existence by the direct, **political** intervention of the masses, through the factory and village councils (soviets) at that point where a majority in the soviets is wielded by the workers' party or parties which are determined to overthrow the bourgeois state. Such was the basic theoretical contribution of Lenin."* [Op. Cit., p. 136, p. 100 and p. 113]

Ignoring the awkward fact that Lenin **before** seizing power argued that, as in the Paris Commune, there would be no executive (although this changed afterward), this indicates well the fundamental difference between anarchism and Trotskyism. For anarchists, the existence of an *"executive committee"* indicates that the workers' council do not, in fact, have power in society -- rather it is the minority in the executive committee who have been delegated power. Rather than govern themselves and society directly, workers are turned into voters implementing the decisions their leaders have made **on their behalf**. If revolutionary bodies

like workers' councils **did** create a "*workers' state*" (as Morrow recommends) then their power would be transferred and centralised into the hands of a so-called "revolutionary" government. In this, Morrow follows his guru Trotsky:

*"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*

*"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* ["*Stalinism and Bolshevism,*" **Writings 1936-37**, p. 426]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole "seizing power", it is the **vanguard** which takes power -- "*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" He mocked the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations: "*Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat.*" [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 424 and p. 430]

In this Trotsky repeated comments made when he was in power. In 1920 he argued that "*[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the . . . party . . . [that] the Soviets . . . [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.*" [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109] Any claims that Trotsky's infamously authoritarian (indeed dictatorial) politics of that time were a temporary aberration caused by the necessities of the Russian Civil War are refuted by these later quotes -- after 17 years he was still arguing the same point.

Trotsky had the same vision of party dictatorship being the basis of a revolution in 1924. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he states that "*whole of . . . Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? . . . Lenin's position was this: . . . the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets.*" Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. Moreover, he states that "*to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us.*" It was "*one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets.*" The Soviet

Congress just provided "*the legal cover*" for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**, p. 134, p. 158 and p. 161]

We are not denying that Trotskyists do aim to gain a majority within working class conferences. That is clear. Anarchists also seek to gain the support of the mass of the population. It is what they do next that counts. Trotskyists seek to create a government above these organisations and dominate the executive committees that requires. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers' become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution. Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace, community and militia assemblies and their councils and conferences. Camillo Berneri simply summed up the anarchist perspective clearly when he wrote:

*"Marxists . . . foresee the natural extinction of the State as a consequence of the destruction of the classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State socialism, whereas anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which suppresses, with classes, the State. Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the commune by the whole proletariat, but rather the conquest of the State by the party which presumes to represent the proletariat. Anarchists accept the use of political power by the proletariat, but this political power is understood as [being formed by] the entire corpus of communist management systems — trade union organisations, communal institutions, both regional and national — freely constituted outside and against the political monopoly of a party and aiming at minimal administrative centralisation."* ["*Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism*", **The State - Or Revolution**, no. 4, p. 52]

Trotskyists, therefore, advocate workers councils because they see them as **the** means the vanguard party can take power. Rather than seeing socialism or "workers' power" as a society in which everyone would directly control their own affairs, Trotskyists see it in terms of working class people delegating their power into the hands of a government. Needless to say, the two things are not identical and, in practice, the government soon turns from being the people's servant into its master.

It is clear that Morrow always discusses workers councils in terms of the strategy and programme of the party, not the value that workers councils have as organs of direct workers control of society. He, like Trotsky, advocates workers councils because he sees them as the best way for the vanguard party to rally workers around its leadership and organise the party's seizure of state power. At no time does he see them as means by which working class people can govern themselves directly -- quite the reverse. The danger of such an approach is obvious. The government will soon become isolated from the mass of the population and, due to the centralised nature of the state, difficult to hold accountable. Moreover, given the dominant role of the party in the new state and the perspective that it is the workers' vanguard, it becomes increasingly likely that it will place its power before that of those it claims to represent. This is what happened in **every** self-proclaimed Marxist regime that has existed.

Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies. When the workers and sailors of the Kronstadt navy base rebelled in 1921, in solidarity with striking workers in Petrograd, they demanded freedom of the press for socialist and anarchist groups and new elections to the soviets but the reaction of the Bolshevik leadership was to crush the Kronstadt dissent in blood. Trotsky's attitude towards workers's democracy was clearly expressed at the time when he argued that the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition *"have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"* He spoke of the *"revolutionary historic birthright of the Party"* and that it *"is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

This perspective naturally follows from Trotsky's vanguardist politics (see [section H.5](#)). For Leninists, the party is the bearer of *"socialist consciousness"* and, according to Lenin in **What is to be Done?**, workers, by their own efforts, can only achieve a *"trade union"* consciousness and, indeed, *"there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their struggle"* and so *"the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology"* (the later being developed not by workers but by the *"bourgeois intelligentsia"*). [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and p. 74] To weaken or question the party means to weaken or question the socialist nature of the revolution and so weaken the *"dictatorship of the proletariat."* Thus we have the paradoxical situation of the "proletarian dictatorship" repressing workers, eliminating proletarian democracy and maintaining itself against the *"passing moods"* of the workers (which means rejecting what democracy is all about). Hence Lenin's comment at a conference of the Cheka (his political police) in 1920:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17,000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40,913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution** although he did admit then that *"it is clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 337-8] This failure, needless to say, was shared by Morrow and later Trotskyists who do not compare the rhetoric of 1917 to the reality of 1918 onwards (see [section H.1.7](#)).

It is hard to combine these facts and the comments by Lenin and Trotsky with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule -- after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises -- who decides what a *"wavering"* or *"unstable"* element is? Given their

comments on the role of the party and the need for it to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets who reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression of its enemies (including elements within or even the vast majority of the working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons (we will ignore the question of the interests of the bureaucratic machine which will inevitably surround a centralised body -- see [section H.3.9](#) for further discussion).

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we stress, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 -- they are to "*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*"). Any independence on their part would be considered "*wavering*" or an expression of "*unstable*" natures and so subject to "*revolutionary coercion*". In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level -- vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government to ensure that the soviets do not go back into the "*mud*" via the "*passing moods*" caused by the "*insufficient cultural level of the masses*" as should by their rejection of the vanguard). In other words, the soviet form may be the "*most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses*" (to use Morrow's words) but only **before** they become transformed into state organs.

Secondly, "*revolutionary coercion*" against "*wavering*" elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed "*unstable*" and become subject to "*revolutionary*" coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Trotskyist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing representatives they hold in that ideology.

Morrow argues that "[o]ne must never forget . . . that soviets **do not begin** as organs of state power" rather they start as "*organs defending the workers' daily interests*" and include "*powerful strike committees*." [Op. Cit., p. 136] That is true, initially workers' councils are expressions of working class power and are organs of working class self-management and self-activity. They are subject to direct control from below and unite from the bottom up. However, once they are turned into "*organs of state power*" their role (to re-quote the Soviet constitution of 1918) becomes that of "*carry[ing] out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*." Soviet power is replaced by party power and they become a shell of their former selves -- essentially rubber-stamps for the decisions of the party's central committee.

Ironically, Morrow quotes the main theoretician of the Spanish Socialist Party as stating "*the organ of the proletarian dictatorship will be the Socialist Party*" and states that the Socialist leaders "*were saying precisely what the anarchist leaders had been accusing both*

*communists and revolutionary socialists of meaning by the proletarian dictatorship.*" [Op. Cit., p. 99 and p. 100] This is hardly surprising, as this was what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky **had** been arguing. As well as the quotes we have provided above, we may add Trotsky's comment that the "*fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party.*" [Lessons of October, p. 118] The resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that "[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle . . . is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party." [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] Indeed, as indicated in [section 4](#), the CNT had broken with the Comintern over the privileged role of the party and the notion that the "*dictatorship of the party*" was a necessity for a "successful" revolution. In addition, we may quote Lenin's opinion that:

*"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transition from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation."*  
[Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

As Lenin had previously acknowledged: "*When we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party . . . we say, 'Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position . . .'*" [Op. Cit., vol. 29, p. 535]

As Lenin and Trotsky constantly argued (once in power), proletarian dictatorship was impossible without the political party of the workers (whatever its name). Indeed, as indicated in [section 10](#), for Lenin to even discuss any difference between the dictatorship of the class and that of the party just indicated a confused mind. Hence Morrow's comments are incredulous, particularly as he himself stresses that the soviet form is useful purely as a means of gaining support for the party which would take over the executive of the workers' councils. He clearly is aware that the party is the **essential** organ of proletarian rule from a Leninist perspective -- without the dictatorship of the party, Trotsky argues, the soviets fall back into the mud. Trotsky, indeed, stressed this need for the dictatorship of the party rather than of the proletariat in a letter written in 1937:

*"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities -- the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history. . . The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit*

*the material and the moral development of the masses.*" [Writings 1936-37, pp. 513-4]

Needless to say, Morrow must have been aware of these arguments by Lenin and Trotsky for most of these appeared in the first issue of his party's journal (his own writings first appeared in the second issue) in an article seeking to refute the notion that the dictatorship of the party was an alien concept brought into Bolshevism by Stalin. It did so by "*quotations from Lenin, Trotsky and others so as to establish . . . the dictatorship of the party is Leninist*" rather than "*a Stalinist innovation*". It adds that "*the twelfth congress of the Russian Communists adopted a resolution stating: 'The dictatorship of the working class can be secured in no other way than through the form of the dictatorship of its advanced vanguard, that is, the Communist party.'*". In short, the "*Soviet system is the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat which is firmly realizable only through its vanguard, the party*" and "*no dictatorship of the party, nor of the proletariat; no Soviet democracy*" [Max Shachtman, "*Dictatorship of Party or Proletariat? Remarks on a Conception of the AWP ... and Others*", **New International**, July 1934] Morrow himself quotes Lenin from 1917 that "*even tomorrow events may put power into our hands, and then we shall not relinquish it*". [quoted by Morrow, **Op. Cit.**, p. 88]

The net result of Bolshevik politics in Russia was that Lenin and Trotsky undermined the self-management of working class bodies during the Russian Revolution and **before** the Civil War started in May 1918. We have already chronicled Trotsky's elimination of democracy and equality in the Red Army (see [section 11](#)). A similar fate befell the factory committees (see [section 17](#)) and soviet democracy ([section H.6.1](#)). The logic of Bolshevism is such that at no point did Lenin describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control as a defeat. We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in [section H](#) and so will not do so here.

All in all, while Morrow's rhetoric on the nature of the social revolution may sound anarchist, there are important differences between the two visions. While Trotskyists support workers' councils on purely instrumentalist grounds as the best means of gaining support for their party's assumption of governmental power, anarchists see workers' councils as the means by which people can revolutionise society and themselves by practising self-management in all aspects of their lives. The difference is important and its ramifications signify why the Russian Revolution became the "dictatorship **over** the proletariat" Bakunin predicted:

*"By popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people. . . [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 178]

It was for this reason that he argued the anarchists do "*not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling*

*individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 237] The history of the Russian Revolution proved him right.

### 13. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist "*workers' state*"?

Morrow asserts two "*fundamental*" tenets of "*anarchism*" in his book [Op. Cit., pp. 101-2]. Unfortunately for him, his claims are somewhat at odds with reality. Anarchism, as we will prove in [section 14](#), does not hold one of the positions he claims it does. The other "*tenet*" of anarchism he fails to discuss at all and so the reader cannot understand **why** anarchists think as they do. Here we present the context and theory Morrow does not give his readers.

According to Morrow, the first tenet is that anarchism "*has consistently refused to recognise the distinction between a bourgeois and a workers' state. Even in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, anarchism denounced the Soviet Union as an exploiters' regime.*" [Op. Cit., p. 101] It is due to this, he argues, the CNT co-operated with the bourgeois state:

*"The false anarchist teachings on the nature of the state . . . should logically have led them [the CNT] to refuse governmental participation in any event . . . the anarchists were in the intolerable position of objecting to the necessary administrative co-ordination and centralisation of the work they had already begun. Their anti-statism 'as such' had to be thrown off. What **did** remain, to wreck disaster in the end, was their failure to recognise the distinction between a workers' and a bourgeois state."* [Op. Cit., p. 101]

This is, to say the least, confused and confusing. Anarchists have **never** denied that there is a need for "*co-ordination*" of numerous activities -- it is why we have consistently advocated **federalism** while opposing centralisation. Thus we find Bakunin contrasting "*state centralization, and the actual subordination of the sovereign people to the intellectual minority that governs them, supposedly representing them but invariably exploiting them*" to "*federal organisation, from below upward, of workers' associations, groups, communes, districts, and ultimately, regions and nations*". The latter could not be considered as the same as "*centralised states*" and were "contrary to their essence" for the state "*stands outside the people and above them*" and is "*the government of society from above downward*". This is why anarchists aim for "*an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments -- a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations.*" [Statism and Anarchy, p. 13, p. 136, p. 198 and p. 33] That Marxists do not appear to know this says more about their awareness of anarchist theory than about anarchism. Likewise, they seem to confuse **any** form of co-ordination with "*centralisation*" and simply do not appear to understand what federalism is and what it is for. Morrow, as we indicate in [section H.2](#), was not the first Marxist to assert such things and, sadly, was not the last.

Another source of confusion is the lack of discussion of what constitutes a state, namely what defines it as against other forms of social organisation, what its role is and what are its unique properties. In other words, what makes a state a state. This is fundamental in understanding the anarchist position as regards the so-called "*workers' state*" and, needless to say, Morrow does not bother to explain this and so explain **why** anarchists consider the bourgeois and

workers' state to be similar. If he did then perhaps his readers would agree with the anarchists on this matter.

However, before discussing that we have to address a misrepresentation of Morrow's. Rather than the expression of anarchist politics, the actions of the CNT were in direct opposition to them. As we showed in [section 12](#), anarchists see a social revolution in terms of creating federations of workers associations (i.e. workers' councils). It was this vision that had created the structure of the CNT (as Bakunin had argued, *"the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour . . . bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself"* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 255]). Thus, the social revolution would see the workers' organisation (be they labour unions or spontaneously created organs like workers' councils) *"tak[ing] the revolution into its own hands . . . an earnest international organisation of workers' associations . . . [would] replac[e] this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie."* [Bakunin, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110]

This is **precisely** what the CNT did not do -- rather it decided against following anarchist theory and instead decided to co-operate with other parties and unions in the *"Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias"* (at least temporarily until the CNT stronghold in Saragossa was liberated by CNT militias). In effect, it created a UGT-like "Workers Alliance" with other anti-fascist parties and unions and rejected its pre-war policy of "unity from below" (see [section 5](#)). The CNT and FAI leadership decided not to talk of libertarian communism but only of the fight against fascism -- a greater mistake they could not have made.

As the Friends of Durruti noted, *"[i]n July [1936] a Committee of Antifascist Militias was set up. It was not a class organ."* [**Towards a Fresh Revolution**, p. 17] Emma Goldman, likewise, noted that *"once [the CNT-FAI] went into the so-called united-front, they could do nothing else but go further. In other words, the one mistake, the one wrong step inevitably led to others as it always does. I am more than ever convinced that if the comrades had remained firm on their own grounds they would have remained stronger than they are now. But I repeat, once they had made common cause for the period of the anti-Fascist war, they were driven by the logic of events to go further."* [**Vision on Fire**, pp. 100-1] This is a commonplace anarchist critique of the CNT-FAI but it should be noted that Morrow is somewhat ambiguous about the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias, writing of *"dual power"* and that the *"most important of these new organs of power was the 'Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militias of Catalonia', organized July 21"* which, *"[u]nlike a coalition government which in actuality rests on the old state machine, . . . rested on the workers' organizations and militias."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 85 and p. 83] In reality, this body was the means by which the state machine was given the space to regroup and, in time, organise the counter-revolution -- precisely because it was not a working-class body but rather a compromise made-up of representatives of existing unions and parties.

An anarchist approach in the aftermath of the fascist uprising would have meant replacing the Generalitat with a federal assembly of delegates from workplace and local community assemblies (a Defence Council, to use a CNT expression -- see [section 8](#)). Only popular assemblies (not political parties) would be represented (parties would have an influence only in proportion to their influence in these base assemblies). The CNT should have called a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions, unorganised workplaces and community groupings to send delegates to create the framework of this

system. This, we must stress, was **not** done (and we will discuss why in [section 20](#)). However, **because** the CNT in effect "postponed" the political aspects of the social revolution (namely, to quote Kropotkin, to "*break the old organisation, **smash the State** and rebuild a new organisation starting with the very foundations of society -- the liberated village commune, federalism, groupings from simple to complex, the free workers union*" [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 275]) in the name of the struggle against Franco, the natural result would be exactly as Goldman indicated and Morrow explains:

*"But isn't it a far cry from the failure to create the organs to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to the acceptance of the role of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie? Not at all . . . Without developing soviets -- workers' councils -- it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 88-9]

As Kropotkin predicted, "*there can be no middle way: either the Commune will be absolutely free to adopt all the institutions it wishes and to make all the reforms and revolutions it finds necessary, or it will remain . . . a mere branch of the State, restricted in all its movements . . . and sure of succumbing in the struggle that will follow. The Commune . . . must break the State and replace it by the Federation*" [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83] Without an alternative means of co-ordinating the struggle, the CNT would, as Morrow argued, have little choice but to collaborate with the state. However, rather than being a product of anarchist theory, as Morrow states, this came about by **ignoring** that theory.

This can be seen from the false alternative used to justify the CNT's and FAI's actions -- namely: "*Either libertarian communism, which means anarchist dictatorship, or democracy, which means collaboration.*" [quoted by Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 41] The creation of libertarian communism is done **from below** by those subject to capitalist and statist hierarchy overthrowing those with power over them by smashing the state and replacing it with self-managed organisations as well as expropriating capital and placing it under workers' self-management. As Murray Bookchin argues:

*"Underlying all [the] errors [of the CNT], at least in theoretical terms, was the CNT-FAI's absurd notion that if it assumed power in the areas it controlled, it was establishing a 'State.' As long as the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State . . . These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms . . . not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term. . . That the 'taking of power' by an armed people in militias, libertarian unions and federations, peasant communes and industrial collectives could be viewed as an 'anarchist dictatorship' reveals the incredible confusion that filled the minds of the 'influential militants.'"* [**Looking Back at Spain**, pp. 86-7]

This perspective explains why anarchists do not see any fundamental difference between a so-called "*workers' state*" and the existing state. For anarchists, the state is based fundamentally on hierarchical power -- the delegation of power into the hands of a few, of a government. As Kropotkin summarised: "*The State is necessarily hierarchical, authoritarian -- or it ceases to be the State.*" [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 227] Which raises an obvious question -- **why** is the state structured in this way? It does not come about by

accident but due to its role as defender of (minority) class property, power and rule (see [section B.2](#)). As Kropotkin indicated:

*"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 143]

The Jacobin's of the Great French Revolution were **"the bulwark of the bourgeoisie coming to power against the egalitarian tendencies of the people . . . for having known how to prevent the people from taking the communist and egalitarian path"**. Given this, *"how it is possible that the socialists . . . adopted the ideal of the **Jacobin State** when this ideal had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies of the people which had arisen during the Revolution?"* Worse, the State *"was literally inundated by thousands"* of squabbles and issues which *"then took thousands of functionaries . . . to read, classify, evaluate all these, to pronounce on the smallest detail"*, with *"most of them corruptible"*. So *"economic servitude"* was secured by the modern State *"bringing its subjects under the yoke of its functionaries and a whole new class of privileged bureaucrats, the Church, the landlords, merchants, and capitalists."* [Modern Science and Anarchy, p. 364, p. 366, p. 269 and p. 307] In short, the centralised, hierarchical State reflects its role as defender of the class system while also, by the very structure needed to fulfil that role, spawns a bureaucracy around it with powers and interests of its own: *"the millions paid every year to officials of all sorts, whose function it is to maintain the 'rights' of minorities - the right, that is, of a few rich men - to manipulate the economic activities of the nation"*. [Kropotkin, **The Conquest Of Bread And Other Writings**, p. 24]

The situation becomes worse if we were *"to hand over to the state all the main sources of economical life -- the land, the mines, the railways, banking, insurance, and so on -- as also the management of all the main branches of industry, in addition to all the functions already accumulated in its hands"* as this *"would mean to create a new instrument of tyranny. State capitalism would only increase the powers of bureaucracy and capitalism."* It would keep capitalist economic arrangements in place for *"[u]nder [state] collectivism it is the representatives of the nation, or of the commune, and their deputies and officials who are to have the control of industry. It is they who reserve to themselves the right of employing the surplus of production"* while *"labourers and craftsmen, weavers and men of science, are all wage-servants of the state"*. This *"new bureaucracy would end by making expropriation hateful in the eyes of all"* as well as creating *"the privileged career of state functionaries"* for *"the state . . . cannot do without its formidable hierarchy of officials . . . its numberless officials"*, particularly one in which *"an all-powerful centralized government . . . undertakes to supply"* every one with goods as this *"develops . . . a formidable bureaucracy"* (although it *"absolutely incapable of doing that through its functionaries -- no matter how countless they may be"*). [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 235, p. 58, p. 78, p. 156, pp. 48-9 and p. 252]

This explains why anarchists oppose the so-called *"workers' state"* advocated by Marxists -- whether in its original form (as a transformed bourgeois republic captured by "political power" as discussed in [section H.3.10](#)) or its Leninist one (ostensibly based on workers councils). As a centralised social organisation it shares the same structure as previous states, a centralised structure designed to exclude the masses from decision-making and to secure minority rule. To apply the same structure in the hope that it would produce a different

outcome is simply utopian -- and so it proved to be under the Bolsheviks who simply showed Bakunin's warnings to be correct just as the rise of reformism in social democracy had (see [section H.1.1](#)).

Morrow's incredulity at anarchists "*denounc[ing] th Soviet Union as an exploiters' regime*" in "*the days of Lenin and Trotsky*" says more about his awareness of the reality of the Bolshevik regime than any weakness in the anarchist theory of the state. As Alexander Berkman saw first-hand, a "*bureaucratic machine is created that is appalling in its parasitism, inefficiency and corruption. In Moscow alone this new class of sovbums (Soviet bureaucrats) exceeds, in 1920, the total of office holders throughout the whole of Russia under the Tsar in 1914.*" The "*Soviet bureaucracy is corrupt and criminal, a huge parasite.*" This class of non-producers control the allocation of the products created by the workers and the labour itself: "*The system of yedinolitchiye is introduced: management by one person. Lenin himself is its originator and chief advocate . . . Every mill, mine, and factory, the railroads and all the other industries are to be managed by a single head . . . in full control of the industries, with absolute power over the workers.*" "*Economically, Russia in 1922 is a combination of State and private capitalism. Politically it remains . . . the dictatorship of the inner circle of the Communist Party.* Capitalist relations in production produce capitalist relations in distribution -- and the class system produces a class struggle "*of a twofold nature: against the private capitalist, and against the State as an employer of labor.*" ["*The Russian Tragedy*", Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, **To Remain Silent is Impossible**, p. 96, p. 99, pp. 96-7, p. 100 and p. 102] Under Stalin, as before the NEP, the private capitalists are completely replaced by the state bureaucracy but the exploitation and oppression which allowed the growth of the state bureaucracy remains regardless of whether Lenin and Trotsky head the state or Stalin does.

In short, the social structures and social relationships associated with Stalin and his rise to power, whether economic or political, were created under Lenin and Trotsky. Workers' were turned into wage-slaves of the state and its appointed "*one-man managers*" while there was a party dictatorship. The state controlled workers, their labour and its product, deciding how it was used and who got what. That the levels of oppression, privilege and inequality were lower under Lenin and Trotsky than under Stalin does not make their regime non-exploitative and non-oppressive nor does it change its class structure -- any more than a profit rate of 5% rather than 25% makes an economy or company less capitalist.

So, unlike Lenin in **The State and Revolution**, who stressed the "*bodies of armed men*" aspect of the state, anarchists consider the real question as one of who will tell these "*bodies of armed men*" what to do. Will it be the people as a whole (as expressed through their self-managed organisations) or will be it a government (perhaps elected by representative organisations)? Will they impose the will of the few at the top of a centralised hierarchical state or will they defend the freedom of the masses against those seeking to rule them? For if it **were** simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

*"But perhaps the truth is simply this: . . . [some] take the expression 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*

*"Thus constructed, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*"But the real supporters of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one' party's leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator's will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses."* [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38-9]

It should also go without saying that certain needed social functions are currently monopolised by the State can be provided by other bodies. For example, many capitalist nations have a nationalised railway network but such a socially necessary function can be provided by capitalist companies -- or by workers' associations. Likewise with other allegedly State functions: *"Is the State even necessary for the defense of a territory? If armed brigands attack a people, is not that same people, armed with good weapons, the surest rampart to oppose to the foreign aggressor? Standing armies are always beaten by invaders, and history teaches that the latter are to be repulsed by a popular rising alone"*. [Kropotkin, *"The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution"*, **Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 121-2] In short, a free society *"will be forced to find new forms of organisation for the social functions that the State apportioned between its functionaries. And nothing will be done as long as this is not done."* [Kropotkin, **Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 169] Morrow, like most Marxists, seems to think that genuinely needed activities that have historically been monopolised by the state can only be provided by it (albeit a *"workers' state"*).

Maurice Brinton sums up the issue well when he argued that *"workers' power . . . cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party -- as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks . . . What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society -- and organises to this end."* [**The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xiv] As Kropotkin stressed:

*"To tell the workers that they will be able to introduce the socialist system **while retaining the machine of the State** and only changing the men in power; to prevent, instead of aiding, the mind of the workers progressing towards **the search for new forms of life** that would be **their** own -- that is in our eyes a historic mistake which borders on the criminal."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 190]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** "seizes power" -- will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent the mass of the population. The difference is vital -- and anyone who confuses the issue (like Leninists) does so out of stupidity, vested interests or a poverty of revolutionary theory.

If it **is** the mass of people then they have to express themselves and their power (i.e. the power to manage their own affairs). That requires that individuals -- no matter where they are, be it in the workplace, community or on the front line -- are part of self-managed organisations. Only by self-management in functional groups can working class people be said to controlling their own lives and determining their own fate. Such a system of federated popular assemblies and their means of defence would not be a state in the anarchist sense of the word. Nor would it be anything like the regime created by the Bolsheviks.

Superficially, the Trotskyist vision of revolution, while seeming in some ways similar to that of anarchists, differ on this question. For Trotskyists, the **party** takes power, **not** the mass of the population directly. Only if you view "proletarian" seizure of power in terms of electing a political party to government could you see the elimination of functional democracy in the armed forces and the workplaces as no threat to working class power. Given Trotsky's actual elimination of democracy in the Red Army and Navy plus his comments on one-man management (and their justifications -- see sections [11](#) and [17](#)) it is clear that Trotskyists consider the workers' state in terms of party government, **not** self-management, **not** functional direct democracy.

Yes, the Trotskyists do claim that it is the workers, via their soviets, who will elect the government and hold it accountable but such a position fails to realise that a social revolution can only be created from below, by the direct action of the mass of the population. By delegating power into the hands of a few, the revolution is distorted. The initiative and power no longer rests in the hands of the mass of the population and so they can no longer take part in the constructive work of the revolution **and so it will not reflect their interests and needs**. As power flows from the top-down, bureaucratic distortions are inevitable. Moreover, the government will inevitably clash with its subjects and Trotskyist theory provides the justification for the government imposing its wishes and negating workers' democracy. Moreover, in the centralised state desired by Trotskyists democratic accountability will inevitably suffer as power flows to the top:

*"The power of the local soviets passed into the hands of the [National] Executive Committee, the power of the Executive Committee passed into the hands of the Council of People's Commissars, and finally, the power of the Council of People's Commissars passed into the hands of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party."*  
[Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 93]

Little wonder, then, these CNT aphorisms:

*"power corrupts both those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised; those who think they can conquer the State in order to destroy it are unaware that the State overcomes all its conquerors. . . dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship without the proletariat and against them."* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 456]

That is why anarchists consider the workers' state as not that different from the bourgeois state. Rather than creating a system in which working class people directly manage their own affairs, the workers' state, like any other state, involves the delegation of that power into the hands of a few, centralisation of power, a hierarchy of politicians and officials as well as a bureaucracy. This was the case under Lenin and Trotsky simply because a structure which evolved to secure minority class rule simply cannot be used to end it. Given that state institutions generate specific social relations, specific relations of authority (namely those order giver and order taker) they cannot help becoming separated from society, becoming a new class based on the state's bureaucratic machine. Any state structure (particularly a highly centralised one, as desired by Leninists) has a certain independence from society and so serves the interests of those within the State institutions rather than the people as a whole.

Perhaps a Leninist will point to **The State and Revolution** as evidence that Lenin desired a state based round the soviets -- workers' councils -- and so our comments are unjustified. However, as Marx said, judge people by what they do, not what they say. The first act of the October Revolution was to form an executive power **over** the soviets (although, of course, in theory accountable to their national congress). In **The State and Revolution** Lenin praised Marx's comment that the Paris Commune was both administrative **and** executive. The "*workers' state*" created by Lenin did not follow that model (as Russian anarcho-syndicalists argued in August 1918, "*the Soviet of People's Commissars [i]s an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work*" [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118]). Morrow follows Lenin in favouring executive committees above workers' councils. In this he actually ignores Marx's comments that the Paris Commune was "*to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.*" [Marx and Engels, **Selected Writings**, p. 287] This indicates that Lenin's claims in **State and Revolution** were ignored once the Bolsheviks took power, so indicating that use of that work to prove the democratic nature of Bolshevism is flawed (see [section H.1.7](#)).

Moreover, Marx's support of the fusion of executive and legislative powers is not as revolutionary as some imagine. For anarchists, as Bookchin argues, "*[i]n point of fact, the consolidation of 'executive and legislative' functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure . . . Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the 'higher bodies' of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular 'revolutionary committees' below.*" [**Toward an Ecological Society**, pp. 215-6]

Thus the Bolshevik state was not based around soviet self-management **nor** the fusion of executive and administrative in their hands but rather the use of the soviets to elect a government (a separate executive) which had the real power. The issue is quite simple -- either "*All power to the Soviets*" means just that or it means "*All power to the government elected by the Soviets*". The second is not the same as the first, for the obvious reason that in the second the soviets become simply ratification machines for the government and not organs in which the working masses can run their own affairs. We must also point out that the other promises made in Lenin's book went the same way as his support for the combining administration and executive tasks in the Paris Commune -- and, we stress, all **before** the

Civil War started in May 1918 (the usual Trotskyist defence of such betrayals is to blame the Civil War which is hard to do as it had not started yet).

So it is unsurprising that Morrow does not explain why anarchists reject the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" -- to do so would be to show that Trotskyism is not the revolutionary movement for workers' liberty it likes to claim it is. Moreover, it would involve giving an objective account of anarchist theory and admitting that the CNT did not follow its teachings as well as recognition that Bolshevism in power confirmed the anarchist rejection of the so-called "*workers' state*".

## 14. What is wrong with Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism?

If Morrow's first tenet of anarchism is question begging (see the [previous section](#)), the second is simply false. According to Morrow the "*second fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching*" is, apparently, the following:

*"Since Bakunin, the anarchists had accused Marxists of over-estimating the importance of state power, and had characterised this as merely the reflection of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' pre-occupation with lucrative administrative posts. Anarchism calls upon workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power. The ultimate sources of power (property relations) being secured, the state power will collapse, never to be replaced . . . The Spanish anarchists thus failed to understand that it was only the collapse of state power . . . which had enabled them to seize the factories."* [Op. Cit., p. 102]

It would be interesting to discover in what work of Bakunin, or any revolutionary anarchist, such a position could be found. Morrow gives us no references to help us in our quest -- hardly surprising as no anarchist (Spanish or otherwise) ever argued this point before July 1936. However, in September 1936, we discover the CNT arguing that the "*withering away of the State is socialism's ultimate objective. Facts have demonstrated that in practice it is achieved by liquidation of the bourgeois State, brought to a state of asphyxiation by economic expropriation.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 261] This, we must note, was the same month the CNT decided to join the Catalan Government. So much for the state having withered away.

However, as will soon be made clear, such comments were a revision of anarchist theory brought about by the apparent victory of the CNT on July 19th (just as other revisions occurred to justify CNT participation in the state). In other words, Morrow's "*second fundamental tenet*" does not exist in anarchist theory. To prove this, we will quote Bakunin and other famous anarchists as well as giving an overview of some of the insurrections organised by the CNT before 1936.

First, though, we should note that Morrow himself is hardly consistent on this issue for he also suggests that "*[i]n civil war, politics is the determining weapon. By taking the initiative, by seizing the factories, by encouraging the peasantry to take the land, the CNT masses crushed the Catalonian garrisons.*" [Op. Cit., p. 84] In reality, as would be expected, the workers seized their workplaces only **after** they had stormed the garrisons: "*the workers . . . created the armed columns which were to engage Franco's forces (four days after the*

victory in Barcelona the first column of 10,000 volunteers left for the Saragossa area) . . . were taking over the factories and, where possible, converting them to the production of arms, armoured cars, and other weapons for the struggle. Meanwhile the peasants were taking over the landed estates. In the large towns the public services were reorganised under workersâ€™™ control, and the distribution of food was guaranteed by the workersâ€™™ organisations." [Vernon Richards, **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 37] While the social revolution undoubtedly inspired the struggle against fascism and gave the masses a reason to fight, commonsense indicates that defeating the army coup was the first necessity which allowed the rest to follow.

Second, looking at anarchist theorists, it is hard to know what Morrow is talking about. For Bakunin, it was the "power of the State" which "sustains the privileged classes" against the "legitimate indignation of the masses of the people" it is. [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 196] Given this perspective, it naturally follows that to abolish capitalism, to allow the seizure of factories by the workers, the state had to be abolished (or "destroyed") rather than ignored. Equally clear is that the "natural and necessary consequence of this destruction [of the state] will be . . . [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood. . . confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use . . . the federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune." [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings** p. 253 and p. 170]

Thus, the state has to be abolished in order to ensure that workers' can take over the means of production, so abolishing capitalism, which is the **direct opposite** of Morrow's claim. While control of the economy by workers is an important, indeed a key, aspect of a social revolution it is not a sufficient one for anarchists. It must be combined with the destruction of the state ("Today no revolution can succeed in any country if it is not at the same time both a political and a social revolution." [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 99] As the power of the state "sustains" the capitalists it clearly follows that the capitalist only has his property because the state protects his property claims -- without the state, workers' would seize the means of production. Which means, contra Morrow, Bakunin was aware that in order for workers' to take over their workplaces the state had to be destroyed as it was by means of the state that capitalist property rights are enforced. As he put it in 1870:

*If Paris rises and triumphs, it will have the duty and right to proclaim the total liquidation of the political, judicial, financial and administrative State . . . Paris will naturally make haste to organize itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour and every kind of capital and building; armed and organized by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune . . . All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organize the necessary common services and arrangements for production and exchange, to establish the charter of equality, the basis of all liberty . . . and to organize common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda, the weapon of revolution" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 179]*

Clearly Bakunin saw the social revolution as occurring **after** a successful revolt which the liquidates the State. And, just to stress the obvious, you cannot "turn your backs on the state" while dissolving the state bureaucracy, the army, police and so on. This is clear for Bakunin:

*"Liberty can only be created by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward."* And the nature of this workers' organisation? Workers' councils -- the *"proletariat . . . must enter the International [Workers' Association] en masse, form[ing] factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179 and p. 49] Thus the revolution would build upon previous struggles and organising but also reflect the needs of the revolutionary situation itself and the organisations it generates (such as the organisations created by the armed people during the revolt and those needed to get production restarted).

As Malatesta recalled, the anarchist principles formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St Imier (under the influence of Bakunin, obviously) stated that *"[d]estruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat"* who must *"establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics."* He adds, *"[n]eedless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and for all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 157-8]

Kropotkin likewise argued that socialists, *"taking advantage of the disorganisation of the authorities during the revolutionary period"*, should aim at the *"expropriation pure and simple of the present holders of the large landed estates, of the instruments of labour, and of capital of every kind, and by the seizure of all such capital by the cultivators, the workers' organisations"*. By expropriation, the revolution *"will gain an inner strength which will enable it to resist the attempts to form a government which would try to stifle it, as well as the attacks which may be made on it from outside."* So, *"it will not be merely political, but will be an economic revolution as well and above all"*, yet the State is not ignored, for having *"overthrown authority"*, *"it is the duty of socialists to prevent the creation of every new government, and to awaken, on the contrary, the strength of the people, destroying the old system and at the same time creating a new organisation of society."* Once *"expropriation is accomplished, and strength of capitalist resistance broken, there will inevitably arise . . . the free federation of producer groups and the free federation of communes"*. Therefore, the commune *"must smash the State and replace it with the Federation and it will act accordingly."* In short, *"overthrow the State, proclaim the free Commune and simultaneously expropriate all the present holders of social capital."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 499-502, p. 595 and p. 299]

Elsewhere Kropotkin argued that the commune of the future would base itself on *"the principles of anarchist communism"*, meaning they would have *"entirely abolished property, government, and the state."* They will *"proclaim and establish their independence by direct socialist revolutionary action, abolishing private property"* when *"governments are swept away by the people . . . the insurgent people will not wait until some new government decrees, in its marvellous wisdom, a few economic reforms."* Rather, they *"will take possession on the spot and establish their rights by utilising it without delay. They will organise themselves in the workshops to continue the work, but what they will produce will be what is wanted by the masses, not what gives the highest profit to employers. . . they will organise themselves to turn to immediate use the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the middle class."* [*"The Commune of Paris"*, **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, pp. 127-9]

Malatesta, unsurprisingly, also always stressed that revolution required *"the insurrectionary act which sweeps away the material obstacles, the armed forces of the government."* He

argued that "[o]nce the government has been overthrown . . . it will be the task of the people . . . to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future by destroying privileges and harmful institutions." "By revolution", he noted "we do not mean just the insurrectionary act, which is nevertheless indispensable" for "[i]nsurrections will be necessary as long as there are power[ful] groups which use their material force to exact obedience from the masses." [Op. Cit., p. 163, p. 161 and p. 156] In short:

*"with the defeat of the forces of repression which serve to keep the people in slavery; with the demobilisation of the army, the dissolution of the police and the magistrate, etc.; having armed the people so that it can resist any armed attempt by reaction to reestablish itself. . . [w]e must push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community, and similarly the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers on the necessary exchange of goods."* [Op. Cit., p. 165]

As with Bakunin and Kropotkin, for Malatesta the revolution needs to smash the state and abolish capitalism by expropriation by the workers, both being needed: *"Do you fear a military coup? Arm all the population, ensure that they really are in possession of all wealth so that every person will have to defend his own freedom and the means which can ensure his well-being"*. [Malatesta, Op. Cit., p. 170]

It should go without saying that these speculations on how a revolution would develop often did not reflect how actual revolutions or revolutionary situations developed. For example, the revolutionary period in Italy after the First World War saw workplaces occupied across the country (see [section A.5.5](#)) and similar waves of workplace occupations took place in France in 1936 and 1968. For anarchists in Italy (as elsewhere), the *"occupation of the factories and the land suited perfectly our programme of action"* and so *"did all we could . . . for the movement to grow and spread."* However, did not think that this was sufficient and *"helped in the preparation of armed resistance, and explored the possibilities of making the revolution . . . if only the decision had been taken to use the arms that had been accumulated."* Indeed, the anarchist programme agreed by the Italian anarchist movement at the time indicate that *"[f]rom the economic struggle one must pass to the political struggle, that is to the struggle against government"* and so the *"means that the people will be able to find to defeat force by force."* [Malatesta, Op. Cit., pp. 135-6 and pp. 193-4] Likewise with the general strike, which is *"an excellent means for starting the social revolution"*, in Malatesta's words, but not in itself enough to make *"armed insurrection unnecessary"*. [The Anarchist Reader, pp. 224-5] Kropotkin agreed, likewise arguing the general strike is *"a powerful method in the struggle"* and the need for *"using immediately the first fruits of the victories that were gained through the general strike"* for *"starting the expropriation of lands and means of production and consumption immediately"*. However, *"although a general strike is a good method of struggle, it does not free the people that use it from the necessity of an armed struggle against the dominating order."* [Direct Struggle Against Capital, p. 477] It should be noted that on July 18th the CNT declared a general strike in response to the military coup and where the people were not able to arm themselves and fight (such as in Zaragoza), the armed forces of the state were victorious (and immediately started to round up and shoot union and other activists).

That, in itself, indicates that Morrow's *"fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching"* does not, in fact, actually exist. To be fair, it could be argued that he did not have access to these works at

the time. However, he gave no reference at all to back up his comments and so it is impossible to determine what he based it on. Given that no anarchist from Bakunin onward actually held the position he proclaims they did, it is fair to conclude that he simply made it up. Anarchists have been clear that you need to destroy the state in order to expropriate capital, that political and economic transformation are interrelated and neither are ignored.

That is theory, what of practice? If we look at the history of the CNT during the 1930s we discover that the union organised numerous insurrections which did not, in fact, involve workers "*turning their backs on the state*" but rather attacking the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers "*seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **comunismo libertario***." In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again "*seiz[ed] town halls*" and the town "*swept by street fighting*." The revolt in January 1933 began with "*assaults by Anarchist action groups . . . on Barcelona's military barracks . . . Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona . . . Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several **pueblos** in Valencia province, and in Andalusia*." In Casas Viejas, as we discussed in [section 1](#), the CNT members surrounded and attacked the barracks of the Civil Guard. In December 1933, the workers "*reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting . . . many villages declared libertarian communism*." Moreover, "*[w]herever possible . . . insurrections had carried out industrial and agrarian take-overs and established committees for workers' and peasant's control, libertarian systems of logistics and distribution -- in short, a miniature society 'organised on the lines set down by Kropotkin*.'" [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227, p. 238 and p. 239]

Now, does all that really sound like workers turning their backs on the state and only seizing their factories?

Perhaps it will be argued that Morrow is referring to **after** the insurrection (although he clearly is not). What about the defence of the revolution? Anarchists have always been clear on this too -- the revolution would be defended by the people in arms. We have discussed this issue in [section H.2.1](#) and so we will not do so here beyond mentioning that (as discussed in [section 8](#)) this perspective was reflected in CNT policy.

Thus Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism does not exist. We have **never** urged the ignoring of the state nor the idea that seizing economic power will eliminate political power by itself. Nor is anarchism against the defence of a revolution. The position of the CNT reflected that of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and other revolutionary anarchists. The question is, of course, how do you organise a revolution and its defence -- is it by the whole people or is it by a party representing that people. Anarchists argue for the former, Trotskyists the latter. Needless to say, a state structure (i.e. a centralised, hierarchical structure based on the delegation of power) is required only when a revolution is seen as rule by a party -- little wonder anarchists reject the concept of a "*workers' state*" as a contradiction in terms.

The question of July 1936 however rears its head. If anarchism **does** stand for insurrection, workers councils and so on, then why did the CNT ignore the state? Surely that suggests anarchism is, as Morrow claims, flawed? No, it does not -- as we argue in some detail in [section 20](#) this confuses mistakes by **anarchists** with errors in anarchist theory. The CNT-FAI did not pursue anarchist theory and so July 1936 does not invalidate anarchism. The

revolution of July 1936 was a social revolution (it expropriated capital and revolutionised social relationships across society) but it was not a political revolution -- in other words, it did not destroy the state but rather ignored it. This because of the danger of fascism and fear of isolation. Little wonder the social revolution was defeated -- the CNT did not apply basic anarchist theory. To dismiss anarchist ideas because they were not applied seems somewhat strange.

Morrow, as proven, was completely unfamiliar with both anarchist theory and the history of the CNT but that did not stop him proclaiming a "*fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching*". Strangely, he also seems ignorant of his own ideology's usual position on anarchism and so, to finish this section, we must indicate that Morrow's statement concerning anarchists urging workers to "*turn their backs*" on the state and concentrate only on expropriating property actually contradicts what both Engels and Lenin said against anarchism. This does not mean, of course, that either Engels or Lenin correctly portrayed anarchist theory any more than Morrow did, simply that he was in good company in asserting things about anarchism without bothering to check whether it actually advocated what they asserted it did.

As Lenin notes in **The State and Revolution**, "*Marx agreed with Proudhon on the necessity of 'smashing' the present state machine*", that there is "*similarity between Marxism and anarchism (Proudhon and Bakunin) . . . on this point*" and that anarchists advocate "*the destruction of the state machine.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 310 and p. 358] Similarly, Engels argued (although distorting his thought somewhat) that Bakunin saw "*the state as the main evil to be abolished*" and "*maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by the grace of the state . . . [Hence] it is above all the state which must be done away with . . . organise, and when ALL workers are won over . . . abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.*" [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 728-9] We must also stress that Engels comments disprove Lenin's assertion that anarchists "*have absolutely no clear idea of what the proletariat will put in its [the states] place.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 358] We have always been clear, namely a federation of workers' associations (this was the organisation of the First International). In other, more modern, words, a system of workers' councils -- a position Marxists only embraced six decades later when Lenin advocated them as the basis of his "workers' state" (see [section H.3.10](#)).

Thus Morrow's comments against anarchism are in contradiction to usual Marxist claims against anarchism. His "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism not only does not exist in anarchist theory, it does not even exist in the Marxist critique of that theory. It is impressive enough to assign a false doctrine to your enemies, it takes real ability to make a claim which contradicts your own ideology's assertions!

## **15. Did Spanish Anarchism aim for the creation of "*collectives*" before the revolution?**

The formation of the worker-managed enterprises called "*collectives*" in the Spanish revolution of 1936 has sometimes led people (particularly Marxists) to misconceptions about anarcho-sindicalist and communist-anarchist theory. These comments by a Marxist-Leninist are typical:

*"Spanish anarchists believed that a system of autonomous collectives, with the weakest possible connections between them, was the alternative to capitalism and also to the Marxist view of society running the entire economy as one whole . . . The anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there, and not by the working class as a whole."* [Joseph Green, "Reply to the Open Letter of the Black Autonomy Collective", **Communist Voice**, Vol. 2, No. 5 (October 1996), p. 24]

This assertion is sometimes voiced by Libertarian Marxists of the council communist tendency (who should know better):

*"At the time of the Civil War, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these 'collectives' should be linked with each other on a 'federal' basis -- that is, without any superior central authority.*

*"This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the Civil War began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the country which had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality." ["The Spanish Revolution: The End of Anarchism?", **Subversion**, no. 18, p. 8]*

Trotskyist Felix Morrow also presents a similar analysis when he states that the POUM "recorded the tendency of CNT unions to treat collectivised property as their own. It never attacked the anarcho-syndicalist theories which created the tendency." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 104]

However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Firstly, CNT policy and social anarchist theory was **not** in favour of workers' owning their individual workplaces. Instead both argued for **socialisation** of the means of life by a system of federations of workers' associations (see [section I.3.3](#)). Individual workplaces would be managed by their workers but they would not exist in isolation or independently of the others -- they would be members of various federations (minimally an industrial one and one which united all workplaces regardless of industry in a geographical area). These would facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between self-managed workplaces. The workplace would, indeed, be autonomous but such autonomy did not negate the need for federal organs of co-ordination nor did federation negate that autonomy (as we will discuss later in [section 18](#), autonomy means the ability to make agreements with others and so joining a federation is an expression of autonomy and not its abandonment.

Secondly, rather than being the product of "more than 50 years" of anarchist propaganda or of "anarcho-syndicalist theories", the "collectives" instituted during the Civil War were seen by the CNT as merely a temporary stop-gap. They had not been advocated in the CNT's pre-Civil War programme, but came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry it out, which would have required setting up workers congresses and federal councils to establish co-ordination and aid the planning of common activities between the self-managed workplaces. In other words, the idea of self-managed workplaces was seen as one step in a process of socialisation, the basic building block of a federal structure of workers' councils. They were **not** seen as an end in themselves no matter how important they were as the base of a socialised economy.

Thus the CNT had never proposed that factories or other facilities would be owned by the people who happened to work there. The CNT's programme called for the construction of **libertarian communism**. This was the CNT's agreed goal, recognising it must be freely created from below. In addition, the Spanish Anarchists argued for "*free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation,*" recognising that "*[i]n each locality the degree of [libertarian] communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy.*" [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 97] In other words, the CNT recognised that libertarian communism would not be created overnight and different areas will develop at different speeds and in different directions depending on the material circumstances they faced and what their population desired. In this they followed the teachings of Kropotkin and Malatesta.

However, libertarian communism was the CNT's declared goal. This meant that the CNT aimed for a situation where the economy as a whole would be socialised and **not** an economy consisting independent co-operatives owned and controlled by their workers (with the producers operating totally independently of each other on the basis of market exchange). Instead, workers would manage their workplace directly, but would not own it -- rather ownership would rest with society as a whole but the day-to-day management of the means of production would be delegated to those who did the actual work. Councils of workers' delegates, mandated by and accountable to workplace assemblies, would be created to co-ordinate activity at all levels of the economy.

A few quotes will be needed to show that this was, in fact, the position of the Spanish Anarchists. According to Issac Puente, the "*national federations will hold as common property all the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops.*" The commune "*will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations.*" [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 29 and p. 26] In D. A. de Santillan's vision, libertarian communism would see workers' councils overseeing 18 industrial sectors. There would also be "*councils of the economy*" for local, regional and national levels (ultimately, international as well). These councils would be "*constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies*" and "*receives [their] orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions*" of their appropriate "*assemblies.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 50-1, pp. 80-7, p. 83 and p. 86]

The CNT's national conference in Saragossa during May 1936 stressed this vision. Its resolution declared that the revolution would abolish "*private property, the State, the principle of authority, and . . . classes.*" It argued that "*the economic plan of organisation, throughout national production, will adjust to the strictest principles of social economy, directly administered by the producers through their various organs of production, designated in general assemblies of the various organisations, and always controlled by them.*" In urban areas, "*the workshop or factory council*" would make "*pacts with other labour centres*" via "*Councils of Statistics and Production*" which are the "*organ of relations of Union to Union (association of producers)*", in other words, workers' councils. These would "*federate among themselves, forming a network of constant and close relations among all the producers of the Iberian Confederation.*" In rural areas, "*the producers of the Commune*" would create a "*Council of Cultivation*" which would "*establish the same network of relations as the Workshop, Factory Councils and those of Production and Statistics, complementing the free federation represented by the Commune.*" The "*Associations of industrial producers and Associations of agricultural producers will federate nationally*" and

*"Communes will federate on a county and regional basis . . . Together these Communes will constitute an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes."* It stressed that *"[n]one of these organs will have executive or bureaucratic character"* and their members *"will carry out their mission as producers, meeting after the work day to discuss questions of details which don't require the decision of the communal assemblies."* The assemblies themselves *"will meet as often as needed by the interests of the Commune. . . When problems are dealt with which affect a country or province, it must be the Federations which deliberate, and in the meetings and assemblies all Communities will be represented and the delegates will bring points of view previously agreed upon"* by the Commune assembly. [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 59, p. 60 and p. 62]

Joan Ferrer, a bookkeeper who was the secretary of the CNT commercial workers union in Barcelona, explained this vision:

*"It was our idea in the CNT that everything should start from the worker, not -- as with the Communists -- that everything should be run by the state. To this end we wanted to set up industrial federations -- textiles, metal-working, department stores, etc. -- which would be represented on an overall Economics Council which would direct the economy. Everything, including economic planning, would thus remain in the hands of the workers."* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 180]

However, social revolution is a dynamic process and things rarely develop exactly as predicted or hoped in pre-revolutionary times. The "collectives" in Spain are an example of this. Although the regional union conferences in Catalonia had put off overthrowing the government in July of 1936, workers began taking over the management of industries as soon as the street-fighting had died down. The initiative for this did not come from the higher bodies -- the regional and national committees -- but from the rank-and-file activists in the local unions. In some cases this happened because the bosses of the enterprise had fled and it was necessary for the workers to take over if production was to continue. However, in many cases the local union members decided to take advantage of the situation to end wage labour by creating self-managed workplaces.

As to be expected of a real movement, mistakes were made by those involved and the development of the movement reflected the real problems the workers faced and their general level of consciousness and what they wanted. This is natural and to denounce such developments in favour of ideal solutions means to misunderstand the dynamic of a revolutionary situation. In the words of Malatesta:

*"To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 36]

This was the situation in revolutionary Spain. Moreover, it was complicated by the continued existence of the bourgeois state. As Gaston Leval suggests, *"it was not . . . true socialisation, but . . . a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our*

*syndicates.*" [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, pp. 227-8] Leval in fact terms it "*a form of workers neo-capitalism*" but such a description is inaccurate (and unfortunate) simply because wage labour had been abolished and so it was not a form of capitalism -- rather it was a system of workers' co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour on the market (and so more reflected mutualist ideas rather than libertarian collectivist or communist ones).

However, Leval's basic argument was correct -- due to the fact the political aspect of the revolution (the abolition of the state) had been "postponed" until after the defeat of fascism, the economic aspects of the revolution would also remain incomplete. The unions that had seized workplaces were confronted with a dilemma. They had control of their individual workplaces, but the original libertarian plan for economic co-ordination was hindered by the continued existence of the State. It was in this context of a partial revolution, under attack by the counter-revolution, that the idea of "collectives" was first put forward to solve some of the problems facing the workers and their self-managed workplaces. Unfortunately, this very "solution" caused problems of its own. For example, Gaston Leval indicates that the collectivisation decree of October 1936 "*legalising collectivisation*", "*distorted everything right from the start*" [Op. Cit., p. 227] and did not allow the collectives to develop beyond a mutualist condition towards libertarian communism. It basically legalised the existing situation while hindering its development towards libertarian communism by undermining union control.

This dilemma of self-managed individual workplaces and lack of federations to co-ordinate them was debated at a CNT union plenary in September of 1936. The idea of converting the worker-managed workplaces into co-operatives, operating in a market economy, had never been advocated by the Spanish anarchists before the Civil War, but was now seen by some as a temporary stop-gap that would solve the immediate question of what to do with the workplaces that had been seized by their workers. It was at this meeting that the term "*collective*" was first adopted to describe this solution. This concept of "*collectivisation*" was suggested by Joan Fabregas, a Catalan nationalist of middle class origin who had joined the CNT after July of 1936. As one CNT militant recalled:

*"Up to that moment, I had never heard of collectivisation as a solution for industry -- the department stores were being run by the union. What the new system meant was that each collectivised firm would retain its individual character, but with the ultimate objective of federating all enterprises within the same industry."* [quoted by Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 212]

However, a number of unions went beyond "collectivisation" and took over all the facilities in their industries, eliminating competition between separate firms. The many small barber and beauty shops in Barcelona were shut down and replaced with large neighbourhood haircutting centres, run through the assemblies of the CNT barbers' union. The CNT bakers union did something similar. The CNT Wood Industry Union shut down the many small cabinet-making shops, where conditions were often dangerous and unhealthy, replacing them with two large factories, which included new facilities for the benefit of the workforce, such as a large swimming pool. The union ran the entire industry, from the felling of timber in the Val d'Aran to the furniture showrooms in Barcelona. The railway, maritime shipping and water, gas and electric industry unions also pursued this strategy of industrial unification, as did the textile union in the industrial town of Badalona, outside Barcelona. This was considered to be a step in the direction of eventual socialisation -- at the Catalan union plenary of September, 1936, "*the bigger, more powerful unions, like the woodworkers, the*

*transport workers, the public entertainment union, all of which had already socialised [i.e. unified their industries under union management], wanted to extend their solution to the rest of industry. The smaller, weaker unions wanted to form co-operatives. . .*" [Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 212]

The collectives came out of this conflict and discussion as a sort of "middle ground" -- however, it should be stressed that it did not stop many unions from ignoring the Catalan's governments' attempt to legalise (and so control) the collectives (the so-called "collectivisation" decree) as far as they could. As Albert Perez-Baro, a Catalan Civil Servant noted, *"the CNT . . . pursued its own, unilateral objectives which were different. Syndical collectivisation or syndicalised collectives, I would call those objectives; that's to say, collectives run by their respective unions . . . The CNT's policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* Indeed, Abad de Santillan stated later that he *"was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature . . . When I became [economics] councillor [of the Generalitat for the CNT], I had no intention of taking into account of carrying out the decree; I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they saw fit, according to their own aspiration."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 212-3 and p. 212f]

Therefore, when Leninist Joseph Green argues the initial collectivisation of workplaces *"was the masses starting to take things into their own hands, and they showed that they could continue production in their workplaces . . . The taking over of the individual workplaces and communities is one step in a revolutionary process. But there is yet more that must be done -- the workplaces and communities must be integrated into an overall economy"* he is just showing his ignorance. The CNT, despite Green's assertions to the contrary, were well aware that the initial collectivisations were just one step in the revolution and were acting appropriately. It takes some gall (or extreme ignorance) to claim that CNT theory, policy and actions were, in fact, the exact opposite of what they were. Similarly, when he argues *"[h]ow did the anarchists relate the various workplace collectives to each other in Barcelona? . . . they made use of a patchwork system including a Central Labour Bank, an Economic Council, credit"*, he strangely fails to mention the socialisation attempts made by many CNT industrial unions during the revolution, attempts which reflected pre-war CNT policy. [Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24] But such facts would get in the way of a political diatribe and so are ignored.

Green continues his inaccurate diatribe: *"The problem is that, saddled with their false theory, they could not understand the real nature of the economic steps taken in the collectives, and thus they could not deal with the economic relations that arose among the collectives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 26] However, the only thing false about this is the claim concerning anarchist theory. As is crystal clear from our comments above, the Spanish anarchists (like all anarchists) were well aware of the need for economic relations between collectives (self-managed workplaces) before the revolution and acted to create them during it. These were the industrial federations and federations of communities predicted in anarchist and CNT theory and actually created, in part at least, during the revolution itself.

Thus Green's "critique" of anarchism is, in fact, **exactly** what anarchist theory actually argues and what the Spanish anarchists themselves argued and tried to implement in all industries. Of course, there are fundamental differences between the anarchist vision of socialisation and the Leninist vision of Nationalisation but this does not mean that anarchism is blind to the necessity of integrating workplaces and communities into a coherent system of federations of workers' councils (as proven above). However, such federation has two possible sources -- it is either imposed from above or agreed to from below. Anarchists choose the latter as the

former negates any claim that a revolution is a popular, mass movement from below (and, incidentally, the Leninist claim that the *"workers' state"* is simply a tool of the workers to defeat capitalist oppression). Unsurprisingly, the Leninist "solution" simply did not work well and in the process handed the economy and the workers to a new ruling class, the bureaucracy, by creating state-capitalism (see [section H.6](#)).

The actual process in Spain towards industrial federations and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved -- as would be expected in a true social revolution. For example, the department stores were collectivised and an attempt to federate the stores failed. The works councils opposed it, considering the enterprises as their own and were unwilling to join a federation -- the general assemblies of the collectives agreed. Joan Ferrer, the secretary of the CNT commercial union, considered it natural as *"[o]nly a few months before, the traditional relationship between employer and worker had been overthrown. Now the workers were being asked to make a new leap -- to the concept of collective ownership. It was asking a lot to expect the latter to happen overnight."* [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220]

However, before Leninists like Green rush in and assert that this proves that *"anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there"* we should point out two things. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Firstly, it was the *"ordinary anarchists"* who were trying to organise socialisation (i.e. CNT members and militants) along with other workers. Secondly, the Russian Revolution also saw workers taking over their workplaces and treating them as their own property. Leninists like Green would have a fit if we took these examples to "prove" that Leninism *"led to the ordinary Bolshevik worker considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there"* (which was what the Mensheviks **did** argue in 1917 when Martov *"blamed the Bolsheviks for creating the local, particularistic attitudes prevailing among the masses."* [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 72]). In other words, such events are a natural part of the process of a revolution and are to be expected regardless of the dominant theory in that revolution. It is how the revolutionaries respond to these development which matter, whether in a libertarian or authoritarian manner. Comparing Spain to Russia shows that the libertarian solution which works better and offers the most hope for an evolution in a communist direction rather than a state-capitalist one. We return to this issue in the [next section](#)

To summarise: The Spanish revolution does confirm anarchist theory and in no way contradicts it. While many of the aspects of the collectives were in accord with pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory, other aspects of them were in contradiction to them. This was seen by the militants of the CNT and FAI who worked to transform these spontaneously created organs of economic self-management into parts of a socialised economy as required for libertarian communism. Such a transformation flowed from below and was not imposed from above, as would be expected in a libertarian social revolution. As can be seen, the standard Marxist account of the collectives and its relationship to anarchist theory and CNT policy is simply wrong.

## **16. How does the development of the collectives indicate the differences between Bolshevism and anarchism?**

As argued in the [previous section](#), the collectives formed during the Spanish Revolution reflected certain aspects of anarchist theory but not others. They were a compromise solution brought upon by the development of the revolution and did not, as such, reflect CNT or

anarchist theory or vision but being self-managed by their workers. The militants of the CNT and FAI tried to convince their members to federate together and truly socialise the economy, with various degrees of success. A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution of 1917. There workers created factory committees which tried to introduce workers' self-management of production. The differences in outcome in these two experiences and the actions of the Bolsheviks and anarchists indicate well the fundamental differences between the two philosophies. In this section we discuss the contrasting solutions pursued by the CNT and the Bolsheviks in their respective revolutions.

The simple fact is that revolutions are complex and dynamic processes which involve many contradictory developments. The question is how do you push them forward -- either from below or from above. Both the Spanish and the Russian revolution were marked by "localism" -- when the workers in a factory consider it their own property and ignore wider issues and organisation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks "solved" the problem of localism by eliminating workers' self-management in favour of one-man management appointed from above. Attempts by the workers and factory committees themselves to combat localism were stopped by the Bolshevik dominated trade unions which "*prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees*" in November 1917 when "*called upon*" by the Bolsheviks "*to render a special service to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees.*" [I. Deutscher, quoted by Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 19] Instead, the Bolsheviks built from the top-down their system of "*unified administration*" based on converting the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 36] The CNT, in comparison, tried to solve the problem of localism by a process of discussion and debate from below. Both were aware of the fact the revolution was progressing in ways different from their desired goal but their solution reflected their different politics -- libertarian in the case of the CNT, authoritarian in the case of Bolshevism.

Therefore, the actual economic aspects of the Spanish revolution reflected the various degrees of political development in each workplace and industry. Some industries socialised according to the CNT's pre-war vision of libertarian communism, others remained at the level of self-managed workplaces in spite of the theories of the union and anarchists. This was the case with other aspects of the collectives. As Vernon Richards points out, "*[i]n some factories . . . the profits or income were shared out among the workers . . . As a result, wages fluctuated in different factories and even within the same industry . . . But fortunately . . . the injustice of this form of collectivisation was recognised and combated by the CNT syndicates from the beginning.*" [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 106-7] This, we must stress, is to be expected as a revolution is a **process** and not an event. As Kropotkin argued: "*It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation.*" [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

Thus the divergence of the actual revolution from the programme of the CNT was to be expected and so did not represent a failure or a feature of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory as Morrow and other Marxists assert. Rather, it expresses the nature of a social revolution, a movement from below which, by its very nature, reflects real needs and problems and subject to change via discussion and debate. Bakunin's comments stress this aspect of a revolution:

*"I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this . . . organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda . . . , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State . . . will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*

*"With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life . . . will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation . . ." [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 207]*

To **impose** an "ideal" solution would destroy a revolution -- the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). As Bakunin argued, *"Collectivism could be imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can come about only through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below."* [Op. Cit., p. 200] Thus socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. To "speed-up" the process via centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with nationalisation and the elimination of workers' self-management with hierarchical management. Workers' again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state. In short, state-capitalism would be -- and was -- created rather than genuine socialism.

Leninism takes a different view, with Lenin arguing that *"Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre."* He continued by explicitly arguing that *"[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry . . . would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 292] Yet such a "solution" to the problems a social revolution generates has its own, much worse, problems.

While we discuss the negative impact of Bolshevik ideology on the Russian Revolution in [section H.6.2](#), three points are worth noting.

First is the basic fallacy that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin's power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that it suddenly arose with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, *"in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies"* and he points to the *"not untypical example of a small*

*condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People's Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People's Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat.*" [Op. Cit., p. 73] In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property (and compared to an individual workplace, the state's power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger).

Secondly, to eliminate the dangers of workers' self-management generating "propertarian" notions, the workers' have to have their control over their workplace and labour significantly reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates **bourgeois** social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above. Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had *"pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea"*. [quoted by Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 65] It shows the poverty of Bolshevik ideology that Lenin could not see what this meant to the workers subjected to it and the nature of his regime.

Thirdly, a centralised body effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers -- power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. This can be seen from the example of Lenin's Russia. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. In other words the government's attempts to centralise actually led to localism (as well as economic mismanagement)! Perhaps this was what Green meant when he argued for a *"new centralism"* which would be *"compatible with and requiring the initiative of the workers at the base"*: that is, the initiative of the workers to ignore the central bodies and keep the economy going **in spite** of the *"new centralism"*? [Green, Op. Cit., p. 24] Unsurprisingly, as economic activity decreased, the power, privileges and numbers of bureaucrats grew and grew.

The simple fact is, a socialist society **must** be created from below, by the working class itself. If the workers do not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation of labour, no one else can do it for them or compel them to do it. Yet this is obviously flawed from a socialist perspective -- *"if,"* argued Malatesta, *"you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?"* [Anarchy, pp. 53-4] Socialism, then, can only be created by workers' own actions and organisations otherwise it will not be set up at all -- something else will be by others ruling over them, namely state capitalism. As happened under Lenin and Trotsky.

For these reasons Bakunin was correct to argue that anarchists have *"no faith except in freedom. Both [Marxists and anarchists], equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by some superior intellects."* Anarchists, he continues, *"think that there is*

*much more practical and intellectual common sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 198]

In summary, the problem of "localism" and any other problem faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires them to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or government. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the *"revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141]

Thus the actual experience of the collectives and their development, rather than refuting anarchism, indicates well that it is the only real form of socialism. Attempts to nationalise the means of production inevitably disempower workers and eliminate meaningful workers' self-management or control. It does not eliminate wage labour but rather changes the name of the boss. Socialism can only be built from below. If it is not, as the Russian experience indicated, then state capitalism will be the inevitable outcome.

## **17. Why is Morrow's support for "*proletarian methods of production*" ironic?**

Morrow states *"[i]n the midst of civil war the factory committees are demonstrating the superiority of proletarian methods of production."* [Op. Cit., p. 53] This is ironic as the Bolsheviks in power fought against the factory committees and their attempts to introduce the kind of workers' self-management Morrow praises in Spain.

Moreover, rather than seeing workers' self-management as "*proletarian methods of production*" Lenin and Trotsky thought that how a workplace was managed was irrelevant under socialism. Trotsky argued that *"[i]t would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party -- M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* Indeed, *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [quoted by Maurice Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 66 and pp. 66-7]

In other words, Trotsky both in theory and in practice opposed "*proletarian methods of production*" -- and if the regime introduced by Trotsky and Lenin in Russia was **not** based on "*proletarian methods of production*" then what methods was it based on? One-man management with *"the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers"* by the government and *"the people unquestioningly obey[ing] the single will of the leaders of labour."* ["The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", Collected Works, vol. 27, pp. 267-9] In other words, the usual **bourgeois** methods of production with the workers' doing

what the boss tells them. As discussed in [section H.3.14](#), at no time did the Bolsheviks support the kind of workers' self-management introduced by the anarchist influenced workers of Spain -- indeed they hindered it and replaced it with one-man management at the first opportunity (see Maurice Brinton's classic **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for further details).

To point out the obvious, bourgeois methods of production means bourgeois social relations and relations of production. In other words, Morrow comments allows us to see that Lenin and Trotsky's regime was not proletarian at the point of production. How ironic. And if it was not proletarian at the point of production (i.e. at the source of **economic** power) how could it remain proletarian at the political level? Unsurprisingly, it did not -- party power soon replaced workers' power and the state bureaucracy replaced the party.

Yet again Morrow's book exposes the anti-revolutionary politics of Trotskyism by allowing anarchists to show the divergence between the rhetoric of that movement and what it did when it was in power. Morrow, faced with a workers' movement influenced by anarchism, inadvertently indicates the poverty of Trotskyism when he praises the accomplishments of that movement. The reality of Leninism in power was that it eliminated the very things Morrow praises -- such as "*proletarian methods of production*," democratic militias, workers' councils and so on. Needless to say, the irony of Morrow's work is lost on most of the Trotskyists who read it.

## 18. Were the federations of collectives an "*abandonment*" of anarchist ideas?

From our discussion in [section 15](#), it is clear that anarchism does not deny the need for co-ordination and joint activity, for federations of self-managed workplaces, industries and rural collectives at all levels of society. Far from it. As proven in sections [12](#) and [15](#), such federations are a basic idea of anarchism. In anarchy co-ordination flows **from below** and not imposed by a few from above. Unfortunately Marxists cannot tell the difference between solidarity from below and unity imposed from above. Morrow, for example, argues that "*the anarchist majority in the Council of Aragon led in practice to the abandonment of the anarchist theory of the autonomy of economic administration. The Council acted as a centralising agency.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 205-6]

Of course it does nothing of the kind. Yes, anarchists are in favour of autonomy -- including the autonomy of economic administration. We are also in favour of federalism to co-ordinate joint activity and promote co-operation on a wide-scale (what Morrow would, inaccurately, call "centralism" or "centralisation"). Rather than seeing such agreements of joint activity as the "abandonment" of autonomy, we see it as an **expression** of that autonomy. It would be a strange form of "freedom" that suggested making arrangements and agreements with others meant a restriction of your liberty. For example, no one would argue that to arrange to meet your friend at a certain place and time meant the elimination of your autonomy even though it obviously reduces your "liberty" to be somewhere else at the same time (see [section H.4](#)).

Similarly, when an individual joins a group and takes part in its collective decisions and abides by their decisions, this does not represent the abandonment of their autonomy. Rather, it is an expression of their freedom. If we took Morrow's comment seriously then anarchists would be against all forms of organisation and association as they would mean the

"*abandonment of autonomy*" (of course some Marxists **do** make that claim, but such a position indicates an essentially **negative** viewpoint of liberty, a position they normally reject). In reality, of course, anarchists are aware that freedom is impossible outside of association. Within an association absolute "*autonomy*" cannot exist, but such "*autonomy*" would restrict freedom to such a degree that it would be so self-defeating as to make a mockery of the concept of autonomy and no sane person would seek it.

Of course anarchists are aware that even the best association could turn into a bureaucracy that **does** restrict freedom. Any organisation could transform from being an expression of liberty into a structure which restricts liberty because power concentrates at the top, into the hands of an elite. That is why we propose specific forms of organisation, ones based on self-management, decentralisation and federalism which promote decision-making from the bottom-up and ensure that the organisation remains in the hands of its members and its policies are agreements between them rather than ones imposed upon them. For this reason the basic building block of the federation is the autonomous group assembly. It is this body which decides on its own issues and mandates delegates to reach agreements within the federal structure, leaving to itself the power to countermand the agreements its delegates make. In this way autonomy is combined with co-ordination in an organisation that is structured to accurately reflect the needs and interests of its members by leaving power in their hands. In the words of Murray Bookchin, anarchists "*do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But [we] believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved voluntarily, by means of self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above.*" [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 139]

Therefore, anarchist support for autonomy does not imply the lack of co-operation and co-ordination, of joint agreements and federal structures which may, to the uninformed like Morrow, seem to imply the "*abandonment*" of autonomy. As Kropotkin argued, the commune "*will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as other communes.*" [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83] This vision was stressed in the CNT's Saragossa resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that the "*the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits.*" [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 106] Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory.

The reason for this is simple. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, we must stress). That is why anarchists have always stressed the importance of the **nature** of the associations people join **as well as** their voluntary nature -- as Kropotkin argued, the "*communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself . . . They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it.*" ["*The Commune of Paris*", **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, p. 132] Moreover, within the federal structures anarchists envision, the actual day-to-day running of the association would

be autonomous. There would be little or no need for the federation to interfere with the mundane decisions a group has to make day in, day out. As the Saragossa resolution makes clear:

*"[The] commune . . . will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate . . . The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems . . . Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes . . . every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say . . . On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements . . . So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation."* [quoted by Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 106-7]

Since the Council of Aragon and the Federation of Collectives were based on a federal structure, regular meetings of mandated delegates and decision-making from the bottom up, it would be wrong to call them a "centralising agency" or an "abandonment" of the principle of "autonomy." Rather, they were expressions of that autonomy based around a **federal** and not centralised organisation. The autonomy of the collective, of its mass assembly, was not restricted by the federation nor did the federation interfere with the day to day running of the collectives which made it up. The structure was a federation of autonomous collectives. The role of the Council was to co-ordinate the decisions of the federation delegate meetings -- in other words, purely administrative implementation of collective agreements. To confuse this with centralisation is a mistake common to Marxists, but it is still a confusion.

To summarise, what Morrow claims is an "abandonment" of anarchism is, in fact, an expression of anarchist ideas. The Council of Aragon and the Aragon Federation of Collectives were following the CNT's vision of libertarian communism and not abandoning it, as Morrow claims. As anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchism would know.

## **19. Did the experience of the rural collectives refute anarchism?**

Some Leninists attack the rural collectives on similar lines as they attack the urban ones (as being independent identities and without co-ordination -- see [section 15](#) for details). They argue that "anarchist theory" resulted in them considering themselves as being independent bodies and so they ignored wider social issues and organisation. This meant that anarchist goals could not be achieved:

*"Let's evaluate the Spanish collectives according to one of the basic goals set by the anarchists themselves. This was to ensure equality among the toilers. They believed that the autonomous collectives would rapidly equalise conditions among themselves through 'mutual aid' and solidarity. This did not happen . . . conditions varied greatly among the Spanish collectives, with peasants at some agricultural collectives making three times that of peasants at other collectives."* [Joseph Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

Of course, Green fails to mention that in the presumably "centralised" system created by the Bolsheviks, the official rationing system had a differentiation of **eight to one** under the class

ration of May 1918. By 1921, this, apparently, had fallen to around four to one (which is still higher than the rural collectives) but, in fact, remained at eight to one due to workers in selected defence-industry factories getting the naval ration which was approximately double that of the top civilian workers' ration. [Mary McAuley, **Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917-1922**, pp. 292-3] This, we note, ignores the various privileges associated with state office and Communist Party membership which would increase differentialeven more (and such inequality extended into other fields, Lenin for example warned in 1921 against "*giving non-Party workers a false sense of having some increase in their rights*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 325]). The various resolutions made by workers for equality in rations were ignored by the government (all this long before, to use Green's words, "*their party degenerated into Stalinist revisionism*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 27]).

So, if equality is important, then the decentralised rural collectives were far more successful in achieving it than the "*centralised*" system under Lenin (as to be expected, as the rank-and-file were in control, not a few at the top).

Needless to the collectives could not unify history instantly. Some towns and workplaces started off on a more favourable position than others. Green quotes an academic (David Miller) on this: "*Such variations no doubt reflected historical inequalities of wealth, but at the same time the redistributive impact of the [anarchist] federation had clearly been slight.*" [quoted by Green, **Op. Cit.**, p. 25]

Note that Green implicitly acknowledges that the collectives **did** form a federation. This makes a mockery of his claims that the anarchists "*believed that the village communities would enter the realm of a future liberated society if only they became autonomous collectives. They didn't see the collectives as only one step, and they didn't see the need for the collectives to be integrated into a broader social control of all production.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 26-7] In reality, the Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need for self-managed communities and workplaces to federate. Indeed, the federation of collectives fits **exactly** pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory (see [section 8](#), for example). Thus what Green asserts the CNT and FAI did not see the need of, they in fact **did** see the need for and argued for their creation before the Civil War and actually created during it! Green's comments indicate a certain amount of **doublethink** -- he maintains that the anarchists rejected federations while acknowledging they did federate.

However, historical differences are the product of **centuries** and so it will take some time to overcome them. Anarchists recognise that the legacy of capitalism will not disappear at the stroke of a pen or by the decree of a central government, it will take time and effort to transform it and create a world fit for humanity to thrive in (see [section I.2.2](#)). In addition, the collectives were not allowed to operate freely and were soon being hindered (if not physically attacked) by the state within a year. Green dismisses this recognition of reality by arguing "*one could argue that the collectives didn't have much time to develop, being in existence for only two and a half years at most, with the anarchists only having one year of reasonably unhindered work, but one could certainly not argue that this experience confirmed anarchist theory.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] However, his claims are deeply flawed.

Firstly, we have to point out that Green quotes Miller who is using data from collectives in Castille. Green, however, was apparently discussing the collectives of Aragon and the Levante and their respective federations (as was Miller). To state the obvious, it is hard to evaluate the activities of the Aragon or Levante federation using data from collectives in the

Castille federation. Moreover, in order to evaluate the redistributive activities of the federations you need to look at the differentials before and after the federation was created. The data Miller uses does not do that and so the lack of success of the federation cannot be evaluated using Green's source. Thus Green uses data which is, frankly, a joke to dismiss anarchism. This says a lot about the quality of his critique.

As far as the Castille federation goes, Robert Alexander notes "*[a]nother feature of the work of regional federation was that of aiding the less fortunate collectives. Thus, within a year, it spent 2 000 000 pesetas on providing chemical fertilisers and machines to poorer collectives, the money from this being provided by the sale of products of the wealthier ones.*" [**The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 438] He also quotes an article from an anarchist paper which states "*there does not yet exist sufficient solidarity*" between rich and poor collectives and that notes "*the difficulties which the State has put in the way of the development of the collectives.*" [quoted by Alexander, **Op. Cit.**, p. 439] Thus the CNT was open about the difficulties it was experiencing in the collectives and the problems facing it.

Secondly, the collectives may have been in existence for about one year before the Stalinists attacked but their federations had not. The Castille federation was born in April, 1937. The Aragon federation was created in February 1937 (the Council of Aragon was created in October 1936) and the Communists under Lister attacked in August 1937. The Levante federation was formed a few weeks after the start of the war and the attacks against them started in March 1937. The longest period of free development, therefore, was only **seven** months and not a year. Thus the federations of collectives -- the means seen by anarchist theory to co-ordinate economic and social activities and promote equality -- existed for only a few months before they were physically attacked by the state. Green expects miracles if he thinks the legacy of class society can be nullified in half a year.

Thirdly, anarchists do not think communist-anarchism, in all its many aspects, is possible overnight (see [section H.2.5](#)). Anarchists are well aware, to quote Kropotkin, the "*revolution may assume a variety of characters and differing degrees of intensity among different peoples.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 231] We are well aware that a revolution is a **process** which will take some time to fully develop once the state has been destroyed and capital expropriated.

Green's assertion that the Spanish Revolution refutes anarchist theory is clearly a false one. Likewise with his suggestion that a "*vast organisational task faces the oppressed masses who are rising up to eliminate the old exploiting system, but anarchist theory just brushes aside this problem -- co-ordination between collective would supposedly be easily accomplished by 'mutual aid' or 'voluntary co-operation' or, if absolutely need be, by the weakest possible federation.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 24] Anarchists are well aware of the difficulties involved in a revolution. That is why we stress that revolution must come from below, by the actions of the oppressed themselves -- it is far too complex to left to a few party leaders to decree the abolition of capitalism. Kropotkin put it well:

*"The immense constructive work that is required from a Social Revolution cannot be accomplished by a central Government, even if it had to guide it in its work something more substantial than a few Socialist and Anarchist booklets. It requires the knowledge, the brains, and the willing collaboration of a mass of local and specialised forces, which alone can cope with the diversity of economical problems in their local aspects. To sweep away that collaboration and to trust to the genius of*

*party dictators is to destroy all the independent nuclei, such as Trade Unions . . . and the local distributive Co-operative organisationsâ€”turning them into bureaucratic organs of the party, as is being done now [under Lenin]."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, pp. 490]

Moreover, as proven above anarchist theory and practice is well aware of the need for organisation, co-operation and co-ordination. We obviously do not "*brush it aside.*" This can be seen from Green's reference to "*the weakest possible federation.*" This obviously is a cover just in case the reader is familiar with anarchist theory and history and knows that anarchists support the federation of workers' associations and communes as the organisational framework of a revolution and of the free society.

This distorted vision of anarchism even extends to other aspects of the revolution. Green decides to attack the relative lack of international links the Spanish anarchist movement had in 1936. He blames this on anarchist theory and states "*again the localist anarchist outlook would go against such preparations. True, the anarchists had had their own International association in the 1870s, separate from the original First International and the Marxists. It had flopped so badly that the anarchists never tried to resuscitate it and seem to prefer to forget about it. Given anarchist localism, it is not surprising that this International doesn't even seem to be been missed by current-day anarchists.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 29]

Actually, the anarchist International came out of the First International and was made up of the libertarian wing of that association (and it outlasted the minority which remained under Marx). The need for international links saw anarchists attempting to join the Second International, but they were expelled. The CNT was a member of the International Workers' Association founded in 1922 in Berlin. The IWA was small, but this was due to state repression: the German FAUD, the Italian USI and the FORA in Argentina had all been destroyed by fascist governments. However, those sections which did exist (such as the Swedish SAC and French CGTSR) **did** send aid to Spain and spread CNT and FAI news and appeals (as did anarchist groups across the world). The IWA still exists today, with sections in over a dozen countries (including the CNT in Spain). In addition, the International Anarchist Federation also exists, having done so for a number of decades, and also has sections in numerous countries. In other words, Green either knows nothing about anarchist history and theory or he does and is lying.

He attacks the lack of CNT support for Moroccan independence during the war and states "*[t]hey just didn't seem that concerned with the issue during the Civil War.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 30] In fact, many anarchists **did** raise this important issue. For example, the CNT's Barcelona daily argued as follows:

*"The struggle against fascism, which at this time has a clear international character, must advise us to try with all our means to foment a healthy atmosphere of rebellion in the communities of the Riff. It is in our interest to prevent the Spanish zone from serving as a sea and air base for our bitterest enemies... It is necessary that an irredentist spirit be fomented in the sector occupied by Franco. This decision is not at odds with our principles. Itâ€™s a matter of freedom... Peoples have to determine themselves. The Spanish zone of the Riff must be granted complete independence."* ["*The Right of Peoples to Determine Themselves: For the Independence of the Riff*", **Solidaridad Obrera**, 28 August 1936]

Camillo Berneri, likewise, argued that libertarians "*must intensify our propaganda in favour of Morocco autonomy*", that we "*must impose on [the government in] Madrid unambiguous declarations announcing withdrawal from Morocco and the protection of Moroccan autonomy*", that it was "*obligatory on us to proclaim officially the political autonomy of Morocco*", [**The State - Or Revolution**, pp. 101-2 and p. 125] It should also be noted that in late July 1936, García Oliver devoted himself to diplomatic negotiations with the Moroccan Action Committee (MAC) over encouraging and supporting attempts at an insurrection in Morocco. [Abel Paz, **Durruti in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 521] In September, he helped arrange a pact between the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias with the MAC which was "*seeking a declaration of Moroccan autonomy from the government, in exchange for which they would attempt to organise an uprising in the rebels' African rearguard and to disrupt recruitment to the Army of Africa.*" Its meeting with "Largo Caballero proved fruitless." [Danny Evans, **Revolution and the State**, p. 50] This analysis was, perhaps needless to say, was shared internationally amongst anarchists:

*"Pierre Besnard, Secretary General of the International Workers Association . . . of which the CNT was a member visited revolutionary Spain [in September 1936] . . . he pointed out the necessity of internationalizing the war . . . Besnard's plan was to bring about an uprising of the Moroccan mountaineers . . . Besnard said that 'the Spanish government must make an announcement declaring the independence of the Protectorate.' The Arab nationalists would welcome this resolution with enthusiasm and would collaborate closely with the Spanish Republic, making life impossible for the rearguard francoists in Morocco. . . [Santillan, Garcia Oliver and Durruti] agreed that Oliver should talk to Companys about it, to make a greater impression on Caballero . . . "* [Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, pp. 258-9]

So to state the anarchists "*didn't seem that concerned*" about this issue is simply false: many anarchists were and publicly argued for it but trapped as a minority force in the government, the CNT could not push through this position and sadly adjusted itself to the prevailing nationalistic perspective. Given that Morrow manages to quote Berneri on this matter, Green's assertions are particularly incredulous -- although, to be fair, Morrow likewise seems ignorant of anarchist activities in this area and states that there was "*[n]ot a hint [from the CNT] that the only advice a revolutionist can give on the colonial question is: get out of Morocco.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 215-6]

Green also points out that inequality existed between men and woman in revolutionary Spain and quotes the anarchist women's organisation **Mujeres Libres** on this matter. He then notes the Bolsheviks "*took seriously the issue of working for the equality of working women with working men*" and "*[a]mong the methods of influence was mobilising the local population around social measures promulgated throughout the country. The banner of the struggle was not autonomy, but class-wide effort.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 27]. Four points.

First, **Mujeres Libres** was a nation wide organisation which aimed to end sexism by collective action inside and outside the anarchist movement by organising women to achieve their own liberation (see Martha Ackelsberg's, **Free Women of Spain** for more details). Thus its aims and mode of struggle were "*class-wide*" -- as anyone familiar with that organisation and its activities would know.

Second, the Bolshevik attempts at combating sexism were weakened by its centralised and top-down party structure. For example, an All-Russian Congress of Women Workers and

Women Peasants was held in Moscow in November 1918 and created what became known as "the women's section" (**Zhenotdel**) but its impact was limited:

*"But in spite of Lenin's claims to the contrary, inside the RCPb [the Communist Party], the Zhenotdel was not an independent body. All instructions and plans for the Zhenotdel were discussed at joint meetings with the Organisational Department of the Central Committee, which was led by men. In addition, the Zhenotdel's outreach activities came under the direction of the Central Committee's Department of Agitation and Propaganda. The same situation existed in the regions, where women's political work was guided by male party functionaries under the principles of 'democratic centralism'. The majority of local communist leaders had strong patriarchal views and did not want to empower women by increasing their representation in the RCPb or allowing them to create autonomous structures within it. In this way, women's aspirations to equal treatment were often blocked (but never eradicated) and they were forced to accept a subordinate role."* [Olga Shnyrova, *Women and Socialist Revolution, 1917-23*, **Women Activists between War and Peace: Europe, 1918-1923**, Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe (eds.), p. 133]

There is a vast difference between resolutions passed by at the top and the reality at the bottom but a centralist perspective usually forgets that -- and the need for those affected to take autonomous direct action to address the issues they face (including these in their own organisations).

Thirdly, undoubtedly it is possible to decree progressive laws on centralised basis (regardless of whether they are actually applied -- after all, many capitalist countries have enacted equal pay laws but without autonomous struggle on the spot these are ignored). Unfortunately, in a centralised system these laws can just as easily be revoked and replaced by reaction ones. This was the case in Russia:

*"The rapidity with which . . . that legislation was repealed . . . shows how precarious and temporary women's liberty is in a totalitarian country . . . The Russian experience demonstrates that real freedom for women cannot be established by Government decrees . . . Women can have only a caricature of liberty so long as they are not prepared to organise their own lives but instead allow the State to decide for them in the minutest details . . . the Russian woman is unable to defend the rights still left to her should the State choose still further to restrict her liberty of action."* [Marie Louise Berneri, **Workers in Stalin's Russia**, pp. 73-4]

Fourthly, why is equality between men and women important? Because inequality reduces the freedom of women to control their own lives, in short, it hinders their **autonomy**. Any campaign against sexism is based on the banner of autonomy -- that Green decides to forget this suggests a lot about his politics.

Thus Green gets it wrong again and again. Such is the quality of Leninist accounts of the Spanish revolution.

## **20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?**

Marxists usually point to the events in Catalonia after July 19th, 1936, as evidence that anarchism is a flawed theory. They bemoan the fact that, when given the chance, the anarchists did not "*seize power*" and create a "*dictatorship of the proletariat*." To re-quote Trotsky:

*"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* ["*Stalinism and Bolshevism*", **Writings 1936-7**, p. 424]

However, as we argued in [section 12](#), the Trotskyist definition of "workers' power" and "proletarian dictatorship" is, in fact, party power, party dictatorship and party sovereignty -- **not** working class self-management. Indeed, in a letter written in 1937, Trotsky clarified what he meant: "*Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.*" [our emphasis, **Op. Cit.**, p. 514]

Hence the usual Trotskyist lament concerning the CNT is that the anarchist leaders did not seize power themselves and create the so-called "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" (i.e. the dictatorship of those claiming to represent the proletariat). A strange definition of "*workers' power*," we must admit. The "leaders" of the CNT and FAI quite rightly rejected such a position -- unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time, as we will see.

Trotsky states that the "*leaders of the CNT . . . explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of 'exceptional circumstances' . . . Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an 'exceptional circumstance.'* Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for 'exceptional circumstances.'" ["*Stalinism and Bolshevism*", **Op. Cit.**, pp. 423-4] For once, he is correct. We will ignore the obvious fact that his own (and every other Leninist) account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism is a variation of the "*exceptional circumstances*" excuse and turn to his essential point. In order to evaluate anarchism and the actions of the CNT we have to evaluate **all** the revolutionary situations it found itself in, **not** just July 1936 in Catalonia. This is something Trotsky and his followers seldom do -- for reasons that will become clear.

Obviously space considerations does not allow us to discuss every revolutionary situation anarchism faced. We will, therefore, concentrate on the Russian Revolution and the activities of the CNT in Spain in the 1930s. These examples will indicate that rather than signifying the failure of anarchism, the actions of the CNT during the Civil War indicate the failure of anarchists to apply anarchist theory and so signifies a betrayal of anarchism. In other words, that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary socialism.

If we look at the Russian Revolution, we see anarchist theory gain its most wide scale influence in those parts of the Ukraine protected by the Makhnovist army (named after the anarchist Nestor Makhno). The Makhnovists fought against White (pro-Tsarist), Red and Ukrainian Nationalists in favour of a system of "*free soviets*" in which the "*working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which are to carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves. that is to say, administrative, not ruling councils.*" As for the economy, the "*land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in*

*them, that is to say, they must be socialised.*" ["Some Makhnovist Proclamations", contained in Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 273]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of the city of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated it they *"immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference . . . it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations . . . The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm . . . Railroad workers took the first step . . . They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region . . . From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management."* [Op. Cit., p. 149]

They also organised free agricultural communes which *"[a]dmittedly . . . were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population . . . But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes."* [Op. Cit., p. 87] This was in addition to abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry by the peasants seizing the land. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land between all sections of the peasant community. [Op. Cit., pp. 53-4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates to discuss political and social issues. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 (including Red Army soldiers) the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law. Trotsky, to note a relevant example, issued order 1824 which stated the June congress was forbidden, that to inform the population of it was an act of high treason and all delegates should be arrested immediately as were all the spreading the call. [Op. Cit., p. 98-105 and p. 122-31]

Needless to say, not an action which would foster working class democracy or participation in the revolution. The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking *"[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?"* and *"[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?"* Makhno himself stated that he *"consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs."* [quoted by Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103 and p. 129] These actions by the Bolsheviks should make the reader ponder if the elimination of workers' democracy during the civil war can fully be explained by the objective conditions facing Lenin's government or whether Leninist ideology played an important role in it (see [section H.6](#) got further discussion). As Arshinov

states: *"Whoever studies the Russian Revolution should learn [Trotsky's order no. 1824] by heart."* [Op. Cit., p. 123]

In addition, the Makhnovists *"full applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power."* Indeed, the *"only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statistes was a prohibition on the formation of those 'revolutionary committees' which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people."* [Op. Cit., p. 153 and p. 154]

The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal -- however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement. Arshinov proves a good summary:

*"The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*

*"Voluntary enlistment meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*

*"The electoral principle meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*

*"Self-discipline meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander."* [Op. Cit., p. 96]

Thus the Makhnovists indicate the validity of anarchist theory. They organised the self-defence of their region, refused seize power for themselves and so the life of the region, its social and revolutionary development followed the path of self-activity of the working people who did not allow any authorities to tell them what to do. They respected freedom of association, speech, press and so on while actively encouraging workers' and peasants' self-management and self-organisation. The Bolsheviks, in contrast, considered that soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was undermined if the proletariat took an active part in the revolution.

Moving to the Spanish movement, the various revolts and uprisings organised by the CNT and FAI that occurred before 1936 were marked by a similar revolutionary developments as the Makhnovists. Here we concentrate on the events in Asturias during October 1934 as the role of anarchists in this revolt has not been as widely known as it should be.

While the CNT was the minority union in Asturias, it had a considerable influence of its own (the CNT had over 22,000 members in the area while the UGT had 40,000). The CNT had some miners in their union (the majority were in the UGT) but most of their membership was

above ground, particularly in the towns of Aviles and Gijon. The regional federation of the CNT had joined the Socialist Party dominated "*Alianza Obrera*" unlike the other regional federations of the CNT (see [section 5](#) for more on this "Workers' Alliance").

When the revolt started, the workers organised attacks on barracks, town halls and other sources of state authority (just as the CNT revolts of 1932 and 1933 had). Bookchin indicates that "[s]tructurely, the insurrection was managed by hundreds of small revolutionary committees whose delegates were drawn from unions, parties, the FAI and even anti-Stalinist Communist groups. Rarely, if at all, were there large councils (or 'soviets') composed of delegates from factories." [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 249] This, incidentally, indicates that Morrow's claims that in Asturias "*the Workers' Alliances were most nearly like soviets, and had been functioning for a year under socialist and Communist Left leadership*" are false. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 31] The claims that the Asturias uprising had established soviets was simply Communist propaganda.

The Socialists "*generally functioned through tightly knit committees, commonly highly centralised and with strong bureaucratic proclivities. In Asturias, the UGT tried to perpetuate this form wherever possible . . . But the mountainous terrain of Asturias made such committees difficult to co-ordinate, so that each one became an isolated miniature central committee of its own, often retaining its traditional authoritarian character.*" The anarchists, on the other hand, "*favoured looser structures, often quasi-councils composed of factory workers and assemblies composed of peasants. The ambience of these fairly decentralised structures, their improvisatory character and libertarian spirit, fostered an almost festive atmosphere in Anarchist-held areas.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 249] Bookchin quotes an account which compares anarchist La Felguera with Marxist Sama, towns of equal size and separated by the Nalon river:

*"[The October Insurrection] triumphed immediately in the metallurgical and in the mining town. . . . Sama was organised along military lines. Dictatorship of the proletariat, red army, Central Committee, discipline. authority . . . La Felguera opted for **comunismo libertario**: the people in arms, liberty to come and go, respect for the technicians of the Duro-Felguera metallurgical plant, public deliberations of all issues, abolition of money, the rational distribution of food and clothing. Enthusiasm and gaiety in La Felguera; the sullenness of the barracks in Sama. The bridges [of Sama] were held by a corp of guards complete with officers and all. No one could enter or leave Sama without a safe-conduct pass, or walk through the streets without passwords. All of this was ridiculously useless, because the government troops were far away and the Sama bourgeoisie disarmed and neutralised . . . The workers of Sama who did not adhere to the Marxist religion preferred to go to La Felguera, where at least they could breathe. Side by side there were two concepts of socialism: the authoritarian and the libertarian; on each bank of the Nalon, two populations of brothers began a new life: with dictatorship in Sama; with liberty in La Felguera."*  
[quoted by Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 249-50]

Bookchin notes that "*[i]n contrast to the severely delimited Marxist committee in Sama, La Felguera workers met in popular assembly, where they socialised the industrial city's economy. The population was divided into wards, each of which elected delegates to supply and distribution committees. . . . The La Felguera commune . . . proved to be so successful, indeed so admirable, that surrounding communities invited the La Felguera Anarchists to advice them on reorganising their own social order. Rarely were comparable institutions*

created by the Socialists and, where they did emerge, it was on the insistence of the rank-and-file workers." [Op. Cit., p. 250] In other words, the Asturias uprising saw anarchists applying their ideas with great success in a revolutionary situation:

*"Almost alone, the Anarchists were to create viable revolutionary institutions structured around workers' control of industry and peasants' control of land. That these institutions were to be duplicated by Socialist workers and peasants was due in small measure to Anarchist example rather than Socialist precept. To the degree that the Asturian miners and industrial workers in various communities established direct control over the local economy and structured their committees along libertarian lines, these achievements were due to Anarchist precedents and long years of propaganda and education."* [Op. Cit., p. 250-1]

Unlike their Socialist and Communist allies, the anarchists in Asturias took the slogan "Unity, Proletarian Brothers" seriously. A key factor in the defeat of the uprising (beyond its isolation due to socialist incompetence elsewhere -- see [section 6](#)) was the fact that "[s]o far as the Aviles and Gijon Anarchists were concerned . . . their Socialist and Communist 'brothers' were to honour the slogan only in the breach. When Anarchist delegates from the seaports arrived in Oviedo on October 7, pleading for arms to resist the imminent landings of government troops, their requests were totally ignored by Socialists and Communists who, as [historian Gabriel] Jackson notes, 'clearly mistrusted them.' The Oviedo Committee was to pay a bitter price for its refusal. The next day, when Anarchist resistance, hampered by the pitiful supply of weapons, failed to prevent the government from landing its troops, the way into Asturias lay open. The two seaports became the principal military bases for launching the savage repression of the Asturian insurrection that occupied so much of October and claimed thousands of lives." [Op. Cit., p. 248]

Therefore, to state as Morrow does that before July 1936, "anarchism had never been tested on a grand scale" and now "leading great masses, it was to have a definite test" is simply wrong. [Op. Cit., p. 101] Anarchism had had numerous definite tests before involving "great masses," both in Spain and elsewhere. The revolts of the 1930s, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 (see [section A.5.5](#)) and in numerous other revolutionary and near revolutionary situations anarchism had been tested **and had passed** those tests. Defeat came about by the actions of Marxists (in the case of Asturias and Italy) or by superior force (as in the 1932 and 1933 Spanish insurrections and the Ukraine) **not** because of anarchist theory or activities. At no time did they collaborate with the bourgeois state or compromise their politics. By concentrating on July 1936, Marxists effectively distort the history of anarchism -- a bit like arguing the actions of the Social Democratic Party in crushing the German discredits Marxism while ignoring the actions and politics of the council communists during it.

But the question remains, why did the CNT and FAI make such a mess (politically at least) of the Spanish Revolution of 1936? However, even this question is unfair as the example of the Aragon Defence Council and Federation of Collectives indicate that anarchists **did** apply their ideas successfully in certain areas during that revolution.

Morrow is aware of that example, as he argues that the "Catalonian militia marched into Aragon as an army of social liberation . . . Arriving in a village, the militia committees sponsor the election of a village anti-fascist committee" which "organises production on a new basis" and "[e]very village wrested from the fascists was transformed into a forest of

revolution." Its "municipal councils were elected directly by the communities. The Council of Aragon was at first largely anarchist." He notes that "[l]ibertarian principles were attempted in the field of money and wages" yet he fails to mention the obvious application of libertarian principles in the field of **politics** with the state abolished and replaced by a federation of workers' associations. [Op. Cit., p. 53, p. 204 and p. 205] To do so would be to invalidate his basic thesis against anarchism and so it goes unmentioned, hoping the reader will not notice this confirmation of anarchist **politics** in practice.

So, from the experience of the Ukraine, Asturias and the Council of Aragon it appears clear that rather than exposing anarchist theory (as Marxists claim), the example of July 1936 in Catalonia is an aberration. Anarchist politics had been confirmed as a valid revolutionary theory many times before and, indeed, shown themselves as the only one to build the foundations upon which a better society could fully develop. Yet, why did this aberration occur?

Most opponents of anarchism provide a rather (in)famous quote from FAI militant Juan Garcia Oliver, describing the crucial decision made in Catalonia immediately after the defeat of the army coup to co-operate with Companys' government to explain the failure of the CNT to "seize power": *"The CNT and FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, eschewing revolutionary totalitarianism . . . by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship."* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 105]

In this statement Garcia Oliver describes the capitalist state as a democracy and refers to the alternative of the directly democratic CNT unions taking power as "totalitarianism" and "dictatorship." Marxists tend to think this statement tells us something about the CNT's original programme in the period leading up to the crisis of July 1936. As proven above, any such assertion would be false (see also [section 8](#)). In fact this statement was made in December 1937, many months after Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT activists had embarked upon collaboration in the government ministries and Republican army command. The quote is taken from a report by the CNT leadership, presented by Garcia Oliver and Mariano Vazquez (CNT National Secretary in 1937) at a congress of the International Workers Association (IWA). The CNT was aware that government participation was in violation of the principles of the IWA and the report was intended to provide a rationalisation but it was, rather, indication of just how far the CNT leadership had been corrupted by the experience of government collaboration.

Garcia Oliver's position in July 1936 had been entirely different. He had been one of the militants to argue in favour of overthrowing the Companys government in Catalonia in the crucial union assemblies of July 20-21:

*"The position supported by Juan Garcia Oliver has been described as 'anarchist dictatorship' Actually, though, Oliver was advocating application of the goals of the Saragossa Congress in Barcelona and Catalonia at a time in history when, in his opinion, libertarian communism was a real possibility. It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of [state] power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the popular masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of*

*the revolution as well as in their political organisations.*" [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 188f]

Those libertarians who defended government participation in Spain argued that a non-hierarchical re-organisation of society in Catalonia in July 1936 could only have been imposed by force, against the opposition of the parties and sectors of society that have a vested interest in existing inequalities. They argued that this would have been a "dictatorship," no better than the alternative of government collaboration. Yet, if this argument were valid, then it logically means that anarchism itself would be impossible, for there will always be sectors of society -- bosses, judges, politicians, etc. -- who will oppose social re-organisation on a libertarian basis. As Malatesta once argued, some people "*seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!*" [Anarchy, pp. 42-3] It is doubtful he would have predicted that certain anarchists would be included amongst such believers!

Neither anarchism nor the CNT programme called for suppressing other viewpoints. The various viewpoints that existed among the workforce and population would be reflected in the deliberations and debates of the workplace and community assemblies as well as in the various local and regional congresses and conference and on their co-ordinating Councils. The various political groups would be free to organise, publish their periodicals and seek influence in the various self-managed assemblies and structures that existed. The CNT would be dominant because it had overwhelming support among the workers of Catalonia (and would have remained dominant only as long as that continued).

What is essential to a state is that its authority and armed power be centralised, hierarchical, top-down, separate and distinct from the population, otherwise it could not function to protect the power of a boss class (see ). When people are armed, organised in democratic militias, directly manages they own affairs (whether political or economic) in decentralised, federal organisations based on self-management from the bottom upwards, this is not a "state" in the historical sense. Thus the CNT would not in any real sense had "seized power" in Catalonia, rather it would have allowed the mass of people, previously disempowered by the state, to take control of their own lives -- both individually and collectively -- by smashing the state and replacing it by a free federation of workers' associations.

What this means is that a non-hierarchical society must be imposed by the working class against the opposition of those who would lose power. In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority, in other words! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed (indeed, they are acts of liberation in which the oppressed end their oppression by their own direct action). That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision making about social and economic issues.

So the dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was a false one and fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, or similar acts, under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union,

workplace, community, militia (and so on) assemblies, as should be the case! "Collaboration" yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations run in a libertarian manner. Anarchism does not respect the "freedom" to be a boss or a politician.

Instead of this "collaboration" from the bottom up, the CNT and FAI committees favoured "collaboration" from the top down. In this they followed the example of the UGT and its "Workers' Alliance" rather than their own activities previous to the military revolt. Why did the CNT and FAI in Catalonia reject their previous political perspective and reject the basis ideas of anarchism? Why the change of direction?

There were two principal reasons.

Firstly, while a majority in Catalonia and certain other parts of Spain, the CNT and FAI were a minority in such areas as Castille and Asturias. To combat fascism required the combined forces of all parties and unions and by collaborating with a UGT-like "Anti-Fascist Alliance" in Catalonia, it was believed that such alliances could be formed elsewhere, with equality for the CNT ensured by the Catalan CNT's decision of equal representation for minority organisations in the Catalan Anti-Fascist Committee. This would, hopefully, also ensure aid to CNT militias via the government's vast gold reserves and stop foreign intervention by Britain and other countries to protect their interests if libertarian communism was declared. However, as Vernon Richards argues:

*"This argument contains . . . two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties -- that is politicians -- honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations. . .*

*"All the initiative . . . was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters." [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, p. 42]*

In addition, in failing to take the initiative to unite the working class independently of the Republican state at the crucial moment, in July 1936, the CNT of Catalonia was in effect abandoning the only feasible alternative to the Popular Front strategy. Without a libertarian system of popular self-management, the CNT and FAI had no alternative but to join the bourgeois state. For a revolution to be successful, as Bakunin and Kropotkin argued, it needs to create libertarian organisations (such as workers' associations, free communes and their federations) which can effectively replace the state and the market, that is to create a

widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed. If this is not done and the state is ignored rather than smashed, it continue and get stronger as it will be the only medium that exists for wide scale decision making. This will result in revolutionaries having to work within it, trying to influence it since no other means exist to reach collective decisions. As the Friends of Durruti argued: "*the State cannot be retained in the face of the unions -- let alone bolstered up by our own forces.*" [**Towards a Fresh Revolution**, p. 24]

The CNT had never considered a "strategy" of collaboration with the Popular Front prior to July 1936. In the months leading up to the July explosion, the CNT had consistently criticised the Popular Front strategy as a fake unity of leaders over the workers, a strategy that would subordinate the working class to capitalist legality. However, in July, the CNT gatherings in Catalonia had not seen clearly that their "temporary" participation in the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee would drag them inexorably into a practice of collaboration with the Popular Front. As Christie argues, "*the Militias Committee was a compromise, an artificial political solution . . . It . . . drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until them its principle enemy, and led to the steady erosion of anarchist influence and credibility.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 105]

The failure to smash the state, this first betrayal of anarchist principles, led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution.

Secondly, the fear of fascism played a key role. After all, this was 1936. The CNT and FAI had seen workers in Italy and Germany being crushed by fascist dictatorships. In Spain, Franco's forces were slaughtering union and political militants and members by the tens of thousands (soon to reach hundreds of thousands by the end of the war and beyond). The revolution had not been initiated by the people themselves (as had the previous revolts in the 1930s) and this also had a psychological impact on the decision making process. The anarchists were, therefore, in a position of being caught between two evils -- fascism and the bourgeois state, elements of which had fought with them on the streets. To pursue anarchist politics at such a time, it was argued, could have resulted in the CNT fighting on two fronts -- against the fascists and also against the Republican government (perhaps even on a third, if the revolution gave an excuse for foreign intervention). Such a situation would have been unbearable and so it was better to accept collaboration than aid Fascism by dividing the forces of the anti-fascist camp.

However, such a perspective failed to appreciate the depth of hatred the politicians and bourgeois had for the CNT. Indeed, their actions showed that they preferred fascism to the social revolution (which was why the government refused time and time again to arm the people). So, in the name of "anti-fascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff "*both before and after July 19th, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 40] So rather than eliminate a civil war developing within the civil war, the policy of the CNT just postponed it -- until such time as the state was stronger than the working class. The Republican government was quite happy to attack the gains of the revolution, attacking rural and urban collectives, union halls, assassinating CNT and FAI members and so on.

It is clear that anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As a Scottish anarchist in Barcelona during the revolution argued: "*Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name . . . Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed.*" [Ethal McDonald, **Workers Free Press**, Oct. 1937] This was also argued by the **Friends of Durruti**: "*Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism.*" ["*The Friends of Durruti accuse*", **Class War on the Home Front**, Wildcat Group (ed.), p. 30]

Yet the majority at the July 20-21 conferences went along with proposal of postponing the social revolution, of starting the work of creating libertarian communism, and smashing the state and replacing it with a federation of workers' assemblies. Most of the CNT militants at these meetings saw the compromise as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). As the official account states, "*[t]he situation was considered and it was unanimously decided not to mention Libertarian Communism until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels.*" [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] Companys (the head of the Catalan government) had proposed the creation of a body containing representatives of all anti-fascist parties and unions called the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*," sponsored by his government. The CNT meeting agreed to this proposal, though only on condition that the CNT be given the majority on it. A sizeable minority of delegates were apparently disgusted by this decision. The delegation from Bajo Llobregat County (an industrial area south of Barcelona) walked out saying they would never go along with government collaboration.

Therefore, the decision to postpone the revolution and so to ignore the state rather than smashing was a product of isolation and the fear of a fascist victory. However, while "isolation" may explain the Catalan militants' fears and so decisions, it does not justify their decision. If the CNT of Catalonia had rejected Companys suggestion and set up a federation of workplace and community assemblies in Catalonia, uniting the rank-and-file of the other unions with the CNT, this would have strengthened the resolve of workers in other parts of Spain, and it might have also inspired workers in nearby countries to move in a similar direction. As Bakunin and Kropotkin continually stressed, revolutions break out in specific areas and then spread outward -- isolation is a feature of revolution which can only be overcome by action, by showing a practical example which others can follow.

So while isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. However, the membership of the CNT rose to the occasion and decided **themselves** to start the social revolution ("*very rapidly collectives . . . began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the CNT leadership . . . the initiative came from CNT militants*" [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 349]). The social revolution began anyway, from below, but without the key political aspect (abolition of the state) and so was fatally compromised from the beginning. As Stuart Christie argues:

*"The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJJL in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism . . . they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become part of the bourgeois state . . . Faced*

*with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*"But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory to practice by organisational decree. . .*

*"What the CNT-FAI leadership had failed to take on board was the fact that the spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direction of its own. On their own initiative, without any intervention by the leadership of the unions or political parties, the rank and file militants of the CNT, representing the dominant force within the Barcelona working class, together with other union militants had, with the collapse of State power, . . . been welded . . . into genuinely popular non-partisan revolutionary committees . . . in their respective neighbourhoods. They were the natural organisms of the revolution itself and direct expression of popular power." [Op. Cit., p. 99]*

In other words, the bulk of the CNT-FAI membership acted in an anarchist way while the higher committees compromised their politics and achievements in the name of anti-fascist unity. In this the membership followed years of anarchist practice and theory. To claim that July 1936 indicated the failure of anarchism means to ignore the constructive work of millions of CNT members in their workplaces, communities and militias and instead concentrate on a few militants who made the terrible mistake of ignoring their political ideas in an extremely difficult situation.

Therefore, it is clear that the experiences of the CNT and FAI in 1936 indicate a failure of anarchists to apply their politics rather than the failure of those politics. The examples of the Makhnovists, the revolts in Spain between 1932 and 1934 as well as the Council of Aragon show beyond doubt that this is the case. Rather than act as anarchists in July 1936, the militants of the Catalan CNT and FAI ignored their basic ideas (not lightly, we stress, but in response to real dangers). They later justified their decisions by putting their options in a Marxist light -- "either we impose libertarian communism, and so become an anarchist dictatorship, or we collaborate with the democratic government." As Vernon Richards makes clear:

*"Such alternatives are contrary to the most elementary principles of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. In the first place, an 'anarchist dictatorship' is a contradiction in terms (in the same way as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is), for the moment anarchists impose their social ideas on the people by force, they cease being anarchists . . . the arms of the CNT-FAI held could be no use for imposing libertarian communism . . . The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrificed. We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority. . . the role of anarchists [is] to support, to incite and encourage the*

*development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do." [Op. Cit., pp. 43-6]*

Their compromise in the name of anti-fascist unity contained the rest of their mistakes. Joining the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias" was the second mistake as at no time could it be considered as the embryo of a new workers' power or an expression of "dual power". It was, rather, an organisation like the pre-war UGT "Workers' Alliances" -- an attempt to create links between the top-level of other unions and parties. Such an organisation, as the CNT recognised before the war, could not be a means of creating a revolutionary federation of workers' associations and communes and, in fact, a hindrance to such a development. Given that the CNT had rejected the call for revolution in favour of anti-fascist unit on July 20th, such a development does not reflect the CNT's pre-war programme. Rather it was a reversion to Felix Morrow's Trotskyist position of joining a "Workers' Alliance" in spite of its non-revolutionary nature (see [section 5](#)).

The CNT did not carry out its programme (and so apply anarchist politics) and so did not replace the Generalitat (the Catalan State) with a Defence Council in which only union/workplace assemblies (not political parties) were represented. To start the process of creating libertarian communism all the CNT would have had to do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates. It could also have invited the various neighbourhood and village defence committees that had either sprung up spontaneously or were already organised before the war as part of the CNT.

Ironically enough, Kropotkin had long before showed the flaw in the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism *"until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels."* In analysing the Paris Commune he had lambasted those who had argued *"Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done"* as follows:

*"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of forming a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of conquering the foe while the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, moral and intellectual well-being to everybody! They tried to consolidate the Commune first and defer the social revolution until afterward, whereas the only way to go about it was **to consolidate the Commune by means of the social revolution.**"*

*"The same thing happened with regard to the principle of government. By proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle, which was the breakdown of the state. . ."*

*"And yet, if we admit that a central government to regulate the relations of communes between themselves is quite needless, why should we admit its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up each commune? . . . There is no more reason for a government inside the commune than for a government outside." [The Commune of Paris", **Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution**, pp. 126-7]*

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated for the war and the revolution were inseparable (*"either victory over*

*Franco, thanks to the revolutionary war, or defeat*" [Camillo Berneri, **The State - Or Revolution**, p. 129]). Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies:

*"Paris sent her devoted sons to the town hall. There, shelved in the midst of files of old papers, obliged to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to act among the people, obliged to discuss when it was needful to act, to compromise when no compromise was the best policy, and, finally, losing the inspiration which only comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Being paralysed by their separation from the people -- the revolutionary centre of light and heat -- they themselves paralysed the popular initiative."* [Op. Cit., p. 127]

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. As one anarchist turned Minister admitted after the war, "[w]e were in the government, but the streets were slipping away from us. We had lost the workers' trust and the movement's unity had been whittled away." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 274] The actions of the CNT-FAI higher committees and Ministers helped paralyse and defeat the May Days revolt of 1937. The CNT committees and leaders become increasingly isolated from the people, they compromised again and again and, ultimately, became an impotent force. Kropotkin was proved correct. Which means that far from refuting anarchist politics or analysis, the experience of the CNT-FAI in the Spanish Revolution *confirms* it.

One last point, it could be argued that anarchist theory allowed the leadership of the CNT and FAI to paint their collaboration with the state as a libertarian policy. That is, of course, correct. Anarchism is against the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" just as much as it is against the actual dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the existing system and its off-shoots such as fascism). This allowed the CNT and FAI leaders to argue that they were following anarchist theory by not destroying the state completely in July 1936. Of course, such a position cannot be used to discredit anarchism simply because such a revision meant that it can never be libertarian to abolish government and the state. In other words, the use made of anarchist theory by the leaders of the CNT and FAI in this case presents nothing else than a betrayal of that theory rather than its legitimate use. Also, while anarchist theory was corrupted to justify working with other parties and unions in a democratic state, **Marxist** theory was used to justify the brutal one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, first under Lenin and then Stalin. So if the revolution failed in Spain because anarchism was **not** applied, the revolution failed in Russia because Marxism **was** applied.

In summary, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 indicates the failure of anarchists rather than the failure of anarchism.