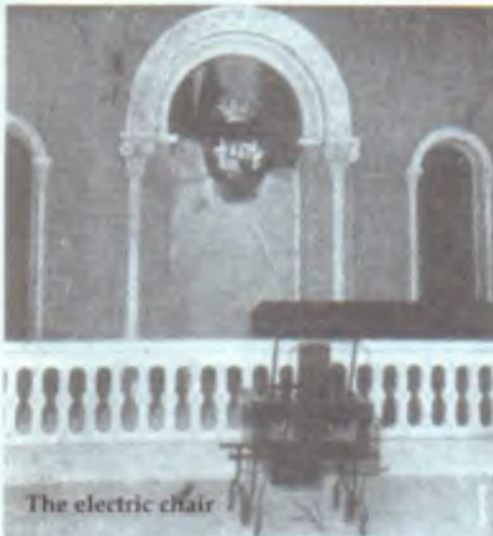


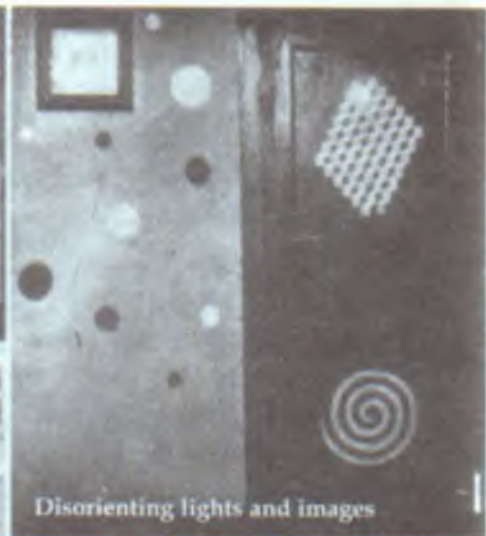




May 1937: corpses of Young Libertarians of the Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias (FIJL) murdered by Stalinists and dumped in Sardanyola; later buried in Sant Andreu cemetery.



The electric chair



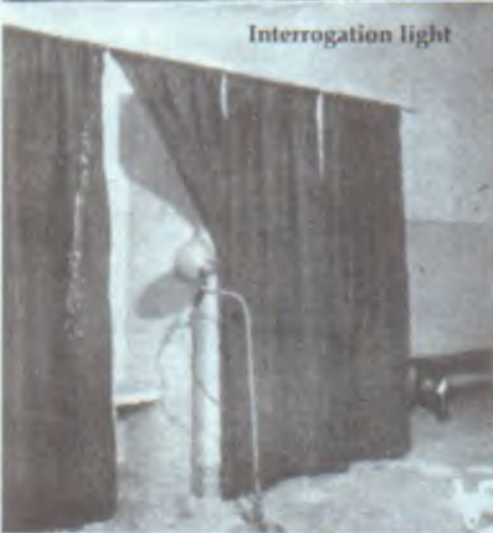
Disorienting lights and images



No place to sit or rest



Torture by bell



Interrogation light



Painful discomfort and tight spaces

▲ **Cheka torture cells:** CNT prison director Melchor Rodriguez exposed the existence of communist interrogation centres (checas) in which prisoners were tortured. These revelations were used by Largo Caballero to dissolve the communist controlled defence committee and force the resignation of José Cazorla, the Communist chief of public order



◀ **Juan Peiró:** glassworker who became the CNT's Minister for Industry. Peiró fled to Spain in 1939, but after the fall of France to the Nazis he was captured and sent back to Spain where he was executed, in Valencia, in 1942.



▲ **Casa CNT-FAI, Via Layetana, Barcelona:** office workers





▲ Casa CNT-FAI: headquarters of the Regional Committee of the Catalan CNT in the former offices of the Employers' Federation, the *Fomento*



▲ *Baleares*: the 20,000 ton Nationalist cruiser which bombarded Malaga (February 1937)



◀ *Deutschland*: German battle cruiser bombed by Republican Air Force in Ibiza

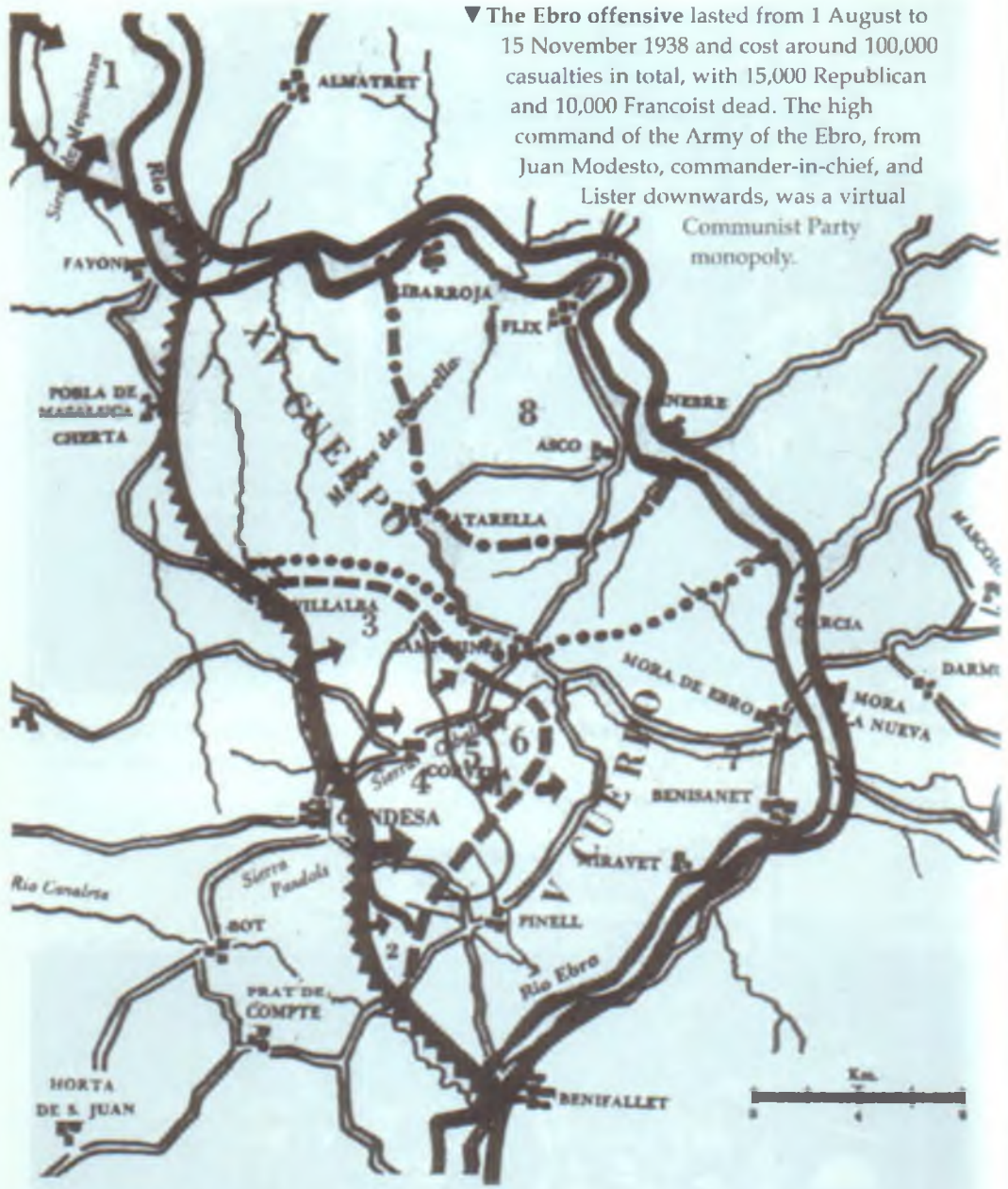


▲ The Durruti Column: guerrillas

▼ The Durruti Column: international volunteers



▼ The Ebro offensive lasted from 1 August to 15 November 1938 and cost around 100,000 casualties in total, with 15,000 Republican and 10,000 Francoist dead. The high command of the Army of the Ebro, from Juan Modesto, commander-in-chief, and Lister downwards, was a virtual Communist Party monopoly.



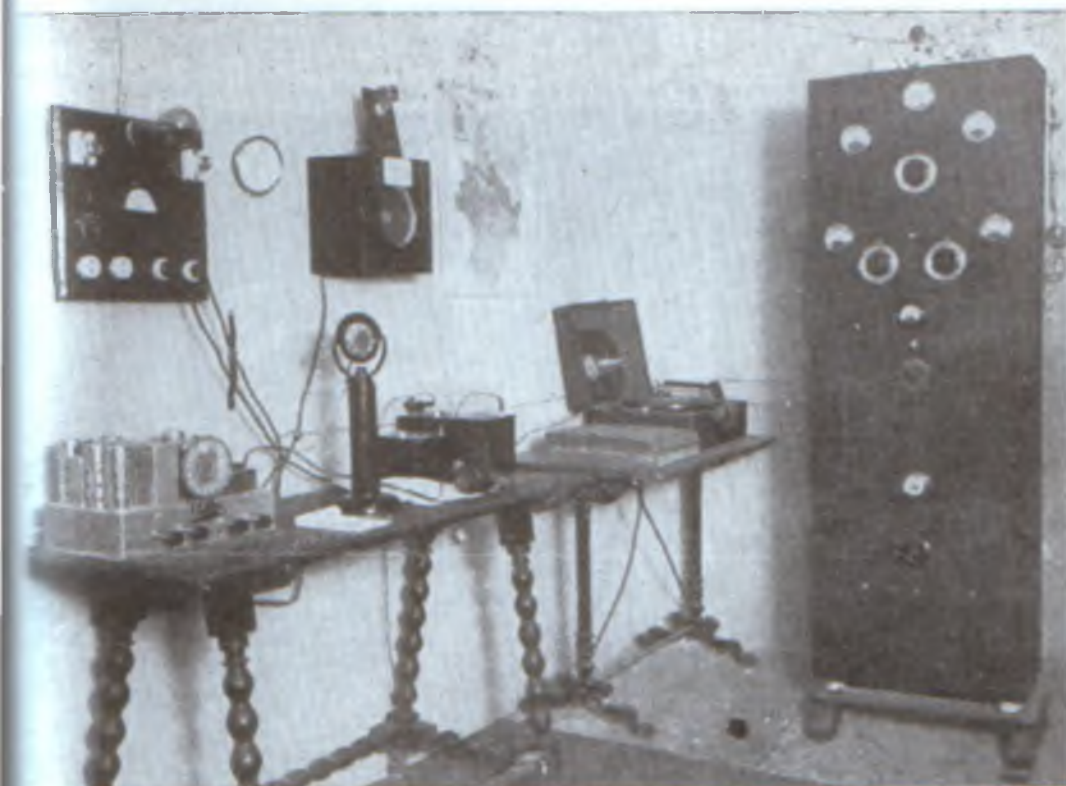
- LINEA DE COMBATE EL 1º DE AGOSTO
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 ZONAS OCUADAS POR EL ENEMIGO EN LOS ATAQUES
- ▬▬▬▬ LINEA ALCANZADA A LOS 90 DIAS, AL TERMINAR EL 6º ATAQUE
- 7 PRIMERA FASE DEL REPLIEGUE, DEL 3 AL 8 DE NOVIEMBRE
- LINEA DE COMBATE AL TERMINAR LA 1ª FASE DEL REPLIEGUE
- 8 SEGUNDA FASE DEL REPLIEGUE HASTA EL 15 DE NOVIEMBRE
- ▬●●●●▬ CABAZA DE PUENTE DE FLIX QUE PROTEGIO EL PASO A LA ORILLA NORTE
- ▬▬▬▬ LINEA DE CONTACTO EL 16 DE NOVIEMBRE (LA DEL 24 DE JULIO) AL TERMINAR LA MANTORRA Y BATALLA DEL EBRO



▲ **Catalonia:** hand-over of flags of the 119th, 20th and 121st 'Mixed Brigades' of the 26th Division by *Mujeres Libres*, the women's anarchist organisation



▲ **26th Division:** Juan Plana, technical operator of the Division's film group, preparing his projector for a screening



▲ **Aragón:** Broadcasting equipment for the radio station of the 26th Division

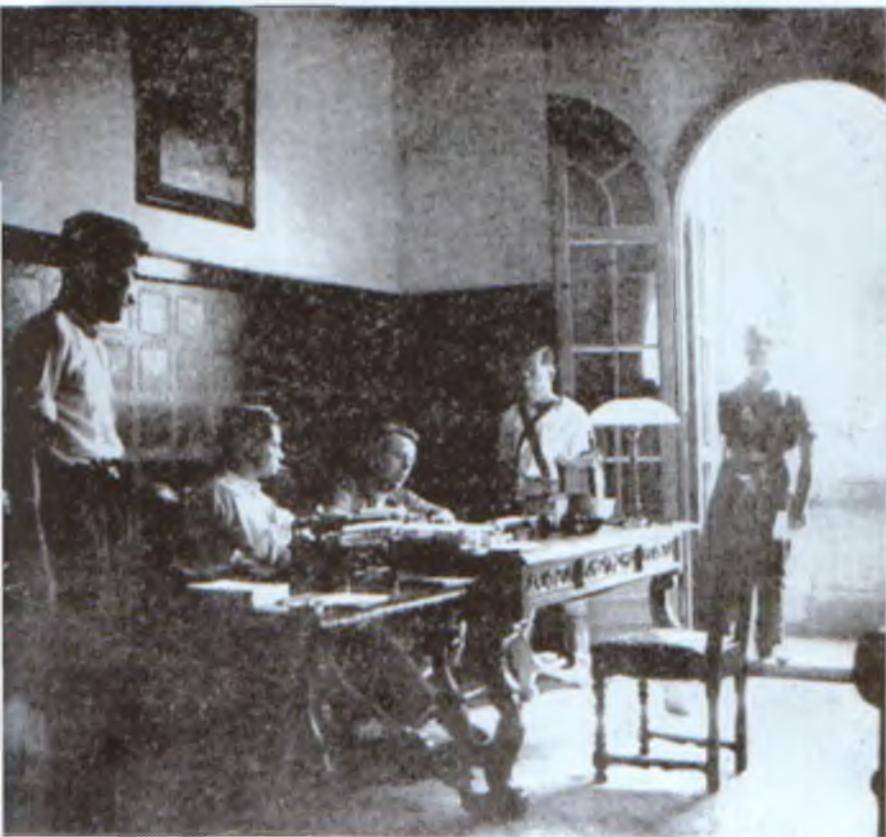




▲ Barcelona: Ricardo Sanz visiting a maternity unit supported by the 26th Division

▼ Madrid: General Staff officers in the dining room of the 26th Division's headquarters





**Pedralbes ('Bakunin') Barracks, Barcelona:** Ricardo Sanz, CNT delegate responsible for logistical support of the Militia columns, in his office (1936)

**Rocketmen:** Artificers of the Durruti Column (26th Div.) were the first to use rockets in warfare





▲ ▼ Colonel Cipriano Mera Sanz: a construction worker, Mera became one of the leading anarchist generals of the Spanish Civil War. Commander of the 4th Army Corps of the Army of the Centre, he participated in all the major battles on the central front. From March 1939 Mera joined with Segismundo Casado and the socialist Julian Besteiro to establish an anti-Negrin National Defence Junta.





▲ ▼ Colonel Cipriano Mera Sanz: taking a march past of the troops with premier Juan Negrin (white raincoat) and President Manuel Azaña y Díaz (black coat). Below: Mera addressing a staff meeting (Valentin Gonzalez, *El Campesino* can be seen on the right)





Gen. Sebastian Pozas Perea



Domingo de Moriones y Larraga



Gen. 'Walter' — Karol Swier



Melchor Rodriguez Garcia



Cipriano Mera Sanz



Col. Segismundo Casado López



Gen. Manuel Mataliana Gómez



Gen. Juan Hernández Sarrabia



Col. Adolfo Prada Vaquero



Gen. Leopoldo Menéndez López



Manuel Fai Conde



Juan Modesto Guilloto



Gen. Gómez Jordana y Sousa



Dr. Juan Negrin Lopez



José Giral y Pereira



Francisco Galán Rodríguez



Segundo Blanco



Gen. Vicente Rojo Lluch



Juan Modesto Guilloto



Diego Martínez Barris



José García Pradas

# Castilla Libre

CNT-AIT

ORGANO DE LA FEDERACION REGIONAL ANARQUISTA DEL CENTRO (F.A.I.)

Redacción y Admón., Miguel Angel, 27 Sábado 15 de octubre de 1938 Precio 15 cts. Año II.-Núm. 53

UN DISCURSO CONCRETO Y ENERGIICO DEL JEFE DEL GOBIERNO  
cometería un delito de máxima traición a la patria el español  
no se atreviese a aceptar, ni aun en hipótesis, que se levante  
en otras fronteras de artificio entre la zona rebelde y la legal

Castilla Libre: CNT-FAI daily of the Central Region (15 October, 1938)



◀ Antonio Ortiz (left) anarchist commander of the 25th Division (formerly the Roja y Negra Column) until 1937 when he was given command of the 24th Division based in Seo de Urgel. With him is Juan García Oliver, fellow member of the *Nosotros* anarchist affinity group



▲ **Catalonia:** Colonel Sebastian Pozas Perea (centre), head of the Army of the East, with Ricardo Sanz (on his left) during a visit to the command post of the 26th Division



▲ **General Juan Hernández Sarrabia**, Republican Commander-in-Chief, addressing reserve troops of the 26th Division



◀ **Buenaventura Durruti** (centre) with Sergeant José Manzana (left) his military advisor and an unidentified officer, possibly his other military adviser, Enrique Pérez Farras.



▲ **The Durruti Column:** *dinamiteros*, a specialist unit of the Durruti Column. On February 9, 1939, 3:00 a.m.: Colonel Modesto, Commander of the Fifteenth Army Corps, crossed into Cerbere from Port Bou. His arrival was preceded by tremendous explosions in which the Port Bou railroad station and quantities of war materiel were destroyed. He announced that the only republican troops left in that area were the headquarters section of a machine-gun battalion and a battalion of *dinamiteros* from the Durruti Column.

▼ **Oath:** *milicianos* symbolically demonstrating their resistance to Nazi intervention (represented by the German steel helmet and shells)







▲ Madrid: City University — general view



▲ Madrid: City University — approximate location where Durruti was shot in 1936



▲ Madrid: City University — Clinical Hospital construction site. Scene of bitter fighting



► Colonel Segismundo López Casado, commander of the Army of the Centre in Madrid and the leading spirit among the officers opposed to Negrín.



◀ Madrid, midnight 5/6 March 1939: Colonel Casado broadcasts the news that a National Council of Defence has risen against the Communist-controlled government of Dr Juan Negrín



## LA "SEMANA COMUNISTA"

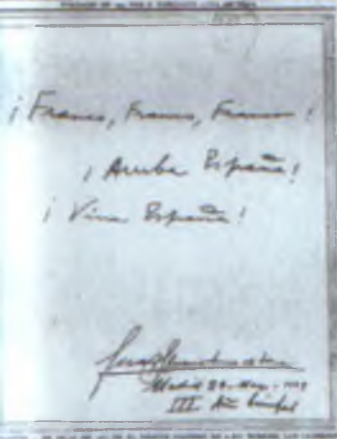
### LUGARES PRINCIPALES DE LA LUCHA DENTRO DE MADRID

Ministerio de Hacienda 2 Ito de Marina 3 Ito de Guerra 4 Plaza de Colon 5 Ito de Cibeles 6 Ito de Manuel Becerra 7 Puente de Vallecas 8 Puente del Sol 9 Plaza de Castellar 10 Ito de la Independencia 11 Palacio de Comunicaciones 12 Banco de España 13 Telefonica 14 Comité Provincial del Partido Comunista 15 Comité Central del mismo Partido 16 Puente de Toledo 17 División 18 Comandancia de Ingenieros 19 Dirección General de Seguridad 20 Gobierno Civil 21 Comandancia de la C.N.T. 22 Unión Radio 23 Alros del Hipódromo

Escala

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▲ 'Communist Week' (5-12 March 1939): Following the formation of the National Council of Defence in opposition to the Communist-dominated government of Dr Juan Negrín (5 March, 1939) Communist-led army units in and around Madrid attempted to close the approaches to the city and seize the central districts, including governmental offices. The Stalinist counter-coup was successfully quashed on 12 March by troops led by the anarchist general Cipriano Mera.



ABC 30 March 1939



Asesinos! — Franco's troops prepare to take their revenge



Fall of Madrid, 28 March 1939: Colonel Prada surrendered the Army of the Centre at 11.00 am, in Madrid the anarchist municipal councillor, Melchor Rodríguez, was accepted even by the nationalists as temporary mayor till the final surrender of the capital to Franco's 1st Army commander General Espinosa de los Monteros



Madrid, 28 y 29 de marzo. Centos miles de soldados fascistas y de simpatizantes fascistas a las afueras recibiendo con emoción sus tropas en la ciudad.

▲ **Madrid, March 28, 1938:** fascist sympathisers and Fifth Columnists take to the streets to welcome Franco's troops



▲ **Catalonia — February 10, 1939:** At Bourg-Madame, the anarchist Twenty-Sixth Division (the Durruti Column) retreated into France leaving a suicide unit of 150 men to delay the taking of Puigcerdá, the last Spanish town before the French frontier post of Bourg-Madame.



▲ **February 5, 1939:** The Spanish republican army begins its orderly retreat to the frontier. Having enabled hundreds of thousands of civilians to cross to France in safety, the army now left the anarchist Twenty-Sixth Division (the Durruti Column) and troops of the Army of the Ebro commanded by the Communist colonels Juan Modesto and Enrique Lister to fight a rearguard action covering the evacuation of the other troops and those civilians still on the Spanish side of the border.

▼ **The 43rd Division:** under the command of Lt. Colonel Beltral, nicknamed *El Esquinazado* ('The Wedger' — below, centre), the 43rd Division held out in the Valle del Alto Cinto in the Pyrenees in northern Aragón, close to the French border.





▲ Madrid prison: Republican prisoners, March 1939

▼ February 14, 1939: Between 12,000 and 15,000 troops emerged from the Col d'Ares (Pyrenees-Orientales) after having evaded pursuing Navarrese soldiers. These were the last organised troops to pass the frontier. According to the French newspaper *La Dépêche*, Franco's forces had captured 35,000 republican soldiers in Catalonia





▲ **Road to oblivion:** the border with France was opened to women, children and the elderly on the night of January 27-28. Refugees were supposed to enter at the ludicrous rate of 2,000 a day. In the photograph a line of lorries with Spanish refugees moves slowly along the road to Cerbère from Port Bou. More than 450,000 of the defeated Republicans crossed the frontier into France to escape the risks and slaughter of General Yagüe's Army of Morocco, General Gambara's Italian fascist troops, and Catalan Falangists, Carlists and Catholic Integrist.



◀ **February 5, 1939:** The order is given to allow passage to the Spanish republican army at Cerbère at 8:00 a.m. and at Le Perthus at 4.30 p.m. on February 6. Weapons are confiscated from the Spanish republican troops at the French

▼ **Colliure, France, February 5, 1939:** Republican refugees crowd the streets as they head into exile.







◀ ▲ February-March 1939: The first of 11 main French concentration camps was located on the beach of Argeles-sur-mer. There were also three prison camps. The anarchist Twenty-Sixth Division was considered the most dangerous of the refugees and were sent to the Castle of Mont Louis, and later to the punishment camp of Le Vernet (Ariège), which was largely reserved for prisoners considered to be politically questionable or dangerous.



▲ Toulouse, August 1944: Spanish *maquis* carrying the Republican flag and wearing helmets and uniforms taken from the Nazi occupiers liberate Toulouse. Spanish anarchists played a key role in the liberation of South Western France, and Paris, which they entered on August 24 with the Ninth Company of General Leclerc's Second Armoured Division.

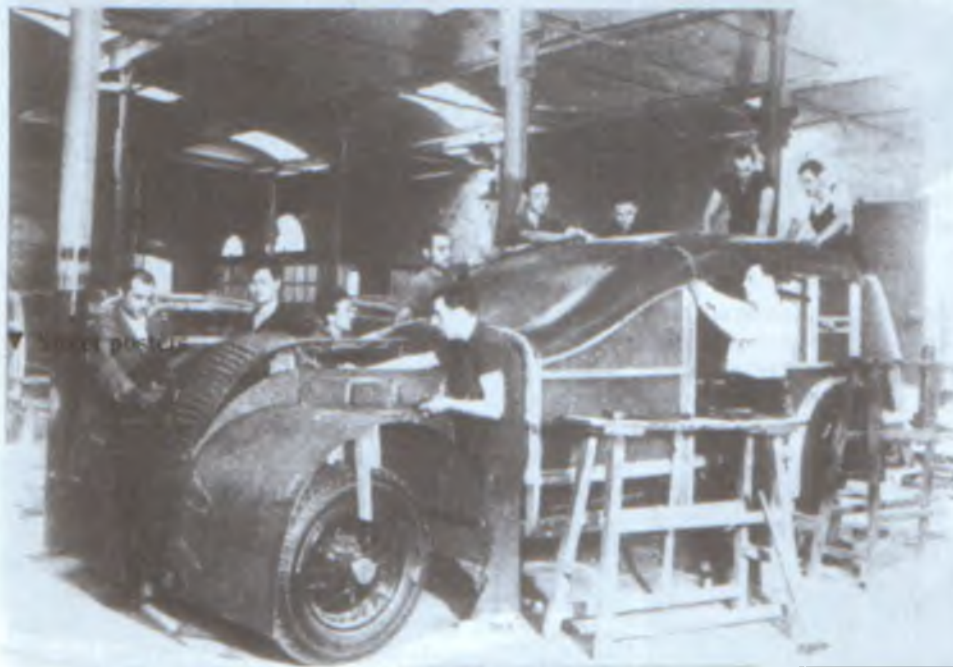
The facilities extended to the enemy have been enhanced by the lack of due vigilance regarding the personnel entrusted with delicate matters, as in the case of the secretary of the Mexican delegation in Paris, Escudero, who repeatedly betrayed our cause by acting in the following manner.

War materials to the approximate value of 154 million francs had been procured and these had been stored in the port of Danzig in September 1936. Escuder made a quick visit to the city to issue instructions regarding the loading and shipment of said materials to republican Spain. Moored in the port, there was a Mexican vessel, the *Hidalgo*; its crew was entirely trustworthy and it had the capacity to accommodate the cargo. There were other equally reliable facilities available for its shipment, however, Escudero, along with the owner of the Greek vessel, *Silvia*, a fellow by the name of Katapodis, and her captain, Kouras, both of them notoriously loose-lipped and venal, decided to load the cargo aboard that vessel, in the knowledge that there was a shipment of arms bound for Franco's army already in her hold. The upshot was that, twelve days after leaving Danzig, the *Silvia* quietly put in at Ceuta where she turned over the entire cargo to the Nationalist authorities.

[...] Escudero personally loaded up the *Rona* with material for our government. Once on the open sea, the political delegate would reveal the course to be set and the delivery port. As he passed El Ferrol, the captain slowed her engines and waited for rebel shipping to appear; the latter drew nearer and, without a word of discussion, as if prearranged, they escorted her into El Ferrol.'

We have comprehensively and, on the basis of available documentation, tackled two sorts of performance: the loyal efforts and sacrifices made by the workers in the rearguard and the government's own sordid, murky stewardship. The reader has enough evidence to hand to draw the appropriate conclusions.

▼ Collectivised industries: armoured cars for the front



FEDERACION REGIONAL <sup>de la</sup> INDUSTRIA <sup>de</sup>  
TRANSPORTE



REGION CENTRO

## Chapter Eight: Libertarians and Communists in the War

Although the weaponry available to the loyalist combatants on the fronts was very precarious, although the attack capability and technical and strategic potential of the enemy was always on the increase, although the shortcomings of the commanders themselves were obvious, there is no accounting for the uninterrupted succession of reversals suffered in 1938.

For that to be explained away, a factor of great importance must be taken into consideration: the collapse of the fighting morale of the combatants, a morale which had been maintained until a short time before, thanks to back-up from volunteers. But even the veterans on the volunteer side, for reasons of natural wastage and thanks to the political vicissitudes to which they were subjected, found their morale constantly flagging.

On 25 August 1938, the Commissar of the Group of Armies in the Catalan Zone forwarded a report to the Commissar of the Land Army. A copy of this report by Gil Roldán was also forwarded to the National Committee of his organisation — the CNT. The report dealt with the issue of desertions at the front, most of which, according to Roldán, were directed towards the rearguard and not the enemy's lines, and he claimed that the deserters were soldiers of sound political credentials who had been at the front since the start of the campaign, as was shown by the fact that many of them had gone on to rejoin their units. On the basis of our own first-hand experience, we might add that many deserters deserted from communist brigades where, because of their political ideas, they risked death or where life was made psychologically impossible for them. As far as CNT members or militants were concerned, desertion very often consisted of a clandestine re-enlistment with CNT units.

According to Gil Roldán's report, what lay behind most desertions was a breakdown in morale caused by ill treatment and inadequate equipment and rations:

'It is very hard for a man who has not eaten in two days and who has neither clothing nor footwear to see his way to going along to listen to a lecture or political speech... On a visit I made recently to the Northern sector of the X Army Corps, I was able to see half-naked soldiers obliged to wrap their feet in sacks. This in the midst of a torrential downpour and with the prospect of heavy snowfalls that lower the temperature to several degrees below zero. The thoughts of a soldier who is not issued with his pay with the requisite punctuality, and who thus is not able to send money home, dwell insistently upon possible tragedy at home. Nor has a sound postal service been organised, which leaves him in the position of being *incomunicado* with his loved ones. If to all this we add the fact that disagreeable news about various aspects of the rearguard reaches him, this simply adds to the complex created in him.'

Commanders of quality were undoubtedly in short supply on the fronts. A means had to be found of accelerating their training and preparation: the War School. In the first months of 1938, the Central General Staff was talking about the 'vital necessity for 12,000 officers'. The logical move was to regularise the intakes of the War Schools and Commissars' Schools. But against all logic, applications for officer training were only invited when there was some disaster happening at the front, or to further party political interests, as we shall see anon. As for the commissars, it so happened that the Commissar-General of the Land Army shut down the schools which had given such sterling service, but which opinion in high places regarded as illicit... which is to say they were not under the control of PCE agents.

Supplies were more than inadequate on most fronts where foodstuffs, clothing and footwear were in short supply. Tending and evacuation of the wounded were also afflicted by shortcomings. And now these inadequacies had become intolerable to the

conscripts and above all to the veterans in a way they had not been in the romantic early months of the revolt, ever since 'the 100,000 sons of Negrin' — legions of carabinieri made up of young men, spared the dangers of front-line service by certain parties, well-equipped, well-armed and well-paid had begun to strut around in the rearguard in their impeccable uniforms.

In 1930 Spain had the following carabineer forces:

Stations	1,622
Commanding officers	135
Officers	559
Infantry troops	14,566
Cavalry troops	350

As regularisation of the militias proceeded, disciplinary measures increased in severity and the nascent military caste really took its task to heart. Its members had quickly absorbed all of the shortcomings of the old barrack-style officer corps but none of its virtues. Militaristic, disciplinarian hysteria was going from the absurd to the ridiculous. Few could resist parading the uniforms and stripes to which they were entitled by regulations, and whenever no such right existed, one was invented. In the application of discipline, they could not have been more grotesque. For instance, during the battle of Levante, on the occasion of a hurried withdrawal, some artillery pieces were left behind. The military commander in charge, without making further enquiries, ordered that these be blown up. But those entrusted with the order, upon going to execute it, discovered that the enemy was still some distance away, and instead of spiking the guns, they dragged them laboriously back to their own lines. The pieces had been salvaged, but the order to explode them had been disobeyed, and the commander concerned, who had committed the grave offence of being ignorant of the enemy's whereabouts, was within an ace of ordering the shooting of selfless soldiers as blessed in initiative as they were oblivious of the absurdities of discipline. Needless to say, the same rigour was not shown with the commander himself, nor in the chastisement of the countless officers that had taken their praetorian roles so seriously.

Another cause of demoralisation was the proselytising activity conducted in army ranks by the communists through the Commissariat. Alvarez del Vayo had sown the seeds of the preponderance of communists in this corps. Repeated dispositions to counter this evil, peppered with solemn undertakings to amend things, came to nothing. Nor was loss of morale unconnected with the feats of the like of Lister's 11th Division in 1937 in the Aragonese rearguard, just a few kilometres behind the CNT's forward positions.

The incompetence of arrangements for supplying the civilian population preyed on the mind of the fighting man. His continual brooding over the misery afflicting his family in the rearguard was an ironic reward for his sacrifices in the firing line. The families of bureaucrats, Assault Guards and carabinieri naturally were spared such penury. And no attempt at all was made to disguise such irksome privilege. The government, out of long-nurtured spite, denied the civilian population the aid of the farming collectives in the procurement of foodstuffs and swamped the collectives with arbitrary requisitions. There was always the glib excuse that transport was needed for war purposes and the collectives almost always were regaled with the sight of their cars and trucks being confiscated from them. The upshot was that, for want of such means of transportation, farm produce, oranges from Valencia or chickpeas from Albacete, wound up being left to spoil.

In its obsessive centralisation, the government spread its ineptitude into every domains and functions into which it intruded. Black marketeering, hoarding and the most damaging sabotage were the fruits of a chaotic policy in matters of provisions. From time to time the populace was shocked by the unearthing of secret caches of potatoes, vegetables and fruit, already spoiling. What this did was annoy the women who spent days and nights, from dawn to dusk, waiting their turns in the 'queues'. And

as if in mockery, the government was increasingly demanding and menacing in its speeches, in which it called for still greater sacrifices, still greater 'resistance'.

There were all too many political operations, dreamed up to afford prestige to the leaders of a certain party, operations that were disastrous in military terms, but which were mounted with cavalier disregard for the human lives squandered.

Some minor PCE bigwigs who figured in the Politburo which, as they themselves admit 'was a clearing house for orders handed down from Moscow', have now, some 14 years on from the end of the Spanish conflict, in books awash with disenchantment and contrition, enlightened us as to the mystery of the disastrous operation against Brunete.<sup>1</sup> According to these sources, Largo Caballero, by then marked by the Kremlin as a candidate for political elimination, planned an operation on a huge scale on the Extremadura front, the object of which was to occupy Merida and Badajoz, which would have bisected the Francoist zone and involved a push to the Mediterranean in order to seize the enemy's main naval and supply bases there. Stalin's ministers in the Largo Caballero government received direct orders from the Kremlin to spare nothing in opposing a military victory that would consolidate the prestige of the 'Spanish Lenin' (Largo Caballero) who had, as we have noted, been cast as a sacrificial lamb. Caballero's plan was torpedoed at a cabinet session by the communist ministers, acting on the orders of the Soviet command based in Alcalá de Henares, with the threat that that command would not release 'their aircraft for the implementation of the plan against Extremadura.' And on the pretext of doing something to bring ease to combatants in dire straits in the North, the Soviet command devised and pushed through a scheme to have the Brunete plan dropped.

Frequently CNT units were used as cannon fodder and no less often they were stripped of their own officers and assigned others, usually communists. There were instances of this in the operation that culminated in the taking of Belchite in 1937 and in the onslaught on Teruel. The units concerned were the 25th and 26th Divisions and the 153rd Brigade. When the Eastern front collapsed, the three brigades of the 26th Division were split up: the 116th for instance was seconded to the 18th Army Corps, the 117th to the 13th Army Corps and the 118th to the 21st Army Corps. We have already dealt elsewhere with what befell the 26th Division's 121st Brigade.

The following was contained in a report from the CNT National Committee's Defence Section (12 April 1938):

'...a military profile, which is to say a precise and real picture, implies situating foreign intervention on a strictly factual basis. This implies precise assessment of its extent, completely and systematically eschewing the facile, glib and counter-productive "refrain" according to which our military reverses are attributable solely to Italo-German might.

Were the operations in the Sierra, El Cerro Garabitas, Brunete and Teruel, as well as those in the North, Huesca and Belchite perhaps planned, prepared and mounted by the Salamanca-Berlin-Rome headquarters?

Does the enemy bear the, frankly, criminal responsibility for not having anywhere had tactically and strategically positioned trenches of varying depths facing in the direction of the enemy's possible or likely avenues of attack?

How come the Prieto-Negrin government, having enjoyed 10 months of undisputed and unchallenged power with which to organise and perfect the Popular Army, endow it with expert officers and a youthful, vigorous and competent central command yet failed to capitalise upon that interval, a period without parallel in contemporary history?

Are the vacillations or diplomatic gaffes of our government — which has landed us in our present dire straits for various reasons of an external nature that we cannot go into in this report — also products of Italo-German intervention?

Whose responsibility is it that our war output is virtually in its infancy while the Corps of Carabineers has its very own equipment production workshops — something quite unheard of?

1. The expression is from Jesús Hernández, *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin*, Mexico, 1953.

Was it in Rome or in Berlin that the decision was made that the transport service should be in permanent disarray, thereby allowing the rearguard in Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid, etc. to run short of wine, oil and other essential products, whilst "stocks" rot in the centres of manufacture?

Could our enemies have expected that various Army Corps would have disintegrated like makeshift militia battalions in the face of moderately well-organised enemy attack?

Is the enemy to blame because Prieto — the entire government in fact — threatened reprisal air raids, only to turn around in the face of repeated, provocative enemy raids, and invite intervention by France and England? How is one to explain that glib threat when we did not have the aircraft to mount the most elementary defence of the fronts, as demonstrated during the worrying period ushered in by the enemy in his 9 March offensive on the South Ebro?

Was it the international enemy who created the duplication of functions which exists, frustrating efficient co-operation between the Air Under-Secretariat and the Armed Forces High Command?<sup>2</sup>

One of the main ambitions of the PCE was to gain control of army commands. By mid-1938 it had managed to capture 80 or 90 per cent of such positions, thanks to manoeuvres implemented from the Under-Secretariat of the Land Army and from the Central High command. With the appointment in April 1938 of the communist Antonio Cerdón to the first of these offices, the supremacy to which we refer was accentuated still further. One of his first moves was to attach the Intelligence and Audit Bureau to the Under-Secretary's office so that it could fill him in on trade union and political affiliation of all officers and military commanders. The Bureau had hitherto always functioned independently.

Cerdón was a 'failed' student of the Higher War School, not that that prevented his being appointed chief of the Operations Section of the Central Command, and later Chief-of-Staff of the Army of the East. Let it be said here that the Central Command was off-limits to certain militia commanders, who held commands on the staffs of the Divisions and Army Corps, on account of their not being 'graduates'.

Front line fighters had priority in the filling of certain specialist positions. To this end they were invited to enrol for certain courses through the columns of the *Diario Oficial*. The established practice was to advertise for applicants, allowing time for this to come to the notice of men in the firing lines, so that combatants might at their ease reply in the usual manner to the appropriate advertisements. Cerdón introduced the practice of allowing a period of grace of only 10 days for receipt of applications. And since the *Diario Oficial* was several days late in reaching the front lines, the upshot was that only those with prior notification of the advertisements could enrol in time. And the PCE — alerted by Cerdón — saw to this through its cells inside the army.

Here is proof of what I have indicated. On 3 May, the CNT's Defence Section for Catalonia forwarded the following letter to its National Section:

'TO THE CNT DEFENCE SECTION:— Dear comrades: We are resolved to bring to the attention of this body the form of chicanery indulged in by the Under-Secretariat of the Land Army, in which one of the PCE's most determined individuals serves, indulges. On earlier occasions we have said something about this, but there are some things which go too far.

In issue 104 of the *Diario Oficial* of 2 May 1938 there appears Circular Order No. 7222, announcing an open competition for tank drivers, an announcement made with all deliberateness, for the period of acceptance for applications close on the 10th of the same month, and applications received are to be considered in order of arrival. In the eight-day period of grace given in the *Diario Oficial*, our division cannot do anything, for the *Diario* reaches us two or three days late. The period expires while selection is

underway and the companies are being briefed. We are sure that all these things are done in connivance with those divisions that look to the PCE, which receive advance notification so that they have time to prepare their personnel to swamp the applications.

The same *Diario Oficial* carries another Circular order, No. 7223, inviting applications for places in the People's War School and affording the same period of grace for replies. That, taken together with 49 promotions from lieutenants to captains in the 11th Division will give a rough idea, albeit in only one particular, of what is going on at the Under-Secretariat of the Land Army.

All of which we bring to your notice for further action.

Without further ado, accept our fraternal greetings, on behalf of the Defence Section, the Secretariat, Barcelona, 3 May 1938.'

Cordón was also in charge of promotions and staffing in the army. With the Eastern Front in a condition of wholesale collapse, a known communist, Francisco Galán, was appointed to command the 11th Army Corps. Since this was a mainly CNT front, there was no shortage of candidates of libertarian persuasion. What came to be known as the Autonomous Ebro Grouping was set aside for Modesto, hitherto the commander of the 5th Army corps — by dint of the capture of Teruel (?). And during the month of May some 1,480 promotions were awarded to the 27th Division (formerly the Karl Marx Division), taking corporals, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, commissars and commanders altogether. These officers were used to staff other units — the 60th Division from corporal and company delegate right up to commander and divisional commissar — where, it seems, promotions were vetoed. In return for its merits, the 27th Division was the only one that failed to advance by a single step in the operations facing the Balaguer bridgehead that very same month of May. 'Without fear of error, we can state that, whilst since May some 7,000 combatants have been promoted through the various ranks, 5,500 of them belong to the PCE.'<sup>3</sup>

Of the 27th Division, one can read in the aforementioned report:

'On the occasion of the operations mounted by the Army of the East (May 1938) in the 11th Army Corps's sector and resulting in the occupation of the towns of San Romá de Abella and Bastús, we wish to point out the following fact:

On 20 May, a dispatch was issued by the command of the 11th Army Corps to the command of the 26th Division, indicating that while operations were in progress the Division would be seconded to the command of the 31st Division.

This was a ploy to rehabilitate, in the event of the success of the operations, the commander of this Division (Trueba), former commander of the 27th Division, at the head of which he had spectacularly failed in Vedado de Zuera operations in September 1937. The position of the 31st Division, which crossed the frontier, entering French soil with its combatants virtually intact, without resisting the enemy as it had a duty and obligation to do, is common knowledge.

This manoeuvre could have been averted...While it was going on, the 31st Division, as well as the 30th, the assigned mission of which was to take other objectives complementary to the operation, achieved absolutely nothing.'

The same policy was followed with regard to dismissals. Whilst Yoldi was dismissed and his Division stood down (it was later to be reorganised under a different commander), other divisions found guilty of and having admitted to rout were reorganised with full honours: this was true of the 30th, the 44th, the 31st and the 32nd.

When the communist Trueba proved a resounding failure in the attack through the Vedado de Zuera (September 1937), he was rewarded with the award of the command of the 31st Division.

One proselytising ploy was to 'reshuffle' units of varying persuasions. In a report

3. Report from the FAI Peninsular Committee, September 1938.



dated 6 May 1938, the officers and political delegates of the 75th Brigade complained to the CNT National Committee about the treatment meted out to their unit. The Brigade had been made up of different parties and organisations, PSOE, PCE, Izquierda Republicana, CNT and UGT and non-partisan personnel. To give some idea of its make-up, suffice to say that the Brigade's commander was a socialist, the commanders of the first and second battalions were both communists, the commander of the third was a republican, and the chief of the fourth was a socialist. The Brigade's origins were in Andalusia and it had a brilliant fighting record. But it was a motley unit, and that sort of unit was what the communist policy fed upon.

After the collapse of the Eastern Front, the Brigade was made the kernel of a reorganised 42nd Division, which says a lot for its performance. However, the Brigade, intended to provide the basis for remodelling, was targeted for remodelling itself: its number was changed — it became the 59th Brigade — and its political and military leadership was replaced by communist officers, even though some of these had to be promoted in order to fit the bill. The report says:

'The replacement of the Brigade commander was done in a roundabout fashion. He was told at Division that he was being seconded to the Army Corps (the 15th); there he was told that they had not asked for him, and meanwhile the Divisional Commander turned up at Brigade, summoned a meeting of commanders and officers and introduced the Brigade's new commander.'<sup>4</sup>

More evidence of partisanship. Barceló, the commander of the 141st Brigade, was accused of having retreated without due cause and of having carried out murders during the withdrawal from Aragón. The accusation had been made by his own Divisional Commander, Gancedo, who later, under pressure from his party (the PSUC), withdrew it. Be that as it may, the appropriate tribunal proceeded with the case and Barceló was jailed. Intervention by Under-Secretary Cerdón worked a miracle and the case was dropped. Barceló was a prisoner in the keeping of a CNT member by the name of Bosch Mortes, the staff commander of the 32nd Division. Whereas Barceló was released, Bosch Mortes was held on charges that were without foundation. The commander of one of the battalions of the 135th Brigade (31st Division) that had retreated in an orderly fashion into France, as so many units had in the border region, was also placed under arrest. The commander of the Brigade and the commander of the Army Corps to which he belonged, were free to walk the streets of Barcelona, even though they had performed exactly the same operation, albeit in a less orderly fashion.

The Under-Secretariat of the Land Army had also taken over the services of the General Transport Directorate and from there arranged secondments or transfers as suited the communists. In another FAI report (26 June 1938) it is alleged that 'of the 19 battalions currently in existence, 10 or 12 are in the hands of the PCE and only one or two in the hands of the libertarian tendency, even though 80 or 90 per cent of the competent personnel of said battalions belong to the CNT.' Whereas army drivers or chauffeurs earned 15 pesetas a day (infantry in the trenches got 10), Air Force equivalents earned 22, carabineer counterparts 25 and drivers from the Armaments Under-Secretariat, 30. The same sort of meddling, arbitrary treatment and privilege obtained in other corps and services, such as Artillery, Stores, etc. In the latter service one of the most incorrigible nests of corruption was based: it speculated with the people's hunger. It was also from the Under-Secretariat that the functions of the CRIM were exploited as a means of swelling the ranks of the communist units only.

The appointment of Ossorio Tafall, (a compliant pro-communist from Izquierda Republicana) as Commissar-General of the Army was followed by that of Jesús Hernández as Commissar of the Army Group in the non-Catalan territory. The latter was involved up to his neck in the arbitrary policy of dismissals, appointments and transfers.

4. A similar case occurred in the 119th Brigade of the 26th Division in the summer of 1938, when Campoy, the chief of the 2nd Battalion, died in an altercation with his Commissar. This was followed by an attempt to make Domingo Belmonte, the Brigade chief, responsible, in an attempt to remove him from his position.

In June 1938 there were six army corps based in Catalan territory: three from the Autonomous Ebro Grouping and three from the Army of the East. Their commanders were Modesto and Perea, respectively. Perea, a military man of upright conduct, was assisted by Commissar Ignacio Mantecón who, though a member of Izquierda Republicana, was a PCE henchman. With the exception of the Commissariat of the 10th Army Corps, held by the CNT member Molina — Gregorio Jover, formerly in command of the 28th Division, was eventually put in charge of the 10th Army Corps — the remaining commissarships with the Army Corps level were held by the PCE. Out of 18 divisions, the CNT had only two commissarships. And only five out of the 54 Brigades. A similar ratio obtained in small units and services. The position of commissar with the Autonomous Ebro Grouping was held by Delage who did not even have an official appointment.

In the wake of the disaster in the East, both trade union associations set up a recruiting commission in Barcelona for the Construction and Fortifications battalions. It eventually served as an offshoot of the General Engineering Inspectorate. The commission started off working in concert with the respective construction unions of Barcelona and the region. It strove to mobilise construction workers between the ages of 30 and 35. In Barcelona alone, the CNT managed to enlist 2,000 men, the UGT 300. It had been agreed with the Inspectorate that for every 50 men recruited by a given union, that union would get a sergeant. All in all, the CNT was entitled to 40 such appointments. But by late June only 10 had been awarded. As for other posts, the respective construction unions of Catalonia (CNT-UGT) had signed an agreement in Valencia, on 1 July 1937, which the commissar from the General Engineering Inspectorate, Edmundo Domínguez, had signed and sealed. According to that text, for the anticipated seven battalions, the ranks were to be allocated in the following manner: commandants: CNT 4, UGT 3; captains: CNT 20, UGT 15; lieutenants: CNT 40, UGT 30. But at no time was this agreement honoured. The UGT, in cahoots with the Engineering Command, got nearly all of the officers.

What happened inside the Army was matched and outdone in the Navy and most especially in the Air Force, the latter having always been a fief of communists and Russian agents.

We referred earlier to a report from the FAI Peninsular Committee (Military Secretariat), dated 30 September 1938. In view of the important figures it contains about the matter in hand, we offer the reader the first part of that report:

**'OVERALL POSITION OF THE ARMY:-** At present every aspect of the Army is in communist hands.

**HIGHER WAR COUNCIL:-** Although the various anti-fascist factions may be represented on it, it can be said that its work is entirely ineffective, for it meets only on an occasional basis and no matter of note is put before it, these, apparently, being the preserve of Dr. Negrín.

**CENTRAL COMMAND:-** This agency, though it may at first glance appear otherwise, is also in the hands of the communists. The commander, General Rojo, is wholly subject to PCE directives.

They also control its two most important sections, the Information section — to which all of the rest are subordinate — headed by Colonel Estrada, and the personnel section, headed by Díaz Tendero. They also have a huge number of junior officers ensconced in the various sections of the Central Command.

**UNDER-SECRETARIAT OF THE LAND ARMY:—** The personality of the serving Under-Secretary and his performance in the Command on the Aragón front are sufficiently well-known for us not to dwell upon his affiliation and the work he is doing at the head of this under-secretariat.

**GENERAL INSPECTORATES:—** Although the headships of the General Inspectorates are in the hands of socialist and republican personnel, we have managed to discover that the vast majority of their junior officers are communists; for instance, the General Health Inspectorate. The Inspector General is a republican. The communists have the General Secretariat and the Surgical Teams Sections, Evacuation, Information, Procurement and

Personnel, as well as officers in every other section. In like manner we might point to the other General Inspectorates, which, aided by the Personnel Section of the Central Command and by the Under-Secretariat of the Land Army, manage to impose their will in every instance.

**MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (SIM):**— We need not allude to the harmful work being done by this agency which is entirely in the pocket of the PCE. At present, the Libertarian Movement holds no position of responsibility in its ranks, despite having sought one on several occasions.

**OTHER SERVICES:**— We ought to point out that the Air Force, Tanks and other Armoured Units are off limits to anyone outside the "party". We should say the same of the Fleet, from which anyone not a member of the PCE is eliminated.

**ARMIES:**— At present there are in loyalist Spain six armies, divided up as follows: the Catalonia Group of Armies, comprising the Ebro Army and the Army of the East; and the Centre-South Zone Group of Armies, which comprises the armies of Levante, the Centre, Andalusia and Extremadura.

**CATALONIA GROUP OF ARMIES:**— In command of this group is General Hernández Sarabia. We should place it on record that this general commanded the Army of Levante and thus bears direct responsibility for the collapse of that front. Instead of court-martialling him, as would be normal procedure in any country, he was not even tried; rather, he was promoted, being given the command of this group. During his period heading the Army of Levante, this general was a faithful tool in the hands of the communists.

**ARMY OF THE EAST:**— Its commander is Lieutenant-Colonel Perea, a professional soldier who is on excellent terms with us. This army is made up of the following: the 10th, 11th and 18th. The first of these is under the command of our comrade Gregorio Jover, while the 11th and 18th are commanded by the communists Francisco Galán and José del Barrio, respectively. The Army of the East is made up as follows:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS, et al.
Army	1	1 (sympathiser)	0
Army Corps	3	1	2
Divisions	9	1	8
Brigades	27	5	22

The libertarian commands are these: the 10th Army Corps, the 26th Division and the 119th, 120th and 121st Brigades of the 26th Division, the 146th Brigade (30th Division) and the 72nd Division's 38th Brigade.

**EBRO ARMY:**— Commanded by Modesto, recently promoted colonel. It is made up of the following three Army Corps: the 5th, 12th and 15th, commanded by Lister, Etelvino Vega and Tagüena, lieutenant-colonels all three, and, like Modesto, prominent members of the "party".

In this army we are in even more inferior circumstances than in the East. A breakdown of its commands gives this result.

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	1	0	1
Army Corps	3	0	3
Divisions	9	0	9
Brigades	27	2	25

Up until a few days ago, we had command of the 16th Division, under comrade Mora, but the communists, jealous of our hegemony in this army, managed to have him transferred. At present negotiations designed to have this comrade restored to command of the 10th Division are proceeding well and it is hoped this will be achieved in a few short days. The two brigades we allude to above are the 16th Division's 149th Brigade and the 44th Division's 144th Brigade.

There is also an Army Corps in the process of being formed, the 24th, in which we hold a command of a Division, the 24th and of the 133rd and 143rd Brigades.

If we analyse a comparative table of commands as set out, it provides us with a dismal picture of our representation in the Catalonia Group of Armies, especially if one bears in mind that we may state without the slightest hesitation that 60 per cent of the fighting men belong to our trade union centre. An overall breakdown gives us the following:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	2	1 (sympathiser)	1
Army Corps	6	1	5
Divisions	18	1	17
Brigades	54	7	47

Let us bear in mind what we indicated earlier concerning the 24th Army Corps and the case of comrade Mora. But, in spite of everything, we believe that comment is not worth the bother.

**CENTRE-SOUTH ZONE GROUP OF ARMIES:—** As regards the army commands in the other zone, we find ourselves even worse off. We will attempt to discover the number of units in which the Libertarian Movement has a command. On an army basis we will not be able to give the affiliation of the commanders of units not under our control, for to date it has not been possible for us to secure control.

The Centre Zone Army Group comprises of four armies, as follows: Levante, the Centre, Andalusia and Extremadura. In command of it is General Miaja, a non-aligned individual that the communists have greatly busied themselves attaching one of their confidants to. At present, he is completely committed to them.

**LEVANTE'S ARMY:—** In charge of this is Colonel Menéndez. This colonel commanded the Army of Manoeuvres, which was disbanded for its poor performance. When Sarabia was transferred from command of the Army of Levante this command was awarded to Menéndez. Of him we may say the same as of General Sarabia. He is a communist and an individual liable to be shot in any country where war is waged without party politicking.

The commands in this army breakdown as follows:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	1	0	1
Army Corps	6	2 (sympathisers)	4
Divisions	20	3	17
Brigades	55	13	42

The Army Corps mentioned above are the 16th, commanded by Palacios, and the 13th, commanded by General Romero. The Divisions are the 54th, 25th and 5th, and the Brigades are the 195th, 75th, 214th, 16th, 180th, 220th, 204th, 79th, 39th, 82nd, 116th, 117th and 118th.

**ARMY OF THE CENTRE:** Commanded by Colonel Segismundo Casado, an individual on good terms with our organisation. Our representation here leaves much to be desired. The figures we presently possess on this army date from some time ago and it is possible that some slight variation may now exist. The breakdown is as follows:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	1	1(sympathiser)	0
Army Corps	4	1	3
Divisions	12	1	11
Brigades	45	3	42

The Army Corps referred to above is the 4th, commanded by our comrade Cipriano Mera: the Division is the 14th. We imagine that there will be others. The Brigades are the 77th, 98th and 70th and we are not in a position to tell whether there may be any more.

ARMY OF ANDALUSIA: At the head of which is Colonel Moriones, an impartial figure whom we would describe as anti-communist: however, the Army of Andalusia is an out and out fiefdom of the "party" and always has been. This army comprises two corps in which communist elements hold complete sway. The corps in question are the 9th and 23rd. Prior to the appointment of Colonel Moriones, this army was commanded by Colonel Adolfo Pradas, a pro-communist socialist who, for campaign achievements unknown to us, has been awarded command of the Army of Extremadura. The breakdown of this army is as follows:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	1	1 neutral	0
Army Corps	2	0	2
Divisions	5	1	4
Brigades	11	1	10

The Division in question is the 20th, and the Brigade is the 147th, the erstwhile Maroto Column. We refrain from further comment.

ARMY OF EXTREMADURA: Under the command of Colonel Adolfo Pradas, a pro-communist socialist. He was removed from command of the Army of Andalusia — for incompetence, we suppose — and assigned to the Military Command of Murcia, and, come the Extremadura disaster, he was placed in command of this army, owing, we imagine, to his good relations with the "party" in Andalusia. This army's breakdown is given below:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army	1	0	1
Army Corps	3	2 (sympathisers)	1
Divisions	11	3	8
Brigades	31	9	22

The Army Corps concerned are the 6th, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Manuel Gallego, and the 8th, headed by Colonel Joaquín Pérez Salas. The Divisions are the 71st, 28th and 63rd and the Brigades the 81st, 88th, 125th, 126th, 148th, 114th, 91st and 94th.

As may be seen from a comparison and digest of all the command positions we have listed, the findings are none too encouraging for the Libertarian Movement, bearing in mind the huge number of troops it contributes to the fight against fascism.

The comparative findings are as follows:

UNITS	TOTAL	LIBERTARIANS	COMMUNISTS et al.
Army Groups	2	0	2
Armies	6	2 sympathisers/1 neutral	6
Army Corps	2	12 libertarians/4 sympathisers	15
Divisions	70	9	61
Brigades	196	33	163

As we have already indicated, we refrain from comment. The findings that emerge from this table reflect the position with commands of combat units. There is no doubt but that our organisation possesses a huge number of junior commands scattered through nearly every unit, but we must not forget that the communists have a number far exceeding our own. To this diagram for military commands must be added the Divisional one and the one for the two Brigades of the 24th Army Corps to which we have alluded in our discussion of the Army Group of Catalonia.

CRIM: Of the 19 centres in existence, only one, No. 18 (Tarragona), is commanded by a comrade. The rest are under the command of professional soldiers or communists.

TRANSPORT BATTALIONS: Of the 18 or 20 battalions in existence at present, only two are under the command of our comrades, the 7th Road Transport battalion and the 4th Special DEA battalion. The remainder are in the hands of socialists and communists. We ought to stress that 85 per cent of the personnel of these battalions belong to the CNT.

REARGUARD BATTALIONS: Of the 20 or 23 battalions existing, we command none at present. Negotiations are underway to obtain command of some of them.

MILITARY COMMANDS: At present no comrade from our trade union or specific organisation has command of any Military Command of note, such as the ones in the cities and important towns.

COMMISSARIAT: At the moment, this remains — as it has always been — a communist fief, despite the strong backlash discernible in it against said elements.

With the appointment of Jesús Hernández as Commissar-General of the other zone, and of Castro as General Commissariat Secretary, the communists have managed to neutralise this backlash in part. The CNT has been granted the Commissariat of the Catalonia Army Group by way of compensation for the appointments of Jesús Hernández and Castro. With the appointment of the latter as General Commissariat Secretary — and with the Commissariat based in this zone — they have largely managed to neutralise the work which the Commissariat of the Army Group of Catalonia may carry out, simultaneously neutralising many of the complaints constantly reaching the Commissariat concerning the extremely partisan performance of the Commissar-General of the other zone, Jesús Hernández. We should not forget that the serving Commissar-General, Ossorio Tafall, is *persona grata* to the "party".

In the Catalan zone we have managed somewhat to improve upon our representation of late, but this does not by any means mean that we have our due allocation — 33 per cent — which, by common consent, was agreed by the Commissariat.

Whereas in the Catalan zone we have achieved something with regard to the Commissariat, the same cannot be said of the central zone, where friend Hernández schemes as he deems fit, engaging in all manner of dismissals of persons not aligned with the PCE, taking the salutary precaution of replacing them with members of that party.

At present, our representation in the Commissariat — of front-line military units — does not differ much from the table of military commands which we set out earlier, which is to say, we have as few commissars as military commands. At the moment, our organisation has one commissar of an Army Group (Catalonia) while the communists have the other (Central Zone); we have one Army Commissar (Andalusia) while the communists have the commissar of the Ebro Army and the socialists the remainder.

Out of the 21 Army Corps, our organisation holds the Commissar's position in four of them: the 10th Army Corps in the Army of the East, the 16th and 19th in the Army of Levante and 4th in the Army of the Centre. As for Divisions and Brigades, there is little difference from the military commands, as we have already noted. We have also been allocated the Commissariat of the 15th Army Corps, but the comrade who is to fill this position has not yet done so. For what reasons, we do not know. We have plenty of commissars in the Services, and scattered through various corps. Such is our position in the Commissariat...

On the same point, we now offer the testimony of a member of the ERC, a Brigade commissar who, at the time, held the position of commissar with the 62nd Division. It is a report from Pere Puig Subinyà, forwarded to the Standing Committee of his party in December 1938.

The signatory is not a CNT sympathiser and is much less a liberal in his military views. He opines in the preamble to his report:

'The best soldier is not the one who obeys because he understands that the order issued is just, but the one who obeys without thought, not knowing whether what he has been ordered to do is just or unjust. However crude, however inhuman, however repugnant it may be, it is high time that we all realised that we cannot wage war (and above all, cannot win it) if we persist with the absurdity of making soldiers citizens conversant in detail with what they do and why they do it. The soldier we sorely need today is the one that knows nothing, grasps nothing, understands nothing: the automaton soldier, the mechanical soldier.'

Nevertheless, Puig Subinyà did not see his way clear to being the 'automaton' or 'machine' of the Stalinists. He says:

'We think we are making a startling revelation if we say that the army is riddled with the PCE and the PSUC. Let us see to what extent.

The Chief of the Central Command, General Rojo, is not a communist, but acts as if he was. The Commander of the First Section, Lieutenant-Colonel Díaz Tendero, is a communist and the Under-Secretary of the Land Army, Colonel Cordón, is also a communist militant.

The Commander of the Army of the East, Lieutenant-Colonel Perea, is not a communist, but his Chief of Staff, Carvajal, is, and the latter does as he pleases. In any event, the communists' hegemony in this army is very tenuous for it is confronted by strong opposition trends.

The Ebro Army, descendent of the 5th Regiment of Madrid, is wholly in the hands of the communists.

The Catalan Zone Army Group, commanded by General Sarabia, is wholly free of any Stalinist tutelage.

The Army of Levante is commanded by General Menéndez, a fervent republican, a close and wholly committed friend of President Azaña; nonetheless, due to negligence or a failure to secure the required support from his superiors, he allows a free hand to the communists who are gradually gaining the upper hand.

The Army of the Centre, commanded by Colonel Casado, a fervent republican, has managed to overcome this proselytising zeal and it can be said that it is a military, republican army free of partisan meddling.

The Army of Extremadura was wholly in the hands of the communists. The efficacy of its performance and influence was shown when the rebel army fell upon it: the whole thing collapsed in an instant. General Rojo had no option but to stand down Colonel Burillo, whom the communists had represented to us as a matchless soldier, and place Colonel Pradas, a republican professional, in charge of this Army in defeat. The commanders of the 7th and 8th Army Corps were replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel Gallego and Colonel Joaquín Pérez Salas. Needless to say, the army promptly recovered and a good part of the terrain lost was recaptured. Now, as far as politics goes, it has the same characteristics as the Army of the Centre.

The Army of Andalusia is commanded by engineering Colonel Moriones, another republican. It is in similar circumstances to those of the Army of Levante.

The Centre-South Group of Armies is commanded by General Miaja, a communist convert. Nearly all of the headquarters staff belong to the PCE. From there they bring strong pressures to bear in order to worm their way into units which they have thus far been unable to penetrate.

The PCE and the PSUC currently have 50 per cent of the commanders, officers and commissars who abide by their watchwords.

Inside the army they have two organisations: the Education Clubs of the JSU which operate openly, and the company level cells and battalion level "troikas", which operate secretly. Those from the Education Clubs say that their aim is to achieve unity of all anti-fascist youth and to form an instrument in the service of the commander and commissar of each unit. They ensure that some soldiers of republican and anarchist outlook are recruited and even nominate some for the Steering Committee, but they

always set aside a majority holding for themselves. They are clearing and distribution centres for all communist propaganda.

There are many units where they have not been able to set up due to opposition from the commander or commissar.

The other, secret organisation has much broader objectives. It is a lot more dangerous and much more widespread. I would go as far as to say that, in the whole of the Catalan zone, there may only be one Division which presents serious obstacles to them. Each company cell has its secretary, whom they strive to exempt from all duty: every battalion "troika" has a general secretary who concerns himself with nothing else. In some places they even have seals. They circulate daily bulletins and, at least once a week, hold meetings, of which minutes are made. It is these that draw up the lists of who are to take courses in the schools; and also they mark down who is for "suppression".

Later, the report continues:

'Needless to say, an army so riddled with political intrigues, where the authority of its comrades is so undermined, cannot perform very well, especially if we consider that few soldiers are unaware of what we have just stated, and can see the partisanship and injustice which are continual fare, sapping morale, discipline and confidence in military commanders who put up with this state of affairs.

It is also these cells that have adopted the ploy of sending telegrams of support to the government, claiming to speak on behalf of military units, every time that a difficult situation arises for the government.

The soldier, being subject to military discipline, is not free to express opinions. It is obvious then, that to address the government on their behalf is to lay claim to a representativeness which one cannot possess... Getting soldiers to say that they endorse certain policy and certain government decrees, amounts to according them the right in future to withhold such approval ...'

A weighty tome might be put together on the proselytising activities in Army, Navy and Air Force units. We shall confine ourselves to the most striking instances. In 1937, the CNT intercepted a letter from the Commissar and 'Work Supervisor' of the 57th Mixed Brigade operating in the Southern Sector of the Teruel front and intended for the PCE's Politico-Military Commission. We give the full text:

'After the Chief of Staff defected to the enemy, we had to go to Valencia to brief you on the delicate situation in which this sector was left. We agreed then to suggest to the Command that some officers be replaced, that a Division be set up, (a scheme long nurtured) and that we ensure that the sector commissar or divisional commissar appointed be one of ours.

So we had already broached the need to devise a speedy solution to these problems, not allowing the plans which anyone else had hatched regarding commands and commissars to come to fruition.

On this front, there is a Sub-Commissar General, Gil Roldán, of the CNT, and a Divisional Commissar, Tomás Sanz, also of the CNT. Enjoying excellent relations with them is another commissar, Peregrín Gurrea, a socialist from the 58th Brigade, which occupies a sector adjacent to ours.

Even before the official establishment of the Commissariat, I was attached to the Command. As the most senior Commissar, I have remained so. Gurrea had no hope of being seconded to Division. The CNT was very keen either to have a commissar of its own or to prevent any appointment going to a communist.

Thus, in the Frigola episode, with rare unanimity, Sanz (CNT) and Gurrea (PSOE), agreed that the blame lay with the Colonel and myself, insinuating that it was odd "that he should defect to the enemy when it seems he was active in a certain party" (i.e. the PCE), which is untrue.



Exploiting this, they nominated Gurrea for sector commissar but this was not accepted. And then, to prevent it going to a communist, Sub-Commissar Gil Roldán appointed Tomás Sanz on an interim basis, but already there is talk of the likelihood of his being given a permanent appointment one of these days.

Were that to be the case, all that it would mean would be that the PCE would be left without a post to which it has a greater entitlement than anyone else, but that is all.

However, there is a whole series of problems here. Whereas we have thus far been able, without violence, to prevent lots of atrocities in the villages, this would no longer be possible.

The Ademuz area is much coveted by the CNT. Apart from anything else, because it has fruit and livestock, which they want so that their co-operatives do not collapse.

At present we control the service corps. This implies free transport for our co-operatives hereabouts (cashing in on necessary trips, so that the fuel use can be justified). There are still some thousands of pesetas left which may be of help to our organisations. And there is nothing immoral in this, in that empty trucks on their way to perform some service are used, and we are very careful not to "step out of line".

This work and the work of comrade Montesinos, in charge of party work in the war zone, has ensured that, despite the tremendous backwardness of this area politically, we are making headway in these little villages. With a FAI member as commissar, they would try to wreck these efforts and the CNT's and FAI's Area Committee in Ademuz would gain new life.

So there will be nothing for it but to defend the peasants with arms, and we cannot overlook the fact that there are CNT forces flanking us, and serious clashes with disastrous consequences would ensue. Then again, for all its shortcomings and weaknesses, this is our affair. We had help from no one. The old Defence Councillorship boycotted us and so did the Central Command and the Mobile Convoy, etc.

And now things are up and running and it was the communists who organised it. Chicanery repels us. So we must not allow any to prosper. You can appreciate what the implications may be in FAI hands, the periodical *Ofensiva* and propaganda to the troops being under FAI control, insinuating that this is the government of the counter-revolution and mediation, and organising FAI and CNT groups despite their objections to "communist propaganda" inside the various units.

It may be argued that efforts on our part can frustrate all these manoeuvres, but we take the view that it is possible to pre-empt them now, before any damage is done.

Tomás Sanz can go to the Eastern Front where, I believe, the anarchists predominate, but what we have achieved belongs to us and cannot be destroyed. It is our view that the party, through its representative in the General War Commissariat, can halt the CNT's manoeuvre in this sector.

Do not forget that our proposals for a change of officers, already before the Central Command, has to be pressed home, unless we want to find ourselves in the same position as we are with the Commissariats. With officers of our own we can quickly transform the sector. Otherwise, our action is confined to the 57th Mixed Brigade in which, naturally, all of the efforts of these people will come to nothing.

This is important in terms of the organisation and battle-readiness of the troops and the time is coming for us to mount a serious offensive, something not feasible with some of the officers in place and several of the units along this front placed as they currently are.

And so we ask you to give these problems your especial attention.

Torre Baja, 8 June 1937.

Commissar to the 57th Brigade, Juan Antonio Toriel. There is a round stamp in red ink from the "General War Commissariat, 57th Mixed Brigade, Commissar".

In charge of party work, Rafael Montesinos.'

To those conversant with the moral outlook, mentality, practices, reactions and jargon of the communists with the resultant exotic borrowings, doubtless of Muscovite origin, the background to the document below will not come as any surprise. It was forwarded

to the Central Command by the then Political Attaché to that Command, the prominent CNT militant Miguel Gonzalez Inestal who preceded it with the following letter:

'TO THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE CENTRAL COMMAND — I am pleased to remit to you herewith a copy of a report which has come into my hands regarding the incident which a short time ago could have had deadly consequences.

Said report is awash with falsehoods from top to bottom, and the author allows himself to bandy words which he uses with the extreme lavishness and thoughtlessness of a brazen provocateur.

The comrade who has been made the focus of this incident is a militant of longstanding in the CNT, and presently holds a journalistic position with the full approval of all.

Allow me to draw your attention to the tasteless epithets used whenever the CNT and its organs are mentioned in the press. These are indicative of the mentality of a thoughtless provocateur and the author of them does not deserve to hold any position in the Popular Army, or in any self-respecting government agency.

At the same time, given that I find that that reports of this nature are flooding in from everywhere, I ask you to attend to them as symptomatic of a highly suspect campaign whose motives are inadmissible and in which lack of scruple and the most rampant irresponsibility are evident.

I think it proper to ensure that all such reports be guided by a sense of responsibility or that the weight of sanctions their mischievous irresponsibility merits be felt by their authors. Otherwise, we are stampeding towards the most perilous tangle of internal struggles and frictions between the different component groups in the anti-fascist camp, which contribute effectively to the fight against fascism. Madrid, 26 July 1937.'

One Manuel Zanbruno, dubbed an anarcho-fascist in the report concerned, was none other than a CNT militant of long standing very well known to readers of the anarcho-syndicalist press under his *nom de plume* of Nobruzan (an anagram of his real surname). Since well before the army revolt, Zanbruno had been the Madrid correspondent of *Solidaridad Obrera* and at the time was editor and front-line correspondent of the CNT's daily papers in the Centre region. He availed of his mission as correspondent in order to ferry newspapers up to the fronts, circumventing their confiscation by military commanders loyal to the 'party'. With this in mind, the full implications of the plot squalidly hatched by one of the Comintern's army commanders will be understood perfectly, and likewise there will be a perfect understanding of the colonisers' profound ignorance of the Spanish psyche, the individual involved being the commander of an International Brigade battalion, no less. This is the document:

'45th DIVISION — RESERVE BATTALION — 13 July 1937.

To the Commandant and Political Commissar of the 77th Brigade.

To the Minister of War (Second Section of the Command).

To the Chief of Internal Security (Province of Madrid).

To the Second Section of the Command of the 45th Division.

REPORT FROM THE COMMANDER OF THE RESERVE BATTALION OF THE 45th DIVISION. Prior to coming to Carabaña there was no fascist or anarcho-Trotskyist agitation and propaganda in our Battalion. In the month of May last, while we were stationed in Carabaña, we found fascist and anarchist propaganda making its way into our barracks. As a result of my inquiries, I discovered that every day a car was coming to Carabaña bearing illegal newspapers for the purpose of smuggling these into barracks and distributing them surreptitiously among the soldiers of my battalion, through the agency of one of these, a Joseph Bosgniak. The latter was discovered conspiring in the house of Manuel Zanbruno Barrera in the dead of night along with three cavalymen.

Our first time in Carabaña we were unable to uncover this conspiracy. While we [i.e. the battalion] marched off and camped in Tortosa, Bosgniak carried on with his work of

disorganisation. Growing suspicious of him, we kept him under close surveillance, so much so that he realised this and deserted.

Once back in Carabaña, No. 2 company of my battalion stationed itself in a place called Molino, about two kilometres from the town, where Manuel Zanbruno Barrera turned up again with counter-revolutionary newspapers.

Following the reappearance of these papers, I gave orders that a watch be set up to discover and arrest the persons bringing in these illegal periodicals.

What did the watch discover?

It discovered that Manuel Zanbruno Barrera drove out daily by car to Molino bringing periodicals which he distributed some time later. Some women also distributed the newspapers to the soldiers of the battalion.

He stirred up the soldiers against their officers and said that the fascists would win the war, and that we were outgunned. At the same time we found that soldiers were belly-aching without reason about poor food, and that only in No. 2 company, stationed in Molino.

Manuel Zanbruno Barrera returned at 3pm and again the counter-revolutionary newspapers appeared...The company commander sent for me, and I stayed with his company in order to trap the culprit myself.

After roughly an hour, the same car reappeared, which I halted and examined, finding a hundred anarchist newspapers and several French fascist periodicals. All were of a counter-revolutionary character. I arrested Manuel Zanbruno Barrera, handing him over to the Political Commissar and Second Bureau of the Battalion.

The Political Commissar, our Battalion's Second Bureau, the Second Bureau of the International Brigades from Albacete, the Military Commander of the Carabaña Area and the Secretary of the Carabaña PCE interrogated Zanbruno, during which interrogation I noticed that this man used undisciplined and provocative language.

On the day after the interrogation, the Carabaña militias set him free. He went to his house in Molino and turned up at No. 2 Company, brandishing a handgun. In front of all the troops, he loaded the pistol and shouted in a loud voice: "Where is Christoff, your commander, Christoff? If I see him, I'll kill him!"

All of which I venture to bring to your attention, asking you also to question Zanbruno Barrera closely and take whatever steps against him you believe appropriate...'

Proselytising work was also conducted officially through the propaganda channels of the Commissariat...newspapers, bulletins, etc. This formal work triggered the incident that was to lead to the dismissal and arrest of Ricardo Rionda, Commissar of the 26th Division.

In July 1938 several issues of a bulletin published by the Commissariat of the 11th Army Corps had been received at the headquarters of that unit. The papers contained several partisan-flavoured articles dedicated to combating, under the general rubric of 'Fascism in our ranks', the 'fascist traitors', a label applied to surviving members from the POUM. After it was dissolved by government order, many POUM fighting-men from the 29th Division had enlisted with the one-time Durruti Column, and they fought and died in the van of the struggle. Then again, whereas the 26th's film team was banned from showing films like *Three Bengal Lancers*, approved by the censor for showing in the rearguard, and featuring artistes loyal to the republican cause like Gary Cooper, dissemination of communist and 'anti-Trotskyist' writings, such as Max Rieger's *Espionage in Spain* was forced upon them.

As a result, on 11 July, the Commander and Commissar of the 26th Division dispatched the following letter to the Commander and Commissar of the 11th Army Corps.

'It has always been the practice of this Command and Commissariat to perform its duties in a sincere spirit of anti-fascist unity, ensuring at all times that the work they do cannot be described as partisan. To this end, an effort has always been made to ensure

that communications, magazines, bulletins, etc., received by the troops through our offices are always inspired by this approach, regardless of the organisation or political party from which they might have originated.

Which is why, in keeping with this practice, on screening the bulletins issued daily by this Army Corps, we have found that for some days now the tenor of them has not been such as we would consider reasonable. Which is to say, that, foreswearing all partisan endeavour, they should be informed only by a language of genuine unity for the technical guidance of commanders, commissars and soldiers.

For this reason, and with a view to avoiding the possible emergence of differences between the troops of the Division, or that the bulletin should languish, undistributed, in Headquarters, we would ask you to take steps to ensure that no copies are forwarded to us until such time as the tenor used by the bulletin in question today has been amended.

Greetings from the Divisional Command, 11 July 1938, from Divisional Commander, Ricardo Sanz — Commissar of the Division, Ricardo Rionda.'

In October 1938, while Ejarque, who had previously been merely Commissar to the 25th CNT Division, was Commissar Inspector of the 16th Army Corps, the communists were engaged in intensive proselytising activity in several units under his command. Ejarque called the divisional, brigade and auxiliary unit commissars together.

According to the minutes of the meeting, dated 1 October, Ejarque, acting as chairman, opened by explaining the reason for the meeting, citing reports he had received, backed up with documentation, to the effect that propaganda meetings were being held in unit headquarters.

At the request of the chairman commissar, the various commissars were briefed on the charges, and listened most shamefacedly to the categorical charges. According to the minutes:

'The Commissar Inspector took the floor again to state that if the matter had been put so bluntly to the meeting, this was because of specific complaints received about the propaganda drives mounted in both the 39th and 48th Divisions.

Reference was made to the meeting held in the 201st Brigade between the Commander and the Commissar and a delegation from the PCE, at which, after discussion of the furlough order issued by the commanding officer, they had agreed that only four days' leave be awarded instead of the seven that had been ordered.

The Corps Inspector went on to state that, the day before the launching of operations in this sector, there had been a meeting of the 129th Brigade to discuss, the operational orders among other things.

He stated also that the 101st Brigade's Commissar for Health had held a meeting with the group and that, at it, 21 individuals were recruited into the JSU, something not permitted in a military unit.

He also complained that he had knowledge that in the 63rd Brigade there was an individual in the Command Post who concerned himself with distributing PCE membership cards, this with the knowledge of the officer in command.

Alluding to Captain Calvo's and trooper Andreu's representing the PCE in the 39th Division, he stated that they met together very frequently on party business and thus engaged in propaganda work. His opinion was that orders and discipline could not be at the mercy of these meetings and that such meetings had to cease forthwith.

In reply to what was said by the 48th Division about desertions to the enemy camp, he agreed that people of every organisation and party had defected, but he took a much more serious view if the deserters belonged to the PCE for these had had the opportunity of discussing officers' orders and so there was greater danger of the enemy's receiving more detailed information on planned operations.

He stated that not only did the commander of the Army Corps see danger in such conduct but that, wounded in his self-esteem also, he wanted to refer the matter immediately to the standing Tribunal, but that, after a plea from him, and out of

chivalry, would not do so until such time as this meeting had taken place...

It had to be borne in mind that the army acknowledged neither cells nor parties, only soldiers defending Spain's liberty, in the hope that everything needful would be done to ensure that such partisan activities would be stamped out root and branch, because, otherwise, the Commissars of the Group of Armies and the General Commissar of Land Forces would hear of it...

One of the 'feats' most highlighted by PCE propaganda, so specialised in the art of representing defeats as heroic achievements, was that of the 43rd Division, better known in those days as the 'story-book Division', the sarcastic label which the popular muse had promptly saddled it with. This Division, during the first phase of the Aragonese disaster, lost contact with the bulk of the republican army and thought it better to hole up in an area adjacent to the Vall d'Aran. In so doing, it left its own side's frontier-facing flank exposed. The enemy, without resistance, then poured in and occupied the Pyrenean massif, facilitating capture of Catalonia's hydro-electrical sources — i.e. the generating stations and dams in Pobra de Segur, Tremp, Camarasa, etc., which were of crucial economic and strategic importance. The hydro-electrical power of the area had been reckoned at 300,000 h.p.

We have seen already the part played by these dams and how the enemy was astute enough to use them to raise the river levels during the Ebro and Segre offensives. And also what the loss of these energy sources meant for industry in general and for the war industry in Catalonia.

Though this was enough to put a damper on any lyrical demagoguery, a legend of heroism which the PCE turned to good use was woven around the '43rd' and its commander in spite of it.

Here is an assessment by one of the commanders of the army operating on that front:

'While this was going on, the 43rd Division, responsible for the collapse of the northern segment of the Eastern front, stationed itself comfortably in the Pyrenees, with its back protected by our neighbouring republic and never lifted a finger against the enemy, since the terrain was such as to allow it quite easily to hold up there quite as long as that great unit might have pleased. From which it may be deduced that this 43rd Division was neither heroic nor any such nonsense, but that a certain political party has sought to justify the record of certain commanders by singing their praises and trying to make heroes of them, when in point of fact there was nothing of the sort. Quite the opposite. Thus is the history of Spain's war written in this day and age.'

In its short-lived existence, the '43rd' performed no important feat of arms. It confined itself to ceding territory as soon as the enemy applied some pressure, until it crossed into France where it was disarmed and forced under escort to return to Spain through the free zone of Catalonia.

What few counter-attacks the Division had mounted were mounted for political ends and entrusted to non-communist troops and officers and then, as we shall see, in criminal circumstances.

Three Brigades made up the 43rd Division — the 72nd, 130th and the 102nd. In the 102nd, which was cast in the role of sacrificial lamb, there was good comradeship among its motley members who belonged to the PSOE, the CNT, the republican parties and even the PCE. The man who was Divisional Commissar, the socialist Máximo Gracia, testified to this in a report dated Barcelona 25 June 1938:

'When, in the last days of the month of March, the Division was cut off from the remainder of the Army of the East and when Antonio Beltrán Casaña, the Commander of the 72nd Brigade, was appointed as its new commanding officer by the Commander of the 10th Army Corps, the Division changed tack completely under the all-embracing powers conferred by the Central Command and, there being no countervailing

influence from the General War Commissariat, an all-out offensive was launched against the 102nd Mixed Brigade because of the presence within that unit of a perfect comradeship among its officers, commissars and soldiers, who conducted themselves as anti-fascists, heedless of party political loyalties.

Members of the PSOE, the PCE, the CNT and republican parties got on with their work with exemplary fraternity, without political squabbling of which, if any there were, I was unaware, and I must acknowledge that the work of these commissars and officers was satisfactory.

In the 72nd and 130th Brigades, due to negligence, connivance or idleness on the part of the Brigade Commissars, a drive was underway to persecute and discredit persons rejecting the PCE's discipline and party card, involving such pressure as promising of promotions to those persons who, due to their ideological convictions, clung steadfastly to their beliefs, bravely enduring the harassment visited upon them by people who, unrestrained by the Brigade Commissars, or under their protection, engaged in naked propaganda on behalf of the PCE.'

It is self-evident that for the purposes of making naked political capital out of this stunning 'odyssey', the plan was to represent the 43rd Division as a 100 per cent communist unit. As this aim was hampered by the catholic nature of some of its component units, recourse was had to the 'communisation' of them. This task was accomplished by *Frente Rojo* and *Mundo Obrero*; it was complemented by divisional officers with their chicanery and criminal actions.

On 28 May *Frente Rojo* made much of the following *communiqué*:

'GREETINGS TO OUR CENTRAL COMMITTEE: From the communist combatants of the 43rd Division's 72nd Brigade, to the PCE Central Committee:

Dear comrades,

From this towering mountain in the Upper Pyrenees, where the 43rd Division defends the territory of Spain, we, the communists of the 72nd Brigade, availing of the visit by the comrade bearers of this present message, wish to send an affectionate revolutionary embrace to our glorious party, so worthily represented by yourselves.

There are but few words we can say. We believe we have lived up to the postulates of our party. We promise to conduct ourselves henceforth as befits militants of the party of Lenin and Stalin, as true anti-fascists ever heedful of the party's voice which at all times correctly maps out the path to follow.

Long live the PCE! Long live the Central Committee!

Moreover, in the cantonment of 'El Esquinazao' — the nickname given to that made-to-measure 'hero', Beltrán, the commander of the 43rd Division — a purge was launched of officers not committed to what was called the 'party of the greatest and the best'.

Lest we get bogged down in the minutiae, we shall confine ourselves to summarising a report which staff of the 102nd Brigade drew up in their place of confinement in the fortress of Figueras. Among the signatories of the text were Commander Pedro Pinilla Montesinas, Staff Chief José Gómez López and various captains, lieutenants and commissars from the 102nd.

On 7 July, with the propaganda hype at its height, the 102nd Brigade was instructed by Divisional Command to launch an offensive operation against Llosat peak. The counter-attack was, militarily, suicidal, for the enemy had mustered an enormous number of troops along the front. The Brigade's Commander and Chief of Staff expressed these misgivings to the Divisional Commander, but the latter stood by his order to attack.

As anticipated, the operation turned into a catastrophe. One of the attacking battalions suffered losses of 65 per cent, including CNT Captains Serra and Gisbert who lost their lives, while Captain Pablo Ananios and other officers were gravely wounded. For his part, the enemy was not content with fending off the attack, but seized the

opportunity to re-draw the lines of the 102nd Brigade and also forced the 130th backwards, the 130th being a communist fief. No mention was made in the daily dispatches of any positions lost by the 130th.

As a result of these developments, several officers from the 130th presented themselves at the 102nd's command post with an order standing-down the Brigade's Commander, Chief of Staff and Commanders of three of its battalions 'for service reasons' (*por conveniencias de servicio*). The latter were to present themselves at divisional command. The bearers of the order stepped into the positions vacated. The following morning, in the village of Salinas, there was consultation between the Divisional Commander and Chief of Staff, the 130th Brigade's Commander and Commissar, and the Commander, Commissar and Chief of Staff of the 72nd Brigade. It was agreed that the officers stood down from the 102nd would be summarily shot. The latter were informed of this verdict and the Divisional Commander himself advised them against presenting themselves at the command post. This version of events is fully confirmed by the 43rd Division's Commissar, Máximo Gracia, in the report mentioned before, where he makes this statement:

'The officers of the 102nd Brigade were continually being accused of negligence and of being in touch with the fascists and tremendous distrust of its members was displayed. The plan, hatched as early as the beginning of April, to take over the Brigade's commands, was carried out on the night of the 12th-13th of this month, due to the loss on the 10th of El Collado in Sahún and Las Coronas, positions that the enemy assaulted with a strong deployment of aircraft, artillery and a huge mass of infantry and in which fight, four captains, several lieutenants and all of the troops occupying several fox-holes lost their lives.

That same day and at roughly the same hour, the Peña Montañesa was lost (under a similar onslaught), but there were no disciplinary consequences for the officers commanding the troops there, which just goes to prove the claim that the 102nd was being victimised.

Given this naked injustice, and in order to pre-empt extraordinarily serious consequences, unless the orders sent from the Chief of Staff and the Divisional Commander standing down the officers bore my signature, I am obliged to reinstate them, and I call upon the Brigade's Commissar to inform the Brigade's Commander and battalion commanders that, if the perpetration of an irreparable outrage is to be averted, they must not report at Division until such time as I so instruct them, given the odium and malicious intent against them...

So the officers concerned resolved to make their way to France and thence on to Barcelona, which they did, presenting themselves immediately at the Ministry of Defence. They were promptly thrown into jail for alleged desertion. Alleged, because no desertion is possible unless one has failed to answer three consecutive roll calls. And there had not been time for that, as the 43rd Division had crossed into France within 24 hours of their 'desertion'.

The same informants report that, for being a CNT member, a second-lieutenant of Munitions with the 72nd Brigade had been shot in the back. Concerning this murder, Lieutenant Pedro Ucar, of the 286th Battalion asserts in a report to his organisation, the CNT, dated 4 July of the same year:

'The leader of the murder gang is Lieutenant Moisés García. This individual does not have command of any section and he personally murdered comrade Puertas, who was a second lieutenant affiliated to our organisation. He was a fine comrade, a native of Campo (Huesca) and had committed no crime unless it was to be a perfect anarchist.

Upon hearing of the incident, I sought an explanation from the Brigade's Commissar, who informed me that it was correct that he had been shot and that it had been for attempted desertion to the enemy. Not satisfied with this, of course, I made my inquiries and managed to establish that execution had been carried out inside a car.

One Moisés García, boss of the "cheka", put two pistol shots into his temple, telling him "Take that, you bastard, and you won't bother us any more!" The act was perpetrated on the road from Ainsa to Bielsa and this was on 6 or 7 April. His body was buried in Lafortunada, a little village in the Bielsa valley. A reliable witness to this episode is the Company Commissar (a comrade), Augusto Sánchez, for the killer himself boasted to him of the feat.'



**We will not win the war without a well-ordered Republic,**  
*says the Communist Party*

'In order to win the war, the republican order must be established. Establishing republican order means imposing on all citizens the respect of the Powers legally constituted, within a popular democratic system; [it] means breaking with the principle of formal acceptance of the organs of Power, at the same time [breaking with] that which hinders [you] from doing your labor or supplants you in the practice with party committees, syndicates or groups that work [for] your free will. Within the republican legality, the Government and the constituted Powers must possess the necessary coercive means in order to impose order and respect for democratic law, which it has freely given to the people, on all those who intend to leave and break from this abusive system of taking justice in hand, in time to apply democratic and revolutionary justice through the organs established by the law and from those that were created during the course of the civil war.'

*(Poster published by the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party)*



▲ CNT-FAI posters ready for distribution





▲ **General Antonio Ortiz Ramírez:** leader of the 2nd Column (Red and Black) to leave Barcelona for Aragón and, after militarisation, commander of the 25th and 24th divisions.



▲ **Major General Miguel Garcia Vivancos:** Ortiz's replacement as commander of the 25th and 24th confederal divisions.

▼ **Lieutenant Colonel Cordon** (second from right); **General Pozas** (fifth); **Saturnino Carod** (sixth); **Vitorio Castau** (seventh); **Antonio Ortiz** (eighth)



## Chapter Nine: The Terror on the Fronts

In the FAI Peninsular Committee's report to the Libertarian Movement plenum in October 1938, oft quoted and which we continue to quote, one can read passages like the following:

'...From the unchallengeable ascendancy which we enjoyed in the direction of the war against fascism, we have been reduced to the status of mere cannon fodder.

...We have very often heard from the lips of comrades who credit themselves with a special gift of responsibility: "If comrades only knew the truth of what is going on, prosecution of the war would be impossible." The same point was made by Frederick the Great of Prussia when he said: "If my soldiers could read, there would be no one left in the ranks".

...At this point we could readily cite instances of our comrades, bereft of the organisation's protection and hemmed in on their frontline positions, opting to accept a PCE card, which strikes us as an exceedingly serious symptom.

Our comrades get the impression that they are being ignored, that the noxious policy of the PCE is allowed a free hand. It is not a question of a handful of cases, but of thousands upon thousands of comrades who admit to being more afraid of being murdered by the competitor by their side than of perishing in the fighting with the enemy opposite.'

There is ample documentation in the Libertarian Movement's archives concerning incidents that go beyond mere propaganda, involving the party with the most sordid record in the war against fascism. What makes its designs so indescribable is that they took place on the battlefronts, in the heart of units whose troops and officers were fighting for the people's freedom and for the independence of Spain. We will deal with kindred developments in the rearguard in the appropriate place.

The CNT and FAI respectively raised such outrages and crimes with the government, but demands for remedial action were never heeded. On 25 March 1938, the CNT National Committee's Defence Section placed before the government a series of documents specifying charges of the utmost gravity. The documents were accompanied by the following letter:

'Minister of National Defence:

In your hands we leave, in addition to what we have stated to you by word of mouth, copies of very important documents, the current and historical moment of which cannot be over-stated,

In them you will find sufficient material evidence for the strongest and severest action to be taken as a matter of urgency by your Ministry or through whatever judicial organs you may deem appropriate.

It is high time, Minister, that errors, some of them accidental and others perhaps deliberate, were ended abruptly, and that atrocities whose utter violence makes them repugnant to every honourable conscience and which furthermore fall under the remit of the Law of Criminal Jurisdiction, were eradicated without further ado.

This is all the more necessary and urgent in that, if it is criminal to place faction or personal ambition before victory, it would be infinitely more so to instil fear, rancour and hatred in those who feel themselves to be constantly under threat and who are more preoccupied with defending their lot and their lives, placed in jeopardy by friends, than with erecting an impregnable barrier against domestic and foreign fascism.

The catalogue of deeds, for which it is hard to find the appropriate adjective, for all the richness of the Castilian dictionary, categorically demands inflexible conduct and action so that the Popular Army may, in its activities and organisations, operate in

conditions of impartiality and brotherhood affording confidence and assurance to the combatant who should be guided by no other objective than attaining victory over the enemy.

For the enforcement of this fairness which we demand as a matter of urgency, the government has the means under the powers with which it presently is endowed. All that is needed is that it be understood once and for all that all citizens are of equal weight in the balance: that valour and heroism must be rewarded in equal measure, just as actions jeopardising unity and thus victory are punishable in equal measure.

Our warning is a grave one and our readiness to see justice done categorical. These incidents are of such a nature that we honestly believe we will be heard and heeded. And that thought prompts us to refrain from inflammatory behaviour which we consider harmful to the war effort.

Will we succeed in making ourselves understood? We hope so. There is still much to be done in the war. Nothing is lost. The people may yet summon up a fund of energy, vitality and the necessary wherewithal for success.

The watchword now must be for us to commit ourselves with intelligence and enthusiasm. And for that it is vital that confidence be restored, and simple justice done: no matter who falls for it or what colours he may be flying. The welfare and most sacred interests of the people demand it.

Barcelona, 25 March 1938. On behalf of the National Committee (Defence Section): Segundo Blanco.'

The first of the complaints made to the Defence Ministry took the form of a copy of the minutes of a gathering of PCE militants at which was mooted a plan of battle against — no, not Franco's armies — but the fighting men of the Libertarian Movement. It took place in Torralba in Aragón on 15 March 1938 and the sinister confabulation was attended by the following individuals: A. Merino, Chief of Staff of the 142nd Brigade, Alejandro González, Acting Lieutenant; Pablo López Marco, Commissar to the 568th Battalion; Antonio Torregrosa, Lieutenant in command of the 3rd Company of the 565th Battalion; José Peris, Lieutenant-Commander of No. 4 Company of the 565th Battalion; Martín Galdós, Sergeant of No. 4 Company 56th Battalion; Padilla, the PCE delegate-general in the Division; Commander Menéndez, and others.

Here is the record of the meeting:

'The sitting opened at 10.00 am with some words from the Divisional delegate, in which he set out all manner of guidelines for all sorts of struggle, and spelled out the ineluctable need in which all found themselves to strive intensely, to wage more effective propaganda, and the advisability of this propaganda's being made at all costs in the trenches themselves, etc.

Next, the delegate from Barbastro delivered his submission, saluting all the comrades there present and endorsing the words of the preceding speaker.

The floor is then vacated, being taken up by Sergeant Martín Galdós who states: "My mission is being carried out step by step. New militants join very passively, but I will recruit as many more. The party cards I received have already been distributed. I need considerably more, for the propaganda I am engaged in demands greater speed in the making and issuance of them. Now, my work cannot proceed with due intensity because the Battalion Commissar does not countenance party politicking. I know not what organisation he belongs to, for in his talks and lightning meetings he always speaks as an anti-fascist and in the name of the republican government. For the proper operation of the 565th Battalion, I believe it to be proper and necessary that he be replaced or eliminated, for with him in place, the party will not be able to make any headway in this Battalion."

Commander Menéndez speaks up to say: "Comrades: Having joined this Brigade only recently, there is little that I can say to you. Above all, my greetings to all present, and let me assure you that, for my part, I will do the impossible to implement and to see to implementation of our party's watchwords. At the same time, in the unit under

my command, propaganda facilities will be available at all times. As for the 565th Battalion, I can say that there our watchwords are not being implemented at present. There are too many organisations, too many anti-communist elements. The Commissar cannot continue for one day more: he must be eliminated. We cannot tolerate a Commissar of this stripe for he is a hindrance to our work. As for the Commander who has replaced me, this Carrillo, he needs transferring. He is an incompetent, a ninny. He wears gold braid, but does not deserve it. To be blunt — why beat about the bush? — he belongs to the CNT." He concludes his contribution by urging direct action in these particulars.

The Lieutenant commanding the No. 3 Company of the 565th Battalion reports, saying: "My Company is going fine. Lots of work underway. Politically, nothing can be done. I have a Commissar in the Company with whom I get nothing done. He is an incompetent. Spends his life sleeping. On the other hand it can be said of the Battalion Commissar that he is quite active. Moves about a lot, though he always has two riflemen in his wake. This when rifles are in such short supply at the front! I believe that he will be an obstacle to the pursuit of our aims. For that reason, and in order to inject greater vim into our propaganda, he needs to be replaced."

Lieutenant José Peris reports: "In the light of what the comrades have said, I have little to report. My Company is hard at work. During his latest visit, the Brigade Commander himself congratulated me and made me a present of a wireless set. As to the Battalion Commissar, there is little I can say. The Battalion's lines are very stretched. He turns up frequently, gives his talks, always anti-fascist and adhering to government guidelines, so there is no party politicking."

Chief of Staff, A. Merino, speaks up, recaps what has been said already and adds details which he has received, swearing them all in on the new plan or approach to be adopted, which he summarises thus:

1. The pressing need to step up propaganda.
2. Recruitment or induction of new militants.
3. Immediate creation of "troikas" at company level.
4. Promptest reports on the conduct of officers and commissars not aligned with the party.
5. Immediate examination of ways of transferring, replacing or eliminating those not so aligned.
6. Greater frequency of meetings.
7. Additional effort to encourage mistrust of officers and commissars not aligned with the Party.

Before concluding the meeting, he advocates the elimination formula once again, saying: "Everything you say is all well and good, but I believe I have spelled it out quite clearly. Anyone who makes a nuisance of himself, one stray bullet on a visit to the trenches and he buys it. Failing that, you walk him as far as the barbed wire, four shots and a report of desertion to the enemy and we will see that things go no further."

Again, before leaving, they pledge themselves to the overall steps to be taken, with the Divisional delegate adding "that tomorrow or thereafter another meeting will be held at which the Divisional Commander will attend."

As they left, the Brigade Commissar and the Commissar from the 568th Battalion swapped ideas about the subject matter, although the Brigade Commissar had seen fit not to take part in it. — Guillermo García, PCE, 17 March 1938.

Now let us turn to the facts. In a report dated Barcelona 31 October 1938, Lieutenant Benjamin Suárez explains how Joaquin Rubio García, Commissar to No. 2 Company of the 3rd Battalion of the 144th Brigade came to be murdered. Rubio was a long time militant of the CNT. He had long served as president of the Union of the Water, Gas, Electricity and Fuel industries of Catalonia. According to the witness, Rubio's company had attacked a certain position at 4am on 10 October. In the course of the day the position changed hands several times. The next day, following a strong counter-attack, the enemy recovered the position once and for all. Between 2pm and 3pm that day,

when troops of the No. 2 company were digging in to resist near the position in question, a Battalion Commissar from the 226th Brigade and a Commandant arrived, accompanied by a detail of men. They proceeded to strip Rubio and the Company Captain Manuel González of their weapons. Also disarmed were the troops under their command, despite their protests. Within moments the Captain and the Commissar were shot out of hand.

"They died", writes Suárez, 'like two genuine anti-fascists: hugging one another closely and shouting "Long live the Republic!"'

The Catalan FAI's delegates to the Popular Front, on 24 May 1938, forwarded to the organisation's Defence Section a complaint from the Popular Front of the Calaf district: according to the complaint, 25 lads from the 1941 call-up (from the aforementioned district) had been delivered to the command of the 124th Brigade. Apparently, they had absented themselves from their base without the required permission. Those who handed them over were assured by army officers that nothing would happen to their charges. However, three days later, one of the lads, a member of the Libertarian Youth, was shot.

Troopers Felipe Mingo Pérez and Antonio García Menéndez, both of them 20 years old and inhabitants of Madrid, had enlisted with the 66th Brigade. They went on a jaunt to the capital to see relations. Such jaunts were frequent on the fronts lying close to major cities. And it was no less commonplace for offenders to receive lenient punishment, serving a few days or weeks in the Divisional fortifications teams.

In the instance above, following the visit mentioned, the parents, receiving absolutely no news as to the whereabouts of their sons, went to the village of Colmenar de Oreja to investigate. There they learned that their sons had been shot and buried in the village of Chinchón. An attempt was made to pass off the murders as punishment 'for attempted desertion to the enemy camp'. The alleged attempted desertions were more than dubious, if one takes the antecedents of the victims into account. Felipe Mingo Pérez's record showed that he had joined the Perea Battalion (later the 38th Brigade) as a volunteer and seen action in the battles of Lazoya, Lazoyuela, Paredas de Buitrago, etc. In December 1936, his brother, likewise a volunteer, lost his life at the front. In January 1937 his father had applied for Felipe's discharge from service on the grounds that he was under-age. This led to his son's quitting the army only to re-enlist the same year. Mingo was a member to the CNT's Catering Union and had always been distinguished by his anti-fascist mentality.

On 19 July 1936, Antonio García Menéndez had helped storm the Montaña barracks in Madrid. Up until late 1937 he had served as a volunteer with the 'Pablo Iglesias' Battalion which served in Somosierra. When his class was called up, he wound up in the 66th Brigade. He too, had lost a brother on the front. His union affiliation had been to the UGT's Billposters' Section and he was a UGT militant.

At the beginning of 1937, some soldiers belonging to the 31st Brigade availed of the Brigade's leave in El Vellón (Madrid) to spend some hours on a visit to the capital. It had been some time since they had seen their families. Upon rejoining their unit, a Captain called Trillón ordered their heads shaved and forced them to run through the village with humiliating placards slung on their backs. This humiliation aroused the indignation of the neighbourhood and some soldiers, too. Two of the latter, after protesting, were placed under arrest and sentenced to death. Execution took place in the cemetery. The men shot had belonged to the CNT and UGT respectively.

In July 1938, Miguel Arcas, Commander of the 79th Brigade, sent an important document to the Levante CNT. Arcas was a well-known Andalusian anarchist with a record as a revolutionary.

The 79th Brigade's Commissar was a communist and his party had ordered him to mount a high-pressure recruitment drive. But, given the CNT make-up of the Brigade, this commissar had problems finding a way to act upon this instruction and he made certain counter-proposals to his political bosses. This brought him into disgrace and during certain operations which went awry for the Brigade, the commissar received news of a sinister party manoeuvre which consisted of sacrificing his life so as to be

able to murder Arcas at the same time. The pretext would be the need to make a severe example at the expense of the lives of those held to be responsible for defeat.

And by sacrificing one of their own, the communists believed that this would defuse any suspicions as to the political motives behind Arcas's killing. It was the appalled commissar himself who briefed the Brigade Commander on what was being hatched and together they determined to expose the entire ploy. Arcas took it upon himself to report it to the Regional Committee of Levante.

On 13 April 1938, at the height of the retreat from Aragón, a company the 26th Division — comprising 80 soldiers under four officers — was disarmed through a ruse by Commandant Palacios, commander of the Disciplinary Battalion of the 11th Army Corps. Without the formality of a court martial, the officers were executed.

According to information from the FAI Peninsular Committee, when the 1st Battalion of the 70th Brigade found itself in difficulty, the unit was sent a company of reinforcements under the command of Captain Francisco Montes Manchón, a communist. When these troops reached their position, the Battalion Commissar of the 1st Battalion was haranguing his troops, exhorting them to resist. Captain Manchón shot him once in the back, killing him on the spot. The men of the aforementioned Battalion were, for the most part, CNT members.

One of the appendices to this same FAI Peninsular Committee report dealt with the criminal events of Turón. For some time, complaints had been coming in about the conduct of communists ensconced in the army units in Andalusia, specifically in the 23rd Army Corps. In that particular sector, it was extremely easy for persons not aligned with 'the party' to disappear.

The Intelligence Captain of the 23rd, one Bailón, is a case in point. Before the war, he had been a tax collector and his despotic manner as the executive arm of the Treasury had made him quite a few enemies. Come the war, Bailón took the precaution of enrolling in the party, managing to reach quite an elevated position. As Intelligence Captain with the 23rd Army Corps, he was primarily engaged in eliminating anyone who might know his background and create any difficulty for him. With that in mind, he did not balk at crime. One of his many crimes was to have ordered that the *ley de fugas* be applied to several prisoners from the village of Peters, among them a socialist with a lengthy record as a revolutionary. This matter was brought to the attention of Prieto, the then Defence Minister, and an angry Prieto ordered the arrest of Bailón.

The Turón incidents were graver still. One fine day, Lieutenant-Colonel Galán, Commander of the 23rd Army Corps, issued an order that every Brigade should send to Headquarters a squad or picket of tried and tested anti-fascists. This was done, whereupon these troops were issued with instructions to march on Turón, a tiny village in the Granadan Alpujarra, some 2,500 souls in size. According to their orders, their task was to eliminate a number of fascists among the detachment of political detainees in the village. This was seen to, and it emerged later that CNT soldiers, socialists and republicans had, on orders from their superiors, done to death comrades from their own organisation. At the time, the road from Turón to Murtas was under construction by the prisoners, and the bodies were buried in the bed of the road. This outrage, for which even the personnel who merely carried it out cannot evade their responsibility, could not be kept under wraps. Under pressure of public opinion, the Army of Andalusia's Standing Tribunal opened an inquiry. Initial investigations found that the orders had emanated from the 23rd Army Corps's own Commander and so, fearing a confrontation with Galán, the Tribunal backed off.

The following document is a report from the Standing Tribunal's chairman to the Inspectorate of Tribunals:

'In compliance with the specifications of your instruction No. 667, dated the 12th instant, I have the honour to report the following to the Inspectorate regarding case No. 110-1938 for due consideration by higher authority.

Early in the month of June last, in the wake of the report from the Legal Consultant's Office, his excellency the Commander of the Army passed this Tribunal a brief on the

Turón detachment of political prisoners prepared by order of the Commander of the 23rd Army Corps, in view of various dispatches signed by the Military Commander of said Detachment reporting the killing by soldiers of the guard of several prisoners, 54 in all, following their attempts to escape on successive dates.

Given that the brief thus drafted gave no indications as to responsibility in respect of negligence in custody and that it did not record burials as having taken place in accordance with the law, and other procedures which have to be observed in such instances of violent death, in that this could lead to concealment of more serious offences, I agreed on 16 June, having listened to the Army Legal Prosecutor and in accordance with his considered opinion, to institute preliminary inquiries. My view was that there were no grounds for treating the events as having any greater significance until such time as their criminal character and consequent gravity had been clearly established.

From the outset, the Chief of Staff of this Army was formally briefed about the implications the events might have, if it were shown that the personnel making up this Tribunal and Legal Consultancy, within the discretion which must be observed lest the regime's enemies be given opportunity to escalate their campaign defaming our struggle. It was also mentioned by the under-signed and by other comrades that there was a need immediately to relieve the military forces making up the garrison of said detachment and the sergeants belonging to it, so that they might make statements before the Tribunal's investigating Secretary-Reporter; on so doing, they all reaffirmed statements made earlier in the presence of the officer who drew up the briefing-paper which was the result of earlier enquiries, but they were placed under arrest and held *incommunicado* until the result of the exhumations and autopsy on the corpses, currently underway, might become known.

At this point in the investigation, a verbal inquiry was made by a field officer, acting on orders from the Command, the findings of which, once known, confirmed the well-grounded fears that the prisoners' deaths had not been the result of an attempted escape. Said officer drew up an affidavit at the earlier hearing and almost simultaneously, the sergeants held *incommunicado* asked to make new statements, and in these statements they also confirmed the criminal actions in quite a clear fashion. In the light of the outcome of these proceedings, a criminal file was opened and the corpses were exhumed, the autopsies performed and the deaths were registered with the Civil Registry.

These proceedings were handled with admirable zeal, competence and discretion by the Court Secretary-Reporter and the Investigating Delegates, lawyers Eugenio Giménez Alvarez and Eduardo Vera Sales.

Not all of the corpses could be exhumed for they were buried in the very bed of the road from Turón to Murtas, on whose construction the prisoners of the detachment had been employed.

The autopsy procedures performed produced no specific findings since the bodies were in a state of utter decomposition and in many instances it was impossible even to verify the presence of gunshot wounds.

For the purposes of identification as well as of location of the different corpses, no information was used beyond that supplied by the road works foreman, without the detainees' being interrogated.

Such tasks having been accomplished, and in view of the gravity, implications and heavy responsibilities which may follow from them, we, the Army Legal Prosecutor, the Court Secretary-Reporter and the undersigned, resolved to raise the issue with the Army Commander in that we believed that pursuit of the investigations might entail serious and substantial damage, including the major danger of the investigation's being suspended and the facts covered up or the blame shifted elsewhere. It was our view that we did our duty by investigating the facts and, having established these, taking no further action beyond making the facts and the various hypotheses known to our Military Commanders and superiors, so that they might also gauge the scale of the matter and enlighten us as to the suitability or unsuitability of our proceeding further.

It was the opinion of the Military Officer commanding this army that the matter was indeed a grave one, and that to proceed with the investigation might be a double-edged sword, and, given the stage that the indictment procedures were in, insofar as no individual had action taken against him and the acts had yet to be categorised, the government should be informed through the Minister of National Defence and he sent a sealed report to His Excellency the General Commanding the Centre-South Group of Armies.

For our part, what we might term the abnormal nature of the affair was noted in the memorandum of last month, forwarded to this Inspectorate on the 10th instant, in order to keep the Court Inspectorate duly briefed on the facts.

It only remains to note that the Turón detachment was made up of political prisoners whom the Governor of Almería had handed over to the Army for deployment on ventures works necessary and of service to the war effort.

Which is everything that I have the honour of setting before the Inspectorate with regard to Case No. 110, without prejudice to any further proceedings which the Inspectorate or higher authority may deem necessary.

Baza, 13 August 1938.'

Let us turn now to the inquiry set up following the disappearance of José Meca Cazorla, the political delegate of the Signals Company of the 141st Brigade, and of trooper Hervás Soler, of the same company. The disappearances occurred on 13 March 1938.

On 16 March 1938 the 11th Army Corps's Commissariat received a dispatch from the Commissar of the 32nd Division — to which the 141st Brigade belonged — recording the desertion of the aforementioned delegate and trooper. The dispatch from the Signals Company stated:

'that political delegate José Meca Cazorla, having left Station X7 at 14.00 hours for the Company, and trooper Hervás Soler likewise having left that station (for the same destination) and their having failed as of the time of writing to present themselves, they have been declared deserters to the enemy front.'

José Meca had been a CNT member since 18 July 1930. Hervás belonged to the POUM.

Learning of this, the then Commissar of the 11th Army Corps, Juan Molina, commissioned Signals Commissar Miguel Barrachina Querol and political delegate Alejandro Gilabert Gilabert to draw up a report. The pair travelled to Vicién (Huesca) and spoke with the 141st Brigade's Commissar, Pedro Puig. From the conversation that took place they concluded that Luis Judez Calleja, corporal of the Signals Company and trooper Jaume Trepas Solé from the same unit might furnish them with the information needed to clear up the puzzle of Meca's and Hervás's disappearances. From the same commissar they learned that trooper Trepas was in the custody of a disciplinary company of No. 4 Battalion of the 141st.

The investigators then journeyed to Station X7, located in Cuarte, there to begin taking statements. Here are the statements made by Sergeant Francisco Trenzado Abadía and troopers Dámaso Fernández Marcos and Francisco Sertrano Manzanera, telephonists who had been on duty at the Station when Meca and Hervás had been summoned from Brigade on the day of their mysterious disappearance:

'Arriving in Cuarte (Huesca) at 2pm on 18 March 1938, the aforementioned sergeant and troopers appeared before us to state that the political delegate of the Signals, José Meca Cazorla, turned up in Cuarte at midday on 13 March 1938 to make an inspection and visit the site of a shelter under construction for use as a telephone exchange. At 2pm, while he was waiting to eat, Cazorla received a telephone call. The first call was taken by telephonist Francisco Serrano who asked who it was that the caller wanted, to which the voice on the telephone replied:

"Is your company commissar there?"

"Yes. Who's calling?"



"The Brigade Commander, and tell him to get down to Vicién by way of El Carrascal, that we're expecting him."

"But do you want to speak to him?"

"Yes. Yes."

The aforementioned telephonist put the call through to Commissar Meca, who was in Sergeant Trenzado's quarters (Signals barracks). Trenzado answered the call, whereupon the same words were repeated to him as had been said to telephonist Serrano, and he passed the telephone to Meca. Afterwards, the latter told the whole detachment:

"I must be off. They've sent for me urgently."

They asked him not to leave before having something to eat, but off he went with a little bread and beef to eat along the way. He asked for directions as to the route to follow to get to where he had been summoned, and Sergeant Trenzado pointed out the road. Meca set off immediately and the men of the detachment watched him leave, munching what they had given him, in the direction they had indicated to him. Nothing more is known of him after that time.

At roughly 3.30pm the same day Sergeant Roig of the Signals Company called the detachment from Vicién. Sergeant Trenzado took the call and was told by Roig:

"Tell Hervás to present himself immediately at Company headquarters by order of the Brigade Commander."

The sergeant passed the message on to trooper Hervás Soler and the latter set off in the direction of Vicién at 16.00 hours. Before he left, trooper Dámaso Fernández told him it would be about his application for a captaincy, that being the rank he had held in the disbanded 29th Division.

At roughly 8pm on the same day, Sergeant Roig put through another telephone call to Sergeant Trenzado and said to him:

"Do you know what time it was when I told you to get Hervás to come down to the Company HQ? Because he has yet to put in an appearance. Nor has Meca showed up. We haven't laid eyes on them."

Sergeant Trenzado replied that the order had been received by telephone at 3.30pm approximately.

These statements, having been read back to the witnesses and their having endorsed them, were signed in Cuarte (Huesca) at 2.30pm, 18 March 1938.

Signed and sealed: Francisco Trenzado Abadía, Dámaso Fernández and Francisco Serrano.'

From Cuarte the investigation team made their way to the command post of the 4th Battalion of the 141st Brigade to take a statement from trooper Jaime Trepát, but on finding the Battalion's Commissar and the Brigade Commander (Eduardo Barceló) there, was informed by the latter that the whereabouts of the above trooper were not known. Nonetheless, Barceló himself would later declare that he had personally ordered Trepát to be placed under arrest 'for distribution of the underground newspaper *La Batalla*.' Statements continued to be taken and Pedro Suárez de Mesa, a trooper from the Signals Company said of Meca's anti-fascist credentials that 'he has naught but praise for him...never having remarked any political or trade union bias, and is baffled by what has happened.' The statement made by the Company sergeant, Antoni Roig Figueres, confirms that Roig summoned trooper Hervás by telephone, but not Meca. As for Trepát, he said that Lieutenant Vergès had sent for him and that he was in Vicién at the disposition of the Command.

This is the statement by the Brigade Commander, Eduardo Barceló:

'In the Command post of the 141st Brigade in Vicién, we took a statement from its Commander, Eduardo Barceló Llacuri, who states that on the 13th of this month he ordered the Commanding Officer of the Brigade's Signals Company to instruct Hervás and Commissar Meca to present themselves before him. He sent for them because in the Brigade an underground newspaper by the name of *La Batalla* had been distributed

and he wanted to know by whom.

He also ordered that troopers Trepát and Sergeant Judez be sent for, but only the latter pair showed up.

He suspects that the abovementioned underground newspaper was received through the agency of a woman. Some days ago, a woman by the name of Pilar Santiago Bilbao, apparently trooper Hervás's wife, had turned up at Brigade in Vicién bearing a safe-conduct which stated: "Safe conduct to comrade Pilar Santiago Bilbao so that she may journey from Barcelona to Cuarte (Huesca) and back. The authorities of the Republic are requested to afford her all necessary assistance. Barcelona, 21 January 1938. The General War Committee, Minister of National Defence. Commissar-General. Trooper Hervás, Signals, Cuarte."

He says that he forbade the woman to journey to Cuarte, summoning Hervás to Vicién so that he might speak with her and this was done. But despite the banning order, Hervás and the woman left for Cuarte.

Within days, copies of *La Batalla* were being distributed. He suspects that Hervás, Trepát, Judez and Meca may have had a hand in the distribution of that newspaper.

He states that he knows nothing of what was said to Meca by telephone about travelling via El Carrascal and that they were expecting him.

He says that he has no copies of *La Batalla* because they were removed from his office.

Says also that Castillo knows something about Pilar Santiago, for he had had dinner with her.

Trooper Trepát is in the custody of a disciplinary company because of allegations that he knows the current whereabouts of political delegate Meca and trooper Hervás.

He says that Hervás must be in Barcelona. Of Commissar Meca, he says he knows nothing. A warrant for their arrest for desertion has been issued against both.

On the strength of some intercepted letters addressed to Hervás and Meca he suspects that the aforementioned individuals had some hand in the distribution of the underground newspaper *La Batalla*. Said letters having been examined, none of them makes any reference to that periodical, but there is a reference in them to "packages".

These statements having been read back to him and he having endorsed them, they have been signed in the 141st Brigade's command post in Vicién at 19.00 hours on 18 March 1938 by the Officer Commanding the 141st Mixed Brigade. Signed, Eduardo Barceló.'

The following statement is by Joan Puig, the 141st's Commissar. After stating that Meca, whom he knew formally, by reason of his post, did good work and was disciplined and obedient to his superiors, he says that 'he has heard talk' of distribution of the underground paper *La Batalla* but has not laid eyes on a single copy.

Luis Judez, as he himself states, was called to the Brigade command on 13 March. There he met with Trepát who had likewise been sent for. They were both locked up in the quarantine bay there. Judez says that he was released when he answered in the negative Major Barceló's question as to whether he knew the whereabouts of Meca and Hervás. He also states that he has neither seen nor heard mention of an underground publication entitled *La Batalla*.

Lieutenant Joaquim Vergès Soler, Commanding Officer of the Signals Company, states:

'on the 13th of this month he was visited by Lieutenant Hidalgo, adjutant to the Commanding Officer of the 141st Brigade, in the company of two further individuals and was told by them to get word to Hervás, Trepát and Judez to present themselves immediately in Vicién, to report to the Brigade Commander, which order the witness carried out. He says that he did not inform Meca since Lieutenant Hidalgo had said that he had already been informed...'

Lieutenant Vergès also states that he knows nothing about any underground periodical

by the name of *La Batalla*.

Lieutenant Hidalgo was adjutant to Major Eduardo Barceló. Hidalgo was adamant that he ordered the Signals Commander to brief by telephone 'those persons whom the Brigade Commander had ordered him to inform, naming no names and pointing the finger at nobody', which is to say 'that the names of the persons to be telephoned had been given orally to the Signals Commander by the Brigade commander.' He also denied the insinuation that it had been he, along with other persons, who was waiting for José Meca in El Carrascal. So the identity of the person who telephoned to Meca, the key in the whole episode, remains a mystery.<sup>1</sup>

In the report which the CNT National Committee's Defence Section forwarded to the government on 25 March and from which we have lifted the details and statements we have just reproduced, the following summary is enclosed:

'The pronounced sectarianism of the Brigade Commanders is all too plainly at the root of the events with which we are concerned.

Hervás Soler was appointed Commissar of the Generalitat Signals School in February 1937. He was one of those who contributed most to the organisation of that school, enjoying unquestionable prestige.

When Virgilio Llanos, a Stalinist agent, took charge of the Commissariat of the Army of the East, Hervás was ousted from this position and became a teacher of mathematics and science at the school. Later, Virgilio Llanos issued orders to the school's director that Hervás was to be retired as a teacher and called up immediately for military service and that, should he fail to report for duty immediately, he should be severely sanctioned. As a soldier, he joined the Signals and was posted to Lleida, to the so-called "Seminario" barracks. There he was detained for punishment, and selected for the most arduous duties.

In December 1937 he was dispatched to the Huesca front, to the Signals Company of the 141st Brigade, 32nd Division. The Commissar of that company is called Meca and is a CNT member and during his time with the unit, neither Hervás nor Trepát engaged in any political activity.

Between Commissar Meca and Brigade Commander Barceló there is a certain tension, just as there are strained relations between Meca and Hidalgo, the Carabineer Commander. One of the reasons is that only the PCE press circulates there, for *Solidaridad Obrera* is burned lest the troops read it. Commissar Meca behaves correctly towards comrades Hervás and Trepát, and likewise with the Brigade Commissar who belongs to the ERC, although the fact is that it is the PCE and the PSUC that rule the roost in the Brigade, through the Brigade's Commanding Officer.

At a meeting of PSUC and PCE personnel it was resolved that all POUM and CNT personnel of any note be eliminated physically. Some days later, on 15 or 16 March 1938, in the evening, Meca and the Signals Company Commissar and troopers Hervás, Jaume Trepát and a corporal from the POUM, were summoned by telephone by the Brigade Commanding Officer. They were told what route to follow (on some pretext, assuredly) in order to present themselves urgently in Vicién, where the 141st Brigade Headquarters is located, before Commander Barceló. Hervás, Trepát and the corporal mentioned were based in the Cuarte sector. The route they were to take was the El Carrascal Road which passes by the Pebredo castle. Suspecting something untoward, for all the reasons cited, the four comrades agreed not to travel together. Hervás and Commissar Meca set off first, a kilometre behind them came Trepát, alone, because at the time the other individual was not there. As he travelled along the El Carrascal road which runs from Pebredo castle to the Zaragoza Road to Huesca, Trepát who was lagging behind, heard some automatic pistol fire and fearing that his suspicions would be confirmed, instead of carrying on along the road, switched to a route that took him to Vicién, where he reported to Barceló. Barceló, surprised to see him, ordered that he

1. This account, including the dates and names, was later corroborated by Miguel Barrachina Querol, responsible at the time for court orders, and Alejandro Gilabert Gilabert, who was involved in this particular case, in an interview with the author on 2 October 1969.

be taken away to a disciplinary battalion.

What Trepát may have to say is still unknown. All that is known is that Trepát vanished, meeting the same fate as the others.

The day after these events, the Brigade's dispatches said: "Signals Company Commissar Meca and trooper Hervas have gone missing. It is supposed that they have defected to the enemy or deserted the front."

The next day the dispatches said: "Trooper Jaume Trepát has gone missing. It is supposed that he has gone over to the enemy or deserted the front."

It seems that, as a result of the intervention of the Commissar-General, comrade Crescenciano Bilbao, a Commissar, has been arrested and, it seems, was one of the perpetrators of the murder. The Commissar-General, while on the Eastern Front, got wind of what had happened, went to the scene in person and initiated an investigation, the findings of which are not known to us.

Barcelona, 25 March 1938.'

In the preceding chapter we mentioned the shortcomings of the military health services as a factor in demoralisation. With great frequency, those shortcomings turned into criminality. The propaganda campaign did not respect sacred humanitarian precincts such as clinics and field hospitals and led to the exploitation of the situation by disaffected persons who had wormed their way into the Army Health Corps.

In the CNT archives there is a series of reports in which several post-holders affiliated to the CNT denounce criminal aspects of the propaganda campaign as it affected their organisation. The memorandum on "Communist Policy in Health" comprises several documents. One of these, dated 8 July 1938, was signed by the Commissar of the 120th Brigade (26th Division) and in it, the claim is made that in the field hospitals in the rear, the wounded were left without medical attention for three or four days. There were complaints of instances of wounds being improperly closed and of 'patients discharged in worse condition than when they were admitted'. There is also talk of improbable deaths which hint at a criminal political intent:

'But the worst thing does not stop there: the worst thing is the huge number of men who perish from neglect, incompetence or bad faith on the part of the practitioners. We have seen shameful cases, utterly incomprehensible in terms of their attendant circumstances, which raise fears of deliberate and planned sabotage or a concern to undermine the combatants' morale. No matter how much it may be explained to us, we will never succeed in understanding how the man who was Commander of the 121st Brigade, Major Gil Montes, came to die: however much may be said to us, we cannot come up with an explanation of how the man who was a battalion commander with the 119th Brigade, comrade Agustín Solé, came to die. Then there is the puzzle surrounding the deaths of the man who was Commander of the 30th Division, Major Don Nicanor Felipe, or of Corporal Joaquin Ballester Alcarria, who belonged to the 479th Battalion of this Brigade, or of Lieutenant Francisco Pérez Rodríguez, who was attached to the 477th Battalion of this unit, or of so many others whom for want of specific detail may not be named.'<sup>2</sup>

It goes on to focus upon the case of Joaquin Ballester Alcarria who died in No. 3 Clinic, Barcelona, as a result, it was said, of tetanus. His death occurred after an injection given to him when he was discharged or on the point of leaving the hospital. As for Lieutenant Francisco Pérez Rodríguez, he was wounded during the capture of San Romá de Abella on 24 May. He was taken from the battlefield to the Brigade First Aid and Triage Centre where he was given treatment and diagnosed as having 'a gunshot

2. Gil Montes was wounded in either an air raid or machine gun attack by enemy planes near Balaguer (Lleida) in the spring of 1938. Agustí Solà, Commissar (not Commander) of the 2nd Battalion of the 119th, was wounded during operations in Tremp in the May of the same year. The author, who was involved in both actions, was able to testify that the injuries to Solà in particular were not very serious and that these deaths resulted in a painful stupor when their fates became known.

wound in the forearm and right thigh'. From 26 May to 20 July he remained in Terrasa hospital, Clinic No. 5, and after that died of 'acute anaemia'.

The document in question continued:

'Were we studying less technical and more comprehensible therapeutic terminology, we would find that a patient can die of acute anaemia: first when, the wounded man's having suffered a tremendous loss of blood, it proved impossible to give him a transfusion to make good this loss; second, when the wounded man, even after receiving a transfusion, proves unable to recover from the loss of blood; third, when the wounded man has a sizeable bowel wound and when, due to the seriousness of the injury or the remoteness of the surgical team, it is not possible to afford him the assistance such an injury merits.

In the case of the lieutenant (a reference to Lieutenant Francisco Pérez Rodríguez) the three circumstances outlined can be discounted: first because, whilst it is true that he did lose a lot of blood, it is no less true that the hospital doctors had more than enough time to give him a blood transfusion and avert his death by successfully remedying the patient's anaemic condition; second, because, needless to say, the hypothesis that the wounded man could not have recovered from the loss of blood, even after a transfusion had been effected, will not wash, since he would not have lasted 24 days - at most, he would have died after two or three days; third, far from his having lacked assistance on account of distance from the surgical team, he received prompt treatment from the battalion doctor, then at the first-aid post and finally from the surgical team by whom he was tended, departing from there for Terrasa Hospital well on the road to recovery.

If to all this we add that suture injuries either cause rapid death or heal it follows that if the injuries in the forearms and thigh, especially if caused by a firearm, rather than by shrapnel, are not likely as to kill anyone we can assert that in Lieutenant Pérez's case there was neither negligence, bad faith, incompetence or whatever. The fact is that the lieutenant died mysteriously, of "acute anaemia", according to the doctors from the Hospital. It would be interesting to verify this by, if need be, submitting all this for examination by a "physician of trust" since they would have more expert knowledge than the undersigned, and might adduce further details, unless concerned with protecting his colleagues, the doctors from the Terrasa Hospital.'

In another document from the same memorandum, the CNT's National Health and Hygiene Federation itemises the political affiliations of the most highly-placed officers of the General Health Inspectorate.

Only in two sections do two members of this Federation figure in a junior capacity.

Here is a breakdown of the Inspectorate and its superiors' political loyalties:

Inspection	ERC
Administration	ERC
Auditing	ERC
'Z' Services (Anti-Gas)	ERC
General Secretary	ERC
Surgical Teams	PSUC
Procurement Section	PSUC
Personnel Section	PSUC
Information Section	PSUC
Pharmacy Section	PSUC
Evacuation Section	PSUC
Propaganda and Press Section	UGT
Hygiene and Prophylaxis Section	UGT
Director, Central Depot	Not known
Ophthalmology	Not known
Third Practitioners' Centre	Not known

On 18 July, the Barcelona Health and Hygiene Union made this reply to a note from the FAI's Peninsular Committee:

'In reply to your enquiry *à propos* of the manner in which the Military Hospitals are performing, we now offer you what figures we have in our possession, having already forwarded these to the higher organisms of the CNT.

In the Military Hospitals there is a festering problem. It is this: there is the basest and most despicable politicking and the ill and wounded comrades are victimised by it. Their pain and injuries are assessed in terms of, and their well being as patients conditioned by, their political affiliation.

In the army health units, communist personnel, a source of discord, have ensconced themselves absolutely.

The injured are treated whenever the doctors like and, if they are out of sympathy with the dominant staff faction in the hospital, they go untreated. Our union delegates from the Military Hospital based in Vallcarca have notified us of some truly monstrous cases. Patients who received treatment neither on one day nor the next, and whose wounds turned gangrenous, with the injured limb turning maggoty. In this hospital there is a thriving communist cell, headed by Doctor Linares, one of the 'brave souls' who, at the time of the Aragón offensive, abandoned his staff and patients and hot-footed it to Barcelona.

The Vallcarca case is typical of absolutely every Military Hospital. The doctor, the medic, the nurse and the director, unless they are communists, are subjected to all manner of humiliation and bullying and, what is worse, are also liable to be caught up in a squalid snare that will lay them low in the ditches of Montjuïc. In those establishments where the administration and management are in our hands, as in Sant Gervasi, say, the communist cell mounts a slander and defamation campaign to turn the patients and staff against our comrades.

Comrades of ours occupying positions of responsibility in Military Health are few in number and are to all intents surrounded by spies who monitor their every move and make life impossible for them.

There is a Circular Order from the Supreme Health Headquarters, which appeared on 30 April, under which male personnel are mobilised, union delegates done away with and the *coup de grâce* delivered to the CNT, that being the sole objective of this Circular Order.

Medical panels are another of the most picturesque instances conceivable... Had we the courage to intrude into the nests of these fascists who pass themselves off as 'Reds', we would see truly wonderful things. Wounded who are sound and cured, yet not discharged because they are "party" members. Poor devils from the CNT or some other trade union of political organisation shipped off to the front, though not cured. All the communist militants are cardiac cases, tuberculosis cases, etc., etc. Comrade Doctor Vallina is one of the doctors serving on the Sant Gervasi Hospital Tribunal. This fine comrade could furnish us with many telling examples of this.

As regards this union, it stands ready to work as the circumstances may require, provided that it receives the backing of the organisation as a whole, which we will bring to your notice for further action.

Barcelona, 18 July 1938.

On behalf of the Branch — J. Díaz; Military Delegate — G. García; on behalf of the Central Council, Antonio Pellicer.'

This memorandum closes with a report from the Commissar Delegate from the Army of the Centre (Nistral) addressed to the Commissar Delegate of the General Health Inspectorate. We cite it in order to prove that what was going on in Catalonia was also happening across the entire territory loyal to the Republic.

Nistral informs his superior of his differences of opinion with the Army of the Centre's director of Health Services, a Doctor Estelles, and takes issue with the latter's proposed confirmation of junior personnel. Commissar and director are agreed upon

undoing the dominance of communist personnel, but whereas the latter is content to insert in the list for confirmation some names of persons affiliated to the various unrepresented parties and organisations (two socialists, two UGT people, two republicans, and one CNT member alongside 10 communists), the Commissar, taking a more radical line, proposes to eliminate the communist personnel completely. The reasoning upon which he bases this proposal is as follows:

'When Doctor Planelles gave up the Directorship of the Health Services of this Army and Doctor Estelles took it over, he found that the offices of the Centre were awash with junior civilian personnel wholly, or for the most part, members of the PCE, to which the aforementioned Doctor Planelles used to belong and still does. Said personnel, organised as a cell, met frequently at the Centre and made decisions which they aimed to put into effect and this they very often succeeded in doing by overriding the determinations and views of the Director of Services himself.

This is shown by the fact that, on taking charge of this Commissariat, the undersigned had to draw up an exposé of the existence and meetings of the aforementioned cell, something fully demonstrated, and in which particular a Military Tribunal is even now acting. Featured in said Organisation and present at these meetings were leading military figures such as Health Commanders Ricardo Fernández Catalina, head of the Hospitals Section, and Adolfo Fernández Gómez, Captains José Manuel Fernández Gómez and Daniel Acija Mestre and others, not counting the junior personnel mentioned.

Lieutenant and doctor's assistant Luis Prieto who for reasons unknown to me has been assigned to this Directorate, serving with the Evacuation Section as a simple auxiliary, and typist Trinidad Azna Mas, who serves as secretary, operate as the leaders of the aforementioned cell.'

For those who have not experienced at first hand the intimacies of the Spanish conflict, the charges emanating from the bulk of these documents will seem exaggerated. There is no exaggeration if one remembers that the largest contingent of 'moles' (*emboscados*) was found precisely among technical and health personnel. To some extent, the revolution conjured up military strategists through application and intuition: but it could not improvise physicians and surgeons, much less dispense with those who had practised the profession in the days when the bourgeoisie was in the ascendant. And with honourable exceptions, the medical profession in Spain had always been distinguished by a superficial conservatism. Very many of these people were of a disaffected outlook that was proverbial on the fronts and in the rearguard. And, regrettably, this opinion on the people's part was not the product of excessive zeal. Party propaganda, the hunt for a 'distinguished' adherent offered the best protection for all sorts of dubious individuals. And it is understandable that such disaffected persons or enemy agents should gladly have abided by the letter of communism's sinister watchwords against its political adversaries, maybe because this was the best way of serving Franco and simultaneously disposing of their enemies. However, we cannot disregard evidence that in Army Health, in those centres well away from the front lines especially, there lurked all the sheltered and potential deserter types always eager to spare themselves any discomfort. And the latter, no less than the former, went along with all the chicanery and criminal activity in order to hold on to their privileged positions.

Let us now turn to the case of the 153rd Brigade. This was the CNT unit upon which the enemies of the Libertarian Movement expended their greatest expansionist endeavours. Part of its record we already know about. Suffice it to recall that, formed in Catalonia, in the early days of the military uprising, it participated, under the name of the 'Tierra y Libertad Column', in the most intense stages of the battle of Madrid. It became the 153rd Brigade at the time of the militarisation of the militias, and among its most outstanding battle honours was the capture of Belchite in 1937 and the famed Segre operation in August 1938.

Following the 12th Army Corps's failure on the South-Ebro Front in March 1938, the 153rd came to be subordinated successively to various Communist Divisional Commanders, received brutal treatment and was targeted for disintegrating manoeuvres designed to eradicate the long-standing anarchist influence in it.

After a series of secondments, the Brigade was assigned to the 30th Division, whose Commander, a communist, had been a stalwart of the 11th Army Corps (Francisco Galán). The Command of the Brigade and various officer positions were successively 'captured' through a series of manoeuvres. The natural reaction against this 'take-over' policy campaign gave rise to a series of incidents, as we shall relate.

With understandable indignation, the anarchist combatants railed against the siege laid to their beloved unit: especially when some of their comrades mysteriously went missing, a sure sign that they had been murdered. The last Commander (José María Teresa) was stood down so that a communist, Felix Arano, whose only recommendation was his uncontrollable fondness for alcohol, might be 'installed' in his place. The 153rd Brigade's best commissars were posted elsewhere 'on orders from above', or else were deposed and charges preferred against them on the most trivial counts. Leal and Teresa were removed for different reasons. Leal was the hero of the aforementioned Segre operation in which he had been seriously wounded. Teresa, the acting Commander, was replaced on 31 May on the orders of the 11th Army Corps.

On 4 June, the Committee of Liaison with the Eastern Front reported to the CNT National Committee's Defence Section that:

'All the comrades are in high dudgeon with the organisation: they reproach us for the trick which they imagine us to have played on them and accuse us of lack of enthusiasm, since the Brigade commander — Teresa — has been stood down in the most arbitrary fashion.'

The 11th Army Corps constantly allocated communist personnel of all ranks to the Brigade and even troops of a certain category. The latter arrived bearing certain instructions and were excused all military service.

In October, the staff of the 153rd was placed under arrest. That very day, Commander Leal had assumed acting command of the Brigade: but he was displaced within 24 hours on the orders of Captain Felipe Frechilla who arrived accompanied with an entire staff assigned to him by General Sarabia. That same day, Division asked for a list of 12 officers due to be posted to the Ebro front. At Division four names belonging to the PCE were stricken from the list, with the result that, save for one UGT member, all of the names put forward were CNT affiliates. Something similar happened to the 146th Brigade, another unit of the 30th Division. Then again, disbandment of the Depot Company (Auxiliary Services) was also ordered, the object being to move soldiers from the CNT up into the firing lines. The Paymaster and Battalion office staff were likewise sent to the trenches and the adjutant lieutenants were dismissed. Needless to say, these had to be replaced by newcomers, PCE newcomers.

All of these abuses were disclosed to the Defence Section by a group of libertarian militants from the Brigade and they demanded a speedy solution from the Section. The report urged at the end:

'It goes without saying that this solution has to be reached in a time so short that two days may be deemed too long, for only those who live it can know the situation and in this instance we shall employ the means at our own disposal in our self-defence.'

The author can bear out this state of over-excitement, the prelude to inevitable tragedy. As lieutenant-adjutant with the 119th Brigade at the end of summer 1938 in our headquarters in Alós de Balaguer. I received several officers from the 153rd, some of them already named in this account. In accordance with the 119th's commander, Domingo Belmonte Clarés, I listened to the envoys who set out the ghastly position of their unit and the harassment visited upon them.

We offered them all our moral support and also, if the need arose, our material



assistance and we agreed to offer a haven within our Brigade's jurisdiction to those comrades from the 153rd whose freedom or personal safety was in jeopardy. This protection we extended despite pressures and threats from the military commanders of the 11th Army Corps. And through our clandestine divisional liaison and defence organisation, the 'Durruti Cultural Group', we made approaches to the higher committees of the CNT and the FAI, conveying to them our firm resolve to harbour our maltreated comrades and in so doing to resort to force of arms should no other remedy be available.

Testimony to this attitude is the document below, taken from the memorandum and serving as the basis for our narrative:

**'THE "DURRUTI CULTURAL GROUP" AND THE ANARCHIST GROUP OF THE 26th DIVISION TO THE CNT.**

Dear comrades,

This present communication has been prompted by the grave irregularities occurring in some units of our army where, to quite an extent, there are comrades who are subject to officers inimical to anarchism and to the CNT.

Comrades' natural reluctance to conform to military discipline is not the issue here. That sort of adaptation has been implemented on the front more effectively than the political adaptation in the rearguard.

The case of the 153rd Mixed Brigade is the closest to us in that the Brigade belongs to the same Army Corps. The despotism of its officers (drawn from the worst elements), the shameless activity of the communists, has in this instance gone to an intolerable extreme. It is a matter of life or death for many comrades, active militants of our movement. The comrades from that great unit have put their complaints to the organisation...

The latest reports in our possession, the result of direct liaison maintained between those comrades and these groups, could not be more serious. So extreme has the tension become that everything augurs a conflict of which the consequences would fall upon the organisation as a whole.

In view of this, the signs point to the existence of a conspiracy against the Confederation and against anarchism to exterminate both of these. The comrades of the 153rd are ready to sell their lives dearly as befits the manly spirit of our militants.

The cause of the comrades from the 153rd Brigade is our cause: the cause of libertarians from the 26th Division. We must warn you that the blood brotherhood of anarchists cannot bear the crimes which Lenin's bastard offspring try to perpetrate, and so we serve notice of the possibility that our patience will be exhausted should that which needs to be prevented in the interests of everyone in fact befall our comrades from the 153rd.

The object of this document is to notify you of the probable and very serious outcomes and the logical consequences of these, which we all, at the front and in the rear, have a sacred duty to prevent at all costs, before it is too late.

We remain yours, in the service of the libertarian cause,  
26th Division. In the field, 17 October 1938.'

Two reports signed by an officer of the Executive Committee of the Libertarian Movement of Catalonia (22 and 24 November) can serve as tailpiece to our narrative. In them there is notification, firstly, of the dismissal and jailing of the Commander and Commissar of the 153rd Brigade on charges of blatant corruption. But the cure was worse than the disease. To replace them, two new individuals from the 'party' were sent in, two Captains, to take over as Brigade Commander and Chief of Staff respectively. They also sent in, as Commissar, a socialist (Rigabert) 'who, it seems', the report notes, 'was not held in very high regard at Division and of whom "party" personnel took a dim view.'

The first pair appointed immediately spared no effort to remove from office what few adversaries still remained in such posts, and to assign loyal elements to fill the

vacancies thus created. They ousted the unconfirmed officers who did not enjoy their political trust. These were dispatched to the battalions.

Against this backdrop came the death of that socialist Commissar, who turned up in a canal, riddled with bullets. Was this murder part of a premeditated plan of provocation? Or was it an error in execution by possible vengeance-seekers? Both hypotheses can be argued. The truth is that this incident triggered a ferocious crackdown on the Brigade's libertarians, in which even the inquisitorial machinery of the SIM participated. There were countless arrests of commanders, officers and troops and those arrested included Commander Leal.

The 24 November report states:

'Following the death of the commissar and the arrests of comrades who held the posts of commanders and officers, the task that we set ourselves was to curtail the impact of the crackdown in the Brigade, trying to fill the minds of those left behind with the required tranquillity so as to prevent things continuing along the course embarked upon, with the manifest damage that was being done to the Brigade, the comrades and the anti-fascist cause.'

The officer of the Executive Committee of Catalonia, and the vice-secretary of the Defence Section of the CNT National Committee used their powers of persuasion on the acting commanders of the 153rd and with its commanders, officers and troops:

'in an effort to calm the tempers (of the latter) given that this Battalion (No. 2) was the one most directly affected, since the conduct of Commandant Leal, whether as commander or as comrade, was admirable...'

Once favourable undertakings had been obtained, negotiations were entered into to secure the appointment of a CNT commissar to the Brigade, one who would have the moral stature needed to tackle such a delicate situation with success. This solution was put to the Headquarters of the Army Group and there the name of Josep Mateu Cusidó came up. The Commissar-General issued an order that the appointment would be made the next day. The informant went on to say:

'I returned to Barcelona confident that I had achieved something of benefit to the Brigade, its members and the organisation. I delivered a report to that effect to the latest meeting of the Executive Committee.'

But then an improbable situation came about. Mateu, expected to arrive at the Brigade at any moment, failed to show up. An explanation was sought from the Commissar-General (Gil Roldán) and the latter turned to Mantecón, Commissar with the 11th Army Corps, to give him 'a categorical order that, the next day, without fail, Mateu Cusidó was to take charge of the Brigade.' It was later formally reported that this order had been carried out, which was untrue. And so, over several days thereafter, reality gave the lie to all of the promises. The contest between the Commissar-General and his subordinate, Mantecón, was finally resolved in the latter's favour: Mateu was not to take over at the 153rd. The author of the report eventually concedes that the 30th Division's Commissar Mantecón and army commander Galán bear the responsibility for the collapse of the deal. The report concludes:

'The current position of the Brigade is as abnormal as can be. Of all the officers it had, only two remain: all the rest have been posted to other brigades and divisions and "party" commanders, officers and commissars have been brought in to take their place.

I must register the despair prevailing among the soldiers, for they do not see that either their liberty or their lives are guaranteed. This evil must be remedied as a matter of urgency. Further delaying before tackling this problem would carry grave dangers.'

Serious military developments which were proceeding apace at the time drew a pious veil over the tragic lot of the 153rd Brigade. The communists were scarcely to have time to enjoy their latest conquest.

▼ Street posters



## Chapter Ten: The Terror in the Rearguard

On 15 August 1937, at the height of the pro-communist Negrín-Prieto government crackdown on the POUM, the Libertarian Movement, the Council of Aragón and its collectives, a decree was issued establishing the Military Investigation Service, better known by its chilling acronym, the SIM. The implications of the decree went unnoticed by many, possibly even by the person who promulgated it. In wartime there is nothing more natural than activation of a counter-espionage military agency especially when there had been such instances of treachery as the handing-over of the plans for the defence of Bilbao. But no one dreamed that a counter-espionage agency could so promptly degenerate into a mighty political tool of one party for use against the rest.

Nonetheless, this was the case with the SIM which turned from a government agency into the Spanish subsidiary of the Soviet GPU. For it is beyond question that the initiative originated with the 'Russian advisors.'

By a curious paradox, the SIM was established under a decree by the Defence Minister, Prieto, who, for all his tortuous political opportunism, was not a devotee of the communists' watchwords.

In time of war or revolution, all states suffer from counter-revolutionary insomnia and this has always impelled them to establish police systems endowed with exceptional powers. The powers awarded to the SIM, and the ones which it arrogated to itself, are no exceptions to this rule. Its agents came to enjoy power to arrest any serviceman or civilian, however elevated his rank, with scarcely a formality. Services of this sort were strictly secret.

The same thing happened with the SIM as with the Commissariat which, created to raise troops' morale and offer psychological comfort to the soldier, automatically degenerated into a weapon for bullying and political terror. Like the Commissariat, the SIM too was of Soviet manufacture. The PCE managed to derive immense profit from it. This is inexplicable, unless one remembers that this party was privy to the secret mission assigned to such a mysterious agency.

Once the agency was in existence, communist militants were instructed to capture control of it. This plan was carried out; hence the pernicious evolution of the SIM from the earliest stages of its operation. It was visibly jettisoning its external function in favour of concentration on its internal one.

By the end of 1938, a dense police network embraced the totality of the battalions right up to the Army Corps. It batted on also to the parties and trade union organisations and their best-known militants. The SIM monitored their slightest movements. Its agents enjoyed tremendous autonomy of action and operated on a plane higher than current policy. It had immense funding and its cruel methods grew as time went by.

Ostensibly, the SIM was answerable to the Defence Ministry: in practice, it served the PCE, for it was the 'party' which supplied its cadres. To this end it relied upon newcomers, most of them ambitious, who were devoid of even the most elementary training. A party which expanded under the star of the war, a party without tradition and without militants of stature had nothing else to offer. One curious thing about which we may be certain is that the SIM boss in the 119th Brigade (26th Division) was scarcely 19 years old. A short time before his official appointment, he had joined the unit as a simple recruit from the reinforcements mobilised in 1938. From a mere rifleman with one of the companies of the 3rd Battalion, he was abruptly hoisted into such an elevated position, equivalent and to all intents superior to the position of Brigade Commander.

The mentality that such fortune hunters brought with them inevitably left a mark of unmistakable incompetence and sadism on an institution that many of them believed was destined for much greater things. In most instances, the SIM concentrated on the political enemy in preference to the fascist enemy.

From the military viewpoint, it had established jurisdictions which corresponded to the demarcations of the armies. There was a visible agent in the headquarters. This agent personally appointed his secret collaborators and these operated in the smaller units and services. These agents secretly reported back to the visible boss and reported on the commanders, officers and men whose activities they had been instructed to monitor. Surveillance was close and included investigation of the military and political background of the person under surveillance. In the event of his being suspect, his conversations were spied upon and his correspondence gone over with a fine-tooth comb. Likewise a check was kept on his acquaintances and if need be he was arrested without formality or warrant. In units commanded by communist officers physical elimination was arranged with equal alacrity.

Similar methods were employed in the rearguard. In government offices and in certain ministries, secret agents, supervised by a visible agent, performed their duties as civil servants, the best cover to accomplish their mission. And such agents were not always recruited from among persons sympathetic to anti-fascism, but rather, on many occasions, individuals of dubious antecedents were used and, in the final analysis, it was they who showed greatest diligence in their work. The object of this was productivity: a dangerous game, despite all the precautions, for it was demonstrable later on, when the war was over, that the internal workings of the SIM were better known to the Francoists than to the anti-Francoists themselves, many of whom suffered its cruelty. The Francoists have been able to demonstrate that, especially in the latter half of 1938, the SIM was largely 'packed' with their people. This was a perfectly understandable phenomenon, for, from the spring of that year onwards, after the loss of Teruel and in the wake of the Aragón disaster, the outcome of the war was no longer a secret for many people, especially those who had never harboured any readiness to make sacrifices. Bureaucratic and police circles in the rearguard, where they were able to shirk the thankless task of military service, were teeming with such people. And those who could not hope to save their miserable lives by escaping abroad — at the cost of their gold — had looked ahead and anticipated possible defeat by affording the enemy some much-coveted services.

In preceding chapters, we have already alluded to the communist chekas. These chekas and the SIM came to be one and the same. Faithful to our task of historical narration, we now face the sad task of expanding upon this dismal chapter.

Undoubtedly, the SIM was set up to provide a veneer of juridical legality, albeit beyond the margins of the machinery of justice, for the criminal intentions of the PCE. The secret nature of counter-espionage activities supplied the SIM's inventors and high-ranking officials with the coveted *carte blanche* that enabled them to act without a thought for the consequences. The rules laid down for the SIM by the decree of 5 August were too broad. There was, anyway, an internal regulation, top secret and unknown even to many of the agents themselves.

The SIM was governed by a Supreme Headquarters to which the following Sections were answerable: first, Foreign Affairs; second, Air Force; third, Land Forces; fourth, Navy; fifth, Public Works; sixth, Armaments; seventh, Economic Affairs; eighth, Justice; ninth, Transport and Communications; tenth, Public Instruction and Entertainment; eleventh, Political Parties and Trade Union Organisations; twelfth, Civilian Population; and thirteenth, Special Brigade.

The SIM divided up the loyalist zone into several precincts overseen by Supreme Headquarters. Each precinct was subdivided into the following three sectors. The Supreme Commander was surrounded by numerous special secretaries such as:

The general secretary, with his own bureaucratic staff, charged with overseeing general registration, records, correspondence, etc.

A chief of technical services in charge of the 13 branches.

Thirteen section chiefs. Each one handling his respective section in his precinct.

A head of internal services: funds, provisions, personnel, material and transportation.

A head of legal services: prisons, tribunals, detainees, etc.

Each section was sub-divided in turn into various offices: ciphers, ordnance survey, photography, radio etc. The title 'ordnance survey' disguised the business of falsifying passports from every country in order to equip agents operating abroad and also within the national borders, inside parties and organisations.

Although the Defence Minister was empowered to appoint and dismiss agents, the internal regulations introduced in September 1938 transferred this power to the Supreme Commander of the SIM.

One of the most ominous sections was Section 13! It had charge of the arrest, interrogation and maltreatment of detainees. For accuracy's sake, it needs to be placed on record that the SIM rendered some remarkable services to the anti-fascist cause, and that on occasions it dismantled Fifth Column organisations. For instance, at the start of 1938 it uncovered the lists of the members and leaders of the Falange Española operating in Catalonia. The arrests numbered 3,500. But it needs to be pointed out that the success of the operation was made possible by the use of torture. And the same methods were also employed on anti-fascists who incurred the wrath of the SIM's putative fathers. In every instance, the terror and the tortures inflicted upon defenceless men are a repugnant and damnable monstrosity.

On other occasions, double agents planted in the agency aborted important operations. Such fascist agents abetted the escape from a labour camp of Rafael Sánchez Mazas who was the teacher of José Antonio Primo de Rivera and spiritual father of the Falange Española.<sup>1</sup> When Mazas had been arrested, the SIM sought to rebuild its damaged prestige by making a public announcement of its coup. Such publicity saved the prisoner's life for he had to be brought for trial in the regular way. And since the government had, for diplomatic purposes, ordered an end to shootings, Sánchez Mazas was sentenced to a period of internment in a labour camp. But as we shall see, the baneful conduct of the agency had triggered a wave of protests abroad.

By mid 1938, the SIM had ceased to be an adjunct of the Defence Ministry for all practical purposes and became the grand inquisitor in the service of the PCE. Its spying activity inside the ranks of anti-fascist organisations and parties was all pervasive. It had immediate notification of the accords and proposals of these bodies and, through it, so did the PCE's Politburo. And although on occasions the anarchists, socialists and republicans made protests, these were promptly dismissed on the pretext of not stirring up internal clashes which might have grave international repercussions. Be that as it may, there was no way of preventing such shameful actions coming to the notice of democratic governments through their diplomatic representatives and leading to the resultant furore.

So the government resolved to disband the sinister Special Brigade whose fame had carried beyond Spain's borders. And a brand new 'Sixth Section' was set up. This, again under cover of counter-espionage, took over — and how! — from the disbanded Special Brigade whose members retained their posts.

To get some idea of the PCE's influence in the SIM, we need only remember that a high percentage of its officers and agents were 'party' members. The Supreme Commander, together with his secretaries and service chiefs and staff, were under the control of Stalin's party. Communist agents dominated the most important demarcations. Many army officers, who had distinguished themselves on the fronts or in the officer training schools paid with their lives for the crime of having declined the party card. Most of these killings were explained as the victims' having attempted to defect to the enemy. The whole affair was laid to rest in the clandestine burial grounds.

The SIM was also employed as a tool in political frame-ups. Agents would probe the private lives of persons slated for recruitment or neutralisation. If the investigation turned up any peccadillo that reflected upon the morals of the target, he was threatened with public exposure unless he could see his way clear to serving certain interests. The SIM also took care to probe state secrets in the realms of diplomacy, industry and

1. This was written prior to the publication of Javier Cercas's outstanding novel *Soldados de Salamina* (Barcelona, 2001; in English as *Soldiers of Salamis*, London, 2003), which places the escape by Sánchez Mazas in a rather different context.

armaments. The sole beneficiary of this sort of activity was the Soviet state.

To begin with, the *chekas* of the SIM were makeshift cells, filthy, damp and cold, with poor ventilation. Torture was routine for all that. It consisted of freezing or scalding showers, beatings with rubber whips, mock firing squads or the insertion of wood splinters under the fingernails of prisoners.

These methods were introduced scientifically by Soviet advisors. Purpose-built cells were very cramped, painted inside in very bright colours and paved with sharp cobblestones. Detainees remained standing up in these cells, which were permanently lit by powerful red or green lights. Other cells were more tomb-like, and built on asymmetrical lines. In order to remain upright, the prisoners had to strain every nerve and muscle. Here the most utter darkness prevailed and a loud metallic noise produced by a sort of bell constantly droned through the prisoner's brain.

Interrogations took place in artistically decorated rooms and the questions asked deliberately or snappily, in tones of authority or sarcasm. Such studied contrasts led to the moral and physical crushing of the victim. For hard cases there was always the 'freezer room', the 'noise box' or the 'electric chair'. The first of these was a cell some two metres high and spherical. It was flooded with very icy water. A person submerged there for hour after hour had within reach an electric bell for when he was ready to talk to the satisfaction of his tormentors. His statement was then taken from him while he remained immersed.

The 'noise box' was a sort of low, and extremely cramped wardrobe. Prisoners hermetically sealed inside were subjected to an infernal racket of alarms and bells which attacked the nervous system. As for the 'electric chair' the only difference between this and the one used against condemned men in the United States was that it did not actually kill.

And the SIM boasted its own concentration camps. The regime in these punishment camps was brutal: the food was meagre and inadequate, and the work not only hard labour but exhausting. Internees were banned from receiving visitors from the outside world. And in anticipation of possible escapes, or because of those which had already occurred, the prisoners were split up into five man squads. If any of the five escaped, the remainder of the squad suffered the consequences. Punishment took the form of shooting the remaining four members of the squad. In these conditions, every prisoner was his colleagues' closest guard.

Let us reiterate that these punishments were utilised against fascist prisoners and anti-fascist prisoners without distinction, against Falangists from the Fifth Column and militants of the POUM and the Libertarian Movement. And let us repeat that, no matter whom the victim, we condemn them in every single instance.

We could illustrate the foregoing with a series of impressive accounts drawn from our archives and from eye witnesses who suffered ghastly torments in the clutches of the new Spanish Inquisition set up by communism. Restrictions on space preclude our transcribing these chilling documents. So we shall confine ourselves to reprinting a report on the sinister dungeon which operated in Valencia in the former Convent of the Sisters of Santa Ursula. The nunnery was commandeered on 19 July by the PCE and later placed at the disposal of the notorious Special Brigade of the SIM, as one of its many *chekas*.

Without further ado, let us move on to the aforementioned report which is dated October 1937:

'The police methods used in Santa Ursula by the Special Brigade are identical to those currently in use in Italy, Germany and Russia. They are a synthesis of the tortures of the Inquisition to which every modern refinement has been added,

Many of those detained were detained for the simple offence of being foreigners, especially Germans and Italians who could not call upon any consular assistance. Not that this means that all Santa Ursula prisoners were innocent victims. No. There were real fascists, self-confessed fascists who never made any secret of their ideology. But, perhaps because of their honesty, these were never of any interest to the police from the Special Brigade.

These were obsessed with espionage and sought to see a spy in every foreigner, especially the Germans and Italians, even if these had unblemished and brilliant records of revolutionary activity behind them. The interrogations were never prompted by hard and fast evidence or suspicions.

The intention in using these methods was to extract information about the political work of some revolutionaries who were outside of the Stalinist Third International, especially those from oppositionist circles, or industrial secrets and formulae from peaceable engineers or petit bourgeois industrialists.

Foreign pilots who had been fighting in Spain from day one on the side of republican and revolutionary Spain, who could have boasted more than anyone of heroics and sacrifices, but who had made so bold as to question the efficiency of Russian aviators, were transformed overnight into spies and were shamefully imprisoned in Santa Ursula. Suppliers of aircraft, weaponry and other war materials, sent by reputable firms abroad to the lawful government, and possible competitors of the USSR, were metamorphosed into spies and immured in the same den.

Engineers and technicians from war industries, as well as military experts put to the test in the 1914-18 war and in other campaigns, followed the same path as the above. The Stalinists wanted no rivals of any sort. They sought an absolute monopoly in every field, to influence the overall policy of the country. They even went so far as to do away with their competitors physically. The Special Brigade had that repugnant and, at the same time, counter-revolutionary brief.

Generally the defence of the accused was determined by his character and temperament. Some refused to answer; others replied with insults and impudence. A highly concentrated hatred percolated through every answer, even the most cordial ones. The commissar in charge of interrogation set about his task with a cynical and criminal expertise. If the nerves of the accused so let him down and he was going where the policeman wanted him to go, that is to say, was accusing himself, everything went fine. But if the detainee offered resistance, the friendly manner gave way to refined inquisition, comparable only to the methods employed in the concentration camps in Germany and Italy.

Whenever the accused dug in his heels against the monstrosity of the charges and even made so bold as to leap to his own defence, the commissar would press a red button on his desk, setting off an electric bell outside the office and in would come his "assistants". Blows were delivered from sharp-edged wooden clubs. The edges bit into the skin, sometimes leaving numerous splinters stuck in the flesh. Iron bars lagged with cloth were also in common use. The exercise continued until the victim collapsed, having lost consciousness. If he did not quickly regain consciousness, his body was doused with pails of iced water. If he refused to admit guilt, the clubbing resumed. And if the accused refused to bend, the tortures turned bestial. He would be kicked, shoved against the wall and the most refined methods deployed against him...

Many were eventually broken down and signed all sorts of documents, acknowledging themselves to be fascists and highly dangerous spies. Once guilt had been confessed, they were left to rot in the dungeons of Santa Ursula. These were the convalescent wards. Later, once bloody wounds had healed over, they were returned to the collective dormitories and to the society of other prisoners.

The wounds left deep scars which would hardly ever fade. Some "convalescents" were unable to sit or lie down for several days because of the pain. Others displayed beneath their torn clothing enormous weals, body parts from which skin had been torn and even areas where the absence of flesh meant that the whitish pallor of the bones was visible. In short, men who prior to arrest had been strong men in the best of health, ended up assailed by frequent haemorrhaging of the lungs.

Many accused lacked the physical and moral strength to stand up to interrogation sessions, which were repeated five or six times, as often as necessary. They put their signatures to whatever was put before them, without even reading it. Later, when presented with the papers they had signed, the tragic reality became plain to them. They were doomed. By then it was too late. The Ministers of War and of the Interior



had the evidence and hand-written confessions before them.

A congratulatory *communiqué* expressed the authorities' gratitude to the active, tireless commissars. And a handful of wretches, cast as spies by the GPU, paid with their lives for their having belonged to a communist opposition or having possessed technical and industrial know-how capable of leaving the prestige of Stalinist production in the shade.

But the police activity of agents acting on GPU orders did not stop there. They had even more refined methods. In addition to tortures inflicted in the building which we have just outlined, in addition to the clubbings and maltreatment doled out in the commissariat at the Interior Ministry located in the Plaza de Bailén, which handled petty offences and prisoners of Spanish nationality, in addition to the mock executions which were commonplace and which generally held on the outskirts of the city, with prisoners being stood up against a wall and threatened at gun-point in order to force compromising statements from them, there were methods the very recollection of which started a thrill of terror.

Santa Ursula, the complement to police stations where interrogations took place, was a Machiavellian compendium of every conceivable torture. Entire volumes might be filled with details of the torment and torture. In the cellars of the one time convent there was a vault formerly utilised as a burial place for the nuns. The walls were honeycombed with the dark recesses of burial niches. There must have been around 40 corpses there, thoroughly desiccated.

When the PCE requisitioned the premises after July 1936, some peasants performed the hygienic task of removing the corpses by night to take them away for interment. These cadavers, in an advanced state of decomposition, gave off an unbearable stench. The peasants' task could not have been more thankless and was left only half done.

There were bones left in every cranny and half-rotted corpses strewn here and there. It was in this vault that detainees were locked up, semi-naked and stripped of underpants. There was no light. The damp, foetid air smelled of death, of rotting flesh. In the midst of the gloom, the decomposing flesh gave off a phosphorescent glow. And monstrous rats, the uncontested "lords" of this "paradise" scurried about, ignoring the corpses and the prisoners.

The average stay in the vault lasted 24 hours. The half-naked prisoners had time to muse upon the commissar's suggestions. Some went to pieces upon entering the vault. Such was the initial impression: but nobody bothered to fetch them out. They remained there stretched out among the decomposing corpses. Other, more spirited prisoners managed after a few moments to defend themselves from the armies of rats. They cleaned out the niches and, crawling inside them, patiently waited for life to return.

When legs went numb from the damp and the lack of movement, there was no way to take a stroll and get the circulation going again. And no feeling of repugnance compares to that caused by treading on the hand or leg of a dead body. Other prisoners were shut up in punishment cells used in the good old convent days to chastise nuns who infringed the convent regulations for hours at a time. Whole months were spent in these cells. They were stone tombs averaging 1.2 metres across by 1.2 long and 2 metres in height. With nobody to talk to, no daylight, no artificial light, no mattress, no blankets, scarcely any air, the wretched inmates of the cells were obliged to sit and lie down on the damp, hard and cold stone flooring. They were allowed to step outside for a few moments only to answer the call of nature. After a fortnight spent in this tomb, the prisoners resembled living corpses. Their comrades thought they were seeing wraiths on their way to perform their necessary functions. When they were returned to the collective dormitories, these creatures were mere shadows of their old selves. They bore within them the seed of incurable illnesses and their joints were hideously gnarled as a result of rheumatism.

In one room specially set aside for torture there was a quite large press, the upper plate of which was in the shape of a swastika. The intention behind this was to lampoon fascism. What irony! The wretched prisoner was placed between the two plates and the screw was given a turn. Slowly the Hitlerian swastika closed on his

chest. As the pressure increased, his ribs, lungs and heart were wholly immobilised. The future outcome we already know. The lungs are much too delicate organs.

Other playthings of which much use was made were the "cupboards". These came in two sorts. Some were 1.8 or 2 metres high, others 1.25 metres. In the former one could stand up: in the latter type, one was forced to squat. Some prisoners spent whole weeks shut up inside "cupboards" of the latter variety. Upon emerging, they stayed as stiff as corpses. Only several days later did they recover the use of their legs which were left completely swollen from top to bottom for weeks and weeks.

Prisoners were shut up in the tall or low cupboards according to the whim of the commissar. There was one cynical and cruel captain who was wont to invite them to step inside the cupboard in the politest fashion, amid guffaws from the other agents. One poor French woman, about 40 years old, a touch overweight, was put into one such cupboard and held in position by several loops of rope, since the door could not otherwise be closed, thereby squashing her flesh. A Belgian serving with the International Brigade, incapacitated at the front and sent for hospital treatment, was unfortunate enough to have had somewhat too much to drink. He was arrested, and agents who had never seen front-line service thrust him inside the cupboard. Outraged, in a wholly justified protest, he smashed the instrument of torture. As punishment, he was shut up in the little cupboard for a period of four days. There are dozens of similar cases.

Another, no less criminal torment involved the crates, large boxes measuring over one metre square and in the top of which a hole had been made for the head to stick through. Into these crates prisoners were thrust for weeks on end. They could neither stand nor yet sit down. One would be hard pressed to devise a more uncomfortable position. Unable to get their hands outside the crate, they needed the help of the police if they were to eat. Many a time these policemen amused themselves with these human heads by denying them food, holding the spoon out then snatching it away and leaving them stupidly open-mouthed.

Others were bound by the wrists to a ring fixed to a wall some two metres from the ground level. But the prisoner had a sort of ditch a little over a metre across between him and the wall. In the early hours this punishment was unbearable, but as weariness overtook one, and as the body grew exhausted one tended to collapse into the ditch. How many wretches, utterly spent and losing their foothold, were left for whole hours dangling from the ring, fainting from the agony of it all! We could detail dozens, hundreds of such cases...

In the much-quoted report from the FAI Peninsular Committee to the National Plenum of the Regional Committees of the Libertarian Movement in October 1938, an outline is given of the evolution of the public order agency. According to this report, to begin with, a National Security Council, with direct representation of all anti-fascist forces, had been set up. Once this monitoring body had been established, the PCE promptly launched into a propaganda drive and as soon as a sufficient number of party cards had been handed out in the General Directorate, it really went to town. The first step was to install Colonel Ortega as the Director-General of Security and immediately it turned upon the Council until its disbandment was achieved, whereupon the General Directorate became a party fief. Portraits of Lenin, Stalin and other notables from the communist pantheon were hung in prominent positions on corridors and offices. An office was even set aside for recruitment and for Red Aid (*Socorro Rojo*) collections and the latter agency was re-christened with the exotic name of 'Sonia'. Next came a 'swap' between the official police set-up and the chekas. Former agents whose conduct prior to 19 July still awaited screening and approval were placed in the staff complement and as a result it was rare, when Fifth Column agencies were accidentally turned up, for these not-yet-purged elements not to feature among those implicated.

A reverse selection procedure had been adopted, and to make the selection all agents included in the draft were mobilised, excepting, of course those whom their officers regarded as indispensable. 'So began the battle', the report comments, 'against those

new agents finished by the organisations and parties, above all, the ones placed by the Libertarian Movement.' The officers mentioned earlier were the likes of Ortega, Burillo, Sala, José Cazorla, etc.

The staff at the chekas interfered in the resolution of political disputes: in the murder of POUM leader Andreu Nin, the storming of the press offices of the caballeristas, *Adelante* and *La Correspondencia* and also, as we have seen, in the cabinet crisis of 15 August 1938.

In the CNT-UGT pact, there had been provision for the establishment of a Public Order Commissariat, but this was never put into effect, even though the National Committee of the Popular Front espoused the scheme as its own. Nor did the government deign to pay any heed to the plan put to it by the Libertarian Movement for the establishment of a foreign intelligence service, another one in the Francoist rearguard, one to deal with guerrilla operations and finally a scheme for subversion to be undertaken in Morocco and designed to dry up one of the enemy's chief sources of mercenary cannon fodder.

*A propos* of the SIM, the report noted:

'Its performance at home is so notorious that we shall refrain from a detailed report of its excesses. The unjustified arrests, house raids in search for booty, the murders of fascist individuals, perpetrated for squalid motives and those of anti-fascist personnel, would occupy too much space for us to submit them for your consideration at this point. Instead, when it comes to harassing groups unacceptable to a certain party, there has been no hesitation in the perpetration of abuses which have brought us dishonour in the watchful eyes of fraternal groups abroad. Foreign subjects who have come here on fraternal business have been arrested and molested and the outside world has been presented with such an impression of runaway terror that very considerable sympathy and support have been alienated from us.'

In the Libertarian Movement's archives, alongside the documents we have been summarising, there could not but have appeared a dense dossier on the feats of the SIM and its chekas. We shall refer to some of the papers, bearing different dates and included in this dossier. They are confidential reports to the FAI Peninsular Committee. The first of them, dated 26 April 1938, speaks of the Justice Minister (González Peña) being unable to disguise his resentment 'at a certain agency's or institution's ignoring of the courts of justice', and of 'the SIM being his greatest worry', in that it detains persons found not guilty and even pardoned individuals, and of special courts being set up 'like the one apparently operating in Montjuïc outside of the law'. This same malaise was manifested in the Judiciary and in the Army Legal Corps, some of whose members were subjected to harassment and persecution.

Another report, dated 24 May, comments that 'three weeks ago, the SIM Commander, Uribarri (a former Civil Guard) left on a foreign trip along with three or four of his agents.' The apparent purpose of the trip was to conduct a certain operation 'personally'. Uribarri left Spain, taking with him several million pesetas' worth of jewels stolen during searches and with a homemade passport. The Spanish Consul in Marseilles was careful to issue the runaways with a current passport. Later on, the Prosecutor of the Republic tabled charges against the commander for theft and murder, and his extradition would be a possibility. The same report then went on to note that 'the Service has a budget of 22 million pesetas a year, which are used whimsically and in Madrid alone the SIM has some 6,000 agents in its service.' The name of Díaz Tendero was bandied around as a possible replacement for the runaway commander, 'but party interests intervened, and now the names of Giménez Sembrador, Castillo, Prat, Burillo and others were being mooted.' The acting Sub-Commander was Ordóñez.

Another report, dated 30 May, stated that the SIM 'is still in complete disarray', and that each ministry retained a police squad at the personal disposal of the minister concerned, 'for his own political intelligence. That Díaz Baza, who had been the SIM's first ever chief along with Sallagués, his lieutenant, had invested the Service with 'an

approach different from the aims expected and which our movement needed.' The same course was later followed by Uribarri, who stepped up the cases of looting and murder which had already been occurring. The report goes on to point out that the government had ordered the arrest of Uribarri, but that upon his lieutenant, Ruiz's getting to hear of this, he had tipped off his boss, 'and they had absconded together'. The government had sought and given the go-ahead for Uribarri's extradition and although he had been tracked down, the extradition application failed. At that time, the position of the chief of the SIM was held by Garcés on an interim basis.

Another report of 13 June, said that 'SIM agents brag of having executed Uribarri in France and this is true as far as the result is concerned, but not with regard to method.'

In the 22 June report it is noted, among other things, that SIM agents had been guaranteed a bonus of 30 per cent of the sale value of jewels which they seized, 'which ensures that this sort of operation commands their attention above all others.'

There follows a memo from the CNT's National Co-ordination Section (25 July) which stated, word for word:

'As we indicated in a preceding memo, the SIM chief (Garcés) has asked us to supply a comrade to assist in the Service's technical consultancy work. Yesterday he was presented with comrade Pedro Campón who had been so designated. On the occasion of this introductory visit, Garcés detailed the object of his request for somebody from our organisation for technical consultancy purposes. From what was actually said by him, and from what may logically be deduced from that, we can infer the following.

On the grounds of his alleged experience and exceptional qualifications, the SIM is having a Russian (name unknown to us) foisted upon it to oversee its specific tasks. With an eye to thwarting the expansionist policy pursued by these people on every side, Garcés, perhaps acting on orders from the Under-Secretary of the Interior, Méndez, to whom he is answerable on every count, wants to hem him in with a couple of colleagues who can keep his totalitarianism in check and limit his exclusivist and egocentric approach to the work in hand, thereby undermining his influence.

Our comrade is not to figure in the SIM as an official or formal delegate from the CNT, but simply and solely as a technical collaborator. In addition to him, and on the same basis, there will be a socialist. Garcés indicated to us that in order to avoid arousing the Russian's suspicions, in that he apparently rejects CNT collaboration, it might be as well if comrade Campón were to join the SIM on the recommendation of some republican party. He clearly indicated to us that Moscow's sway is so strong that the likes of Garcés have to resort to this sort of deception in order to get around it.

If his position in the office of the chief of the SIM were firmer, he would enforce his own rules: otherwise it shows that he is overwhelmed by outside influences. In essence: our comrade will be known only to Garcés as a delegate from the CNT and for official purposes will be merely an official, who as a technician, will work in a section charged with issuing directives for the services to act upon, the section being headed by the Russian.'

The FAI Peninsular Committee report to the October plenum of the Libertarian Movement is clear as to the outcome of this CNT co-operation within the SIM when it states:

'But these good omens were neither continued nor confirmed. The agents they sought from us were to be in humiliating circumstances, for they were not admitted as permanent staff and their work was confined to investigation of factories and workshops: they represented mere collaborators of the SIM and, in any case, were being admitted only in a trickle. We sought leadership positions in those matters for which our conspiratorial capabilities, the qualifications of some comrades and the importance of our movement equipped us. But the SIM Directorate sought to cut down our contribution to secondary posts with a role that might be described as that of "narks", and this prompted a break-down in our relations with the SIM.'

In the dossier under examination, there is another memo from the National Coordination Section. And there it says that on 26 July Spain's consul in Bayonne together with SIM agent Ramiro Puch had crossed the frontier at 3.30pm, in a car with Spanish licence plates, 'placing themselves, through the rebel border controller, Juan Rajula, at Franco's disposal'.

And, to finish with the document we are summarising, here is another memo from that same Coordination Section, dated 16 December, alleging that:

'the statement released by SIM to the press has prompted pointed comment in political circles, all of them remarking on the clumsiness with which it has been drafted. Under the pompous headline of "A vast espionage network uncovered", a series of operations unconnected in substance or timing, in that some of the instances quoted are long since history, is presented as something of contemporary relevance.'

Some saw the object as being to prove the value of the SIM, so as to prevent the call-up of certain of its agents for active service: others argued that it was a desperate attempt to fend off the constant and persistent criticism which, based upon the SIM's own aberrations, had made it the focus of public attention.

SIM misdeeds, and the crimes of the chekas, provoked lively indignation in political, liberal and foreign intellectual circles not suffering from the contagion of Stalinism, and especially on account of the repression directed against the POUM, commissions began to arrive in Spain for the purpose of establishing the truth of the allegations made against the SIM or against the POUM. One such commission, made up of persons of some prestige, arrived in Spain in August 1937. It reported to a certain committee which had been formed in Paris. The commission had talks with the government and with representatives from the labour organisations and political parties.

Let us see how it was received by the official and formal newspapers of the PCE:

'The likes of Brockway, Maxton and Sam Baron are all traitors to the proletariat's cause. They are, in a word, agents of fascism.'<sup>2</sup>

'Foreign Trotskyists who, like the ones in Spain, take their orders from the Gestapo, have formed a so-called Committee for Defence of Anti-Fascists and Revolutionaries in Spain, which operates from Paris and which has had the effrontery to apply to the newspapers and antifascist organisations of Spain, requesting their support for its dark intentions to hamper the operation of Spanish popular justice.'<sup>3</sup>

It is now time for us to concern ourselves with the Nin case, working on the basis of information made public recently (in 1953).

Andreu Nin had belonged to the CNT and held important posts in it during the phase of its activity which the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera brought to a violent close. When the revolution occurred in Russia and Profintern was set up by the Bolshevik Party, Nin, along with a fair number of labour militants of the day, was seduced by the revolutionary promises of the new Moscow dictatorship which had donned the 'proletarian' disguise.

In Chapter One of this book, we saw Nin and Maurín having themselves appointed CNT delegates and leaving for Russia with these credentials. The CNT disowned the delegation. Nin did not return to Spain until after the emergence of the Trotskyist phenomenon inside the ranks of the Russian Communist Party. With Lenin dead, and Trotsky expelled from the USSR, Nin made no secret of his sympathies with Trotsky's teachings and he in turn was expelled from the 'Soviet Paradise'. He came back to Spain when the Republic was proclaimed, and promptly organised an anti-Stalinist faction, before joining with Maurín, against the wishes of Trotsky, to form the POUM, whose press organ was *La Batalla*.

2. *Mundo Obrero*, 21 August 1937.

3. *Mundo Obrero*, 27 August 1937

At the time of the outbreak of the revolt of 19 July, Maurin was stranded in enemy territory, where he remained imprisoned until after the war. He later left Spain and emigrated to the United States. So, during the civil war, Nin was politically and intellectually the most representative figure of the Spanish communist opposition movement against Stalin's policies.

The existence of opposition nuclei always rankled with Moscow. In Stalinist invective, all such nuclei were lumped together under the common heading of 'Trotskyists in the hire of fascism'. And we have seen that the PCE availed of the collapse of the Largo Caballero government, a collapse that it contrived, to rid itself of a despised rival, the POUM. But the suppression pure and simple of this party was not enough. It had to be demonstrated by fair means or foul that the main leaders of the POUM were enemies of the people and of the world's proletariat: that they were fascist agents and these charges, as serious as they were unfounded, had to be proved. Orlov, the GPU's chief in Spain, took this repugnant task upon himself. The trap, according to Jesús Hernández, was quickly prepared.<sup>4</sup>

Forgive us for not introducing Jesús Hernández to the reader. He introduces himself in the course of our narrative. The disclosures made in his book, and his new political stance, albeit belated, are no less important for all that. In the words of Hernández:

'For some time now, they [a reference to Orlov and his cronies] had been on the trail of a Falangist spy network...POUM personnel were mixed up with it. Hundreds of arrests had been made...the most important detainee being an engineer, one Golfín...had confessed everything...Nin was seriously compromised...Gorkín, Andrade, Gironella, Arquer...the whole Trotskyist crew. A certain Roca acted as liaison between the POUM and the Falangists in Perpignan. A suitcase full of documents had been captured from a certain Riera in Girona...A hotel boss by the name of Dalmau had also been caught and confessed...Everything had been prepared for the mounting of a coup.'

According to Hernández, the Central Committee of the PCE, Togliatti (who went by the name of Alfredo), Codovila (an Italian-Argentine), Orlov, La Pasionaria and Checa, ordered Ortega (the Director-General of Security) to send by teletype to Burillo (the Public Order Delegate in Catalonia) the order to arrest Nin, Gorkín, Andrade, Gironella, Arquer and as many POUM personnel as 'may be suggested by Antonov-Ovseenko (the USSR consul-general) or Stashevsky (the Soviet Trade chargé)'. Some of those arrested were taken to Valencia, but Nin vanished. Even the government was ignorant of his whereabouts: only the 'comrades of the special service', as the agents of the GPU were known in communist jargon were in on the secret of this mysterious disappearance. In El Vedat, a tiny village near Valencia, in a villa ringed with orange groves, the 'tovarischi' from the Soviet delegation had set up a powerful radio transmitter, by which means they communicated with 'home' (Moscow) and received all manner of sinister instructions from there.

The furore over Nin's arrest and the arrests of other POUM militants assumed international proportions. Telegrams from foreign entities and individuals anxiously seeking information as to the whereabouts of Nin began to flood into the residence of the Council of Ministers. The non-communist press of Spain was gagged by the censor, but on the walls of city and village 'the unseen paintbrush' had daubed an accusing 'Where is Nin?' Beneath the question, communists offered the depraved answer 'In Burgos or in Berlin'.

Alluding to an uncomfortable interview that he had with the leader of the government, Hernández in his book writes:

'I do not know what arguments Negrín would avail of in order to convince Irujo, the Justice Minister, a Basque Catholic with very little love for the communists and a man openly opposed to playing along with the GPU. But the day after this conversation, the

4. *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin*, Editorial America, Mexico, 1954.

press carried an official *communiqué* from the Ministry of Justice announcing that the POUM leaders were to be brought to trial along with some Falangists headed by the engineer Golfín, author of a scaled plan destined for Franco, a plan on which were marked certain military installations in the capital, constituting an espionage and high treason offence.

Even as the newspaper presses were printing the official *communiqué* from the Justice Ministry, Orlov's treacherous hand was completing one of the most sordid crimes recorded in the annals of political crime in this country: Nin had been done to death by the thugs of Stalin's GPU.'

According to Hernández, 'Orlov and his gang kidnapped Nin in the intention of extracting from him a "voluntary" confession in which he was to admit his role as a spy in the service of Franco.' They were experts in the art of breaking wills and obtaining 'spontaneous' confessions. With Nin, they opened with the 'dry' method, a 'scientific method which tends to drain away all mental energy and wear the prisoner down' with the implacable passage of time and repetition of 'make a statement', 'acknowledge', 'you'd be better to', 'you can save yourself', until all the will was sapped and fortitude broken down. Hernández continues:

'the prisoner is kept standing for hours on end, not allowed to sit down, until he collapses exhausted by the unbearable pain in his kidneys...the body becomes awfully heavy and the cervical vertebrae refuse to support the head...the spine aches as if it were coming to pieces...the prisoner is overcome by a deadly weariness...

Nin did not capitulate. He held out against unconsciousness. His tormentors lost patience. They determined to abandon the "dry" method. Now it would be flowing blood, torn skin, torn muscles that would put man's fortitude and ability to resist to the test. Nin withstood the cruelty of the torture and the agony of the refined torment. After some days his human visage had turned into a shapeless lump of swollen flesh. A frantic Orlov, driven crazy by his fear of failure, which might spell liquidation for himself, foamed with fury at this sickly individual who suffered agonies without "confessing", without compromising either himself or his party comrades, who, at a word from him, would have been lined up at the execution wall, to the delight and satisfaction of the lord of all the Russias.

Nin's life petered out. On the streets of loyalist Spain and throughout the world there was a swelling campaign demanding news of his whereabouts and insisting upon his release. This situation could not go on for long. To hand him over alive meant a double scandal. Everyone would have been able to see the frightful physical torments to which he had been subjected and, what was more dangerous, Nin might have exposed the whole sordid frame-up mounted by Stalin's goons in Spain. So the thugs resolved to do away with him.

The professional criminals thought along the lines: finish him off and dump his shot body in some ditch? Murder him and bury the body? Burn him and scatter the ashes to the wind? Any of these methods would have meant an end of Nin, but the GPU would not be spared the responsibility for the crime, as it was public knowledge that it had been behind the kidnapping. So a way had to be found which, while relieving the GPU of the burden of responsibility for the "disappearance", would cast the blame on Nin by demonstrating his collusion with the enemy.

The solution, it seemed, was devised by the rabid mind of one of Orlov's most soulless cohorts, the so-called "Commandant Carlos" (Vittorio Vidali, as he was known in Italy, or Arturo Sormenti or Carlos Contreras, the names under which he had gone in Mexico and Spain). The latter's plan was as follows: to fake an abduction by Gestapo agents "disguised" as International Brigaders, a storming of the villa in Alcalá de Henares, and a fresh "disappearance" by Nin. It would be put about that the Nazis had "liberated" him, thereby demonstrating the connections that Nin had with domestic and international fascism. Meanwhile Nin would disappear once and for all and, lest any traces be left behind, would be dumped at sea. This squalid sham lacked

refinement, but it did offer a way out.

One day the two guards standing watch over the prisoner in Alcalá de Henares (two communists with PSOE cards) were found tied up: they stated that a gang of something like ten soldiers from the International Brigades, who spoke German, had stormed the villa, disarmed them and bound them, opened the prisoner's cell and borne the prisoner off in a car. To lend the sinister ploy more credibility, a briefcase containing a series of documents showing his connections with the German spy service was found tossed upon the ground in Nin's quarters. As a final touch, German banknotes were even found.

Through the version of someone in direct contact with Orlov, I was able to reconstruct these events later. But I was absolutely certain that Nin had been murdered the day after the crime had been carried out. Compañera X vouchsafed to me that she had transmitted to Moscow a message which stated: "A. N. affair resolved by method A." The initials coincide with those of Nin. What might "method A" be? The absurd story of the "abduction" by Gestapo agents was a give away that the crime was the GPU's handiwork. Anyway, in the code of the Soviet delegation, "A" stood for death. Codovila, Gerö, etc. would have transmitted anything except the bit about "affair resolved".

In his book, *Los vascos y la República Española*, A. de Lizarra, who may be taken as the biographer of Irujo, the Justice Minister of the Republic at the time of the events just outlined, says, *à propos* of Nin's disappearance, that Nin and his colleagues were rounded up in an arbitrary police raid and removed to Valencia and Madrid. Nin 'was kidnapped from this latter villa by Stalinists and nothing more was ever heard of him again.' The Minister of Justice appointed a magistrate as special judge and ordered 'the detention of a considerable number of police upon whom suspicion had fallen.' Some of these managed to give the courts the slip and sought refuge in the Russian Embassy and a police squad attempted to place the special judge under arrest in Valencia. He also says that Irujo bluntly raised the matter at two cabinet sessions, which 'provoked the sudden dismissal of the Director-General of Security, Colonel Ortega, a communist who had been acting without instructions from the minister in charge of the department, señor Zugazagoitia.'<sup>5</sup>

What de Lizarra has to say does very little in the way of exonerating Irujo and his cabinet colleagues. Very little, if we remember the application with which the Minister of Justice had flung himself, with a pronounced enthusiasm for the past, into repressing the excesses which had been committed in the republican zone and especially in Catalonia during the early months of the popular upheaval.

In a speech which Irujo made upon taking charge of the portfolio of Justice in May 1937, he had declared:

'...But the people's accomplishment has been besmirched by criminal bloodshed. The republican rearguard has borne witness to countless killings. Roadside ditches, cemetery walls, prison yards and elsewhere have been filled with corpses. Men representative of oppression and knights of the ideal alike have succumbed and are mixed together in a ghastly heap. Women, priests, workmen, shopkeepers, intellectuals, professional people and society's outcasts have fallen victim to the *paseo*, the name given in popular parlance to cover up the more apt and appropriate term, murder. Neither the worker's humble abode nor the ancient mansion of the aristocrat, nor the mystic abbey of the religious, nor the brothel upon which illicit assignations thrived, have been spared the criminal, cruel, barbaric and uncivilised repression orchestrated by men devoid of honour or mercy, who have capitalised upon the runaway passions of the people in order to stain with all too often innocent blood the noble soil of republican democracy.

I have not come here to defend the fallen. Innocent and guilty, valuable human

5. *Los vascos y la República Española*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Vasca Ekin, 1944.



beings and the scum of society lie side by side in the common grave. I am speaking out to oppose the system and to affirm that the *paseos* are over. The protection and judging of citizens is in the state's keeping, and the latter would not be doing its duty if it did not strike out with all the power at its disposal against anyone trying to take the law into his own hands, whatever his name of persuasion may be. There was a time when the government was not in control of the means of power. It was powerless to resist social excesses. Those times are gone.'

As a result, the justice minister carried out an intense campaign of repression, more sensational than effective, against the real or alleged perpetrators of crimes not under the supervision of the Justice Ministry and which had been committed in those early months of popular emotion when 'the government was not in control of the means of power'. This campaign consisted of disinterring corpses from the so-called 'clandestine cemeteries' and of mounting trials. The PCE, which had distinguished itself as the mainstay of this 'unrestrained repression', made its contribution to the ministry's work by organising processions of ladies in mourning, many of them the widows of executed fascists. However, despite Irujo's claim that 'those times are gone', crime never attained such refinement and sadism as it did from the month of May 1937 on, when the government began to be 'master of the means of power' and when the Basque minister assumed responsibility for the administration of justice. From then on the most horrendous crimes in our political history were committed, as we have just seen.

And let us now conclude this chapter with a look at the most sensational development of that month of October 1938: the trial of the POUM.

This trial, mounted in accordance with GPU practices, opened on 11 October. It concluded on 22 October. Press censorship precluded any reporting before 25 October. The court comprised Eduardo Iglesias Portal as president, and judges Ernesto Beltrán Díez, Julián Calvo Blanco, Manuel Mediano Flores and Manuel Hernando Solana. The prosecutor was a certain Gomis and the counsel for the defence was the lawyer Rodríguez Revilla. The principal accused were: Juan Andrade, José Escuder, Julián Gómez (Gorkin), Enrique Adroher (Gironella), Pedro Bonet, Daniel Rebull and Jordi Arquer. Gorkin had made room on the bench for a photograph of Nin whom the prosecutor persisted in indicting 'in his absence'.

The main prosecution exhibit was, as we have mentioned, the notorious scale plan of the fascist engineer Golfín, on the back of which there was an inscription to Franco and which it was claimed had been written in invisible ink by no less than Nin himself. Golfín was bold enough to state that the plan belonged to him, but up to the moment he was shot he denied that there had been any sort of inscription on the back of it.

In his summing up, the prosecutor had specified the charges of military espionage and quoted Article 223 of the Military Code of Justice which prescribed the death penalty for this offence. But in his closing remarks, although he deplored the fact that the accused had not been made to face a court martial, he sought, for the crime of "high treason", a 30 year prison sentence against Gorkin, Arquer, Gironella and Bonet (as members of the POUM Executive Committee) and five years against Rebull, plus acquittal for Escuder.

From *Solidaridad Obrera* we reprint the main testimony given before the court:

'ANTONIO CORDÓN GARCÍA (Under-Secretary of Land Forces): Replying to the prosecution, he said that he is aware that the 29th Division belonged entirely to the POUM and that in that Division underground and fascist newspapers, as evidenced by the contents of the periodicals and other documents, were continually being distributed. He stated that all this, along with other documentary evidence, had been forwarded to the Defence Minister, Prieto. He said that there was no connection between the POUM and the Staff and alleged that the 29th Division quit the front at the time of the May events in Barcelona and acted off its own bat, thereby jeopardising the front that it occupied. He gave assurances that death threats against some military commanders were constantly being received at the Staff headquarters.

JOSÉ LUIS COELHO DE PORTUGAL: Attached to the cipher department of the Defence Ministry. Claimed not to have seen the plan uncovered during a raid on the fascist organisation in Madrid. That the plan in question had been deciphered by the Defence Ministry's cipher department and that the same code had been used for it as for despatches from the Balearics.

VIRGILIO LLANOS ARTERA: Said that the POUM, through the 29th Division, had attracted FAI forces and had absolute sway over that Division. That on 5 May the 28th Division had mutinied and joined with the 29th Division in the absence of the commander of the 28th Division and together gone to Binéfar... Claimed that the 29th Division had left its front unmanned: from the outside their fortifications looked adequate but they were flimsy and incapable of withstanding the slightest enemy onslaught. He denounced a "non-aggression" pact with the fascists and complained that fascist fraternisation with the 29th Division even went as far as to include movements from one set of trenches to another. He claimed that on one occasion, a commissar was sent to the 29th Division who exposed all the above anomalies and above all the fact that the 29th Division would be issued with an order to "let the enemy pass". The following day the commissar in question fell dead, doubtless attacked by 29th Division personnel, because around that time not one shot was fired in pursuance of the war. He said that the whole performance of the 29th Division has been favourable to Franco and Mussolini. That on account of its being so well equipped, it was referred to as "the queen's cadets".

JOAQUIM ROCA MIR (tried for espionage in a separate case): Stated that he had joined the Perpignan-based Dalmau-Riera spy network. He passed all military intelligence on to Riera. One particular day they brought him a letter for Riera and left him with a suitcase that was to have been picked up the next day. That four hours after this happened, the police showed up and seized the letter and the suitcase. That the prisoner was held for 48 hours without food and, under police bullying, signed whatever they wanted. But in front of the judge and later by letter he had retracted what he said about being in touch with the POUM, whose personnel were not known to him. Inside the suitcase had been found some documents with the plans of a bomb on which had been written "POUM Central Committee" and other coded documents from which it transpired that the POUM's undercover squads were going to make an attempt on Prieto's life. He said he was not acquainted with the person who had delivered the letter and suitcase.

IGNACIO MANTECÓN (Commissar of the 11th Army Corps): Said that he had not been on the Aragón front at the time of the May events. That he had no first-hand knowledge of the business of the 29th Division, but was aware of the existence of the "non-aggression pact" and of the rebels' communicating with the Division. He said that in Binéfar, upon quitting the front, the 29th Division committed a series of outrages and crimes, even against leftists. That the Division's activities had amounted to disobedience. It had always refused help to other divisions. Its propaganda was provocative.

FRANCISCO LARGO CABALLERO: In reply to questions from the defence lawyer, he stated that the May events had been prompted by the dispute existing between the political parties. Stated that he came under severe pressure to disband the POUM by governmental order, which he had resisted and would have gone on resisting. *À propos* of the telephone service, he replied that, broadly speaking, there had been communications difficulties everywhere but he did not believe that there had been sabotage. He stated that he had not warned Llanos about the POUM. He said that he knew some of the accused as militants of longstanding and that he regarded them, not as fascists, but as very intransigent. Questioned by the prosecution as to whether he could say, as former prime minister, if his government had been anti-proletarian, he replied that that was not for him to say. "Many fascist sectors, in addition to the POUM, had declared so."

ANGEL GALARZA (former Minister of the Interior): Stated that as the Generalitat had control of public order in Barcelona, he had no control. That the May events came

about chiefly because there was a power struggle between the parties. That the settling of the May events was due mainly to the intervention of the CNT, above all to Garcia Oliver and to Frederica Montseny, who immediately journeyed from Valencia up to Barcelona... That he had suspended the POUM's newspaper because of its refusal to submit to censorship.

MANUEL IRUJO (former Minister of Justice): Stated that during his ministry he received numerous representations of every political complexion from abroad pressing him to remove the POUM question from the political forum and hand it over to the courts so that the Republic, with complete independence of the executive and police power, might let the law follow its normal course. During his term of office he learned of anomalies in the POUM affair on the part of the police, such as the making of arrests in Barcelona, the removal of detainees to Valencia and then Madrid, only to lose track of their whereabouts as happened with Nin, who had been in a private villa instead of prison. He said that as a result of this irregular conduct on the part of the governing power, he notified the Prosecution of the Republic and the President of the Supreme Court at the appropriate time so that the matter might be placed in the hands of the judicial power. He said that the special judge who tried to take charge of the Nin affair was on the verge of being arrested and that the police resorted to wholly irregular and excessive measures. The police — he continued — had made arrests without the knowledge of the Minister of the Interior. Departing from their duty, they had removed detainees from one site to another, to unknown locations, leading to the disappearance of people as in the Nin case, without the possibility of these things being checked.

HANDWRITING EXPERTS: Two handwriting experts who had examined three signatures from three separate documents stated that at first glance they appeared similar, but upon minute examination appeared different, with some strokes of questionable authenticity. For which reason they adjudged that they could not guarantee that they had been signed by the same person.

FREDERICA MONTSENY (former Health Minister): Said she knew some of the accused through trade union and literary business and also as anti-fascist militants of longstanding. That she had been dispatched by the government to settle the May disturbances and that, when it was possible to clarify those events, many things which presently seem obscure will come to light. That neither the POUM nor the CNT carried any blame for the aforementioned events. She alleged that the May upheaval had all the signs of being hatched behind the scenes in order to topple Largo Caballero's government and to oust the proletariat from power to the detriment of the workers. In reply to questioning by the court president she said that upon reaching Barcelona she went to the Generalitat to find some way of calming feelings, which were running high, and prevent the fighting from assuming the dimensions sought by the provocateurs, since she appreciated that it was a manoeuvre against the masses. Finally, she asked the president to allow her to say a few words to indicate that Spain was essentially a land of liberal minds and she did not expect that the persons seated on the bench would be found guilty for being liberals and anti-fascists.<sup>6</sup>

The verdict passed on the accused amounted to a complete rejection of the charges of espionage and high treason, since the inscription on the notorious 'N document' — the military plan of Madrid — was declared a forgery by experts.

Here is an extract from the court's findings:

'From the foregoing it cannot be proved that the accused supplied fascist elements with intelligence of any sort concerning the circumstances of the battle fronts or the organisation of the rearguard, or that they had maintained direct or indirect dealings with them, or with the police or military agencies of the invader nations, or that they were in touch with or offering assistance to this country's Falangist groups or agencies, or that they sought to support rebel fighters, or received economic assistance from the

6. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 26 October 1937.

enemies of the state for their political propaganda.

On the contrary, it may be deduced from the foregoing that the accused all enjoy a great and long-established anti-fascist reputation, that by their efforts they have made their contribution to the fight against the military uprising and that the stance they espouse is designed solely to remove the democratic republic in order to install a regime consonant with their own social outlook. These facts we declare proved. ✓

No part of this finding was more telling than the final section which states 'We must, and do, condemn'. In point of fact, the court had to condemn and did condemn (for want of evidence necessary to place the accused in front of a firing squad) to the following punishments: 15 years' imprisonment for Julián Gorkín (Gómez), Juan Andrade, and Enrique Adroher (Gironella) and Pedro Bonet; 11 years for Jordi Arquer; José Escuder and Daniel Rebull were found not guilty; the POUM and all its organisations were ordered to be disbanded for the offence of 'secret association'.



▼ POUM leaders: Julián Gorkin (second from left) and Andrés Nin (second from right)





Alexander Orlov



Palmiro Togliatti



Andrés Nin



Joaquin Maurin



Julián Gorkin



POUM milicianos

## Chapter Eleven: From the October Plenum to the Loss of Catalonia

The most important organisational event of late 1938 was undoubtedly the National Plenum of the Regional Committees of the Libertarian Movement (CNT, FAI, FIJL) held in Barcelona from 16 to 30 October. In our examination of that important gathering, we have three documents to hand: the *resumé* carried by *Solidaridad Obrera* from 18 October onwards, an anthology of resolutions building to a memorandum entitled 'Agreements of the Libertarian Movement' and a draft report by a member of the FAI's Peninsula Committee. This draft contained a number of very interesting comments on the proceedings, all the more interesting if one considers that the summary carried by *Solidaridad Obrera* is a stylised *resumé* intended for public consumption. In our estimation, the draft report is the more authoritative document for it rather starkly reveals the internal workings of the movement whose differences of opinion erupted at the plenum.

The agenda affords us a better idea of its importance. It was as follows:

1. Scrutiny of the stewardship and policy followed by the Libertarian Movement since 19 July 1936.
2. Circumstantial engagement in politics and the approach we laid down as the axis for our conduct in domestic, political, federalist, international dealings with other military and economic persuasions.
3. How the three organisations are co-ordinated with an eye to the course to be plotted.
4. How the Libertarian Youth is to be assisted.
5. The co-ordination and articulation of the Defence Sections.
6. The Libertarian Movement's auxiliary agencies.

The plenum was attended by all of CNT, FAI and FIJL Regional Committees from Catalonia, Aragón, the Centre, Levante and Andalusia, from the CNT and FAI Regional Committees bereft of any organisational basis (due to their territory's being wholly occupied) such as the North and Asturias, the CNT and FIJL of Extremadura, the CNT National Committee and the Peninsula Committees of the FAI and the FIJL. Also present, in a rapporteur capacity, was the international anarchist militant Emma Goldman and representatives of the Portuguese CGT. The women's organisation *Mujeres Libres* was present only for the plenum's consideration of 'auxiliary' agencies.

The first session was given over to examination of the procedures to be followed at the Plenum and in fact it was agreed that, for the last time, those Regional Committees bereft of organisational basis be afforded full participant status. It was also agreed that accords would be reached on a basis of unanimity. In the event of such unanimity not being forthcoming on a given issue, a majority resolution would be put to the rank and file in a referendum.

Discussion of the first item on the agenda opened in session two.

The FAI of Catalonia delivered an extensive and well-documented address, wherein it referred to the 'existing differences of opinion' and to shortcomings in the past performance of the Libertarian Movement. Other delegations spoke up and it was soon evident that there were two schools of opinion revolving, respectively, around the line of CNT National Committee and that of the FAI Peninsular Committee.

According to the report in question, Horacio Prieto, who was representing the Northern Regional Committee, 'spelled out, with superb eloquence, a concrete, out and out reformist line, bordering on Marxism.' He contemptuously dismissed the teachings of Kropotkin and asserted that 'truly decisive action can only be brought to bear from the organs of power'. In his 'cold critique' he stressed that the errors committed had been due to the 'movement's naive outlook and to its lack of hard and fast plans'.

The report's author notes:

'In short, an outstanding intervention which did not mince its words, which tested the nerve of the plenum, causing many a conviction to waver momentarily but which was, fortunately, gainsaid by the prompt retorts from Esgleas (of the CNT of Catalonia), Andalusia and Levante (FAI) and the Catalan FAI, which mounted a great defence of our tactics.'

The report goes on to say that the FAI of Asturias, represented by Ramón Alvarez (the private secretary to CNT minister Segundo Blanco) 'rather agreed with its northern compatriot, but did not dare to strike the stance he had', but that in any event 'Horacio Prieto's stance earned respect for its resoluteness'.

This same debate continued into the third session and continued over twelve sessions. In the course of it, Prieto asserted that the FAI should be the 'movement's political agent and that the CNT should confine its activities to matters economic'.

The CNT National Committee (Mariano R. Vázquez) spoke up in the debate, come the fourth session. This is how his speech condensed:

'We need to jettison our literary and philosophical baggage if we are to get our bearings and achieve hegemony in the future. The blame for the few positions held by us today lies with our comrades' refusal to accept militarisation from the outset. If the FAI Peninsula Committee has no Sub-Commissar General, it is because of its sensitivity about a ruinous dignity. The collectives would have done better to agree to government supervision, since the government has already invested eight million pesetas in loans, a sum that would have been increased considerably had our comrades made up their minds to avail of that option. He was critical of García Oliver's performance as a minister. Spoke critically of the Control Patrols. He spoke of the "quixotic stance" of the late Council of Aragón and of the scheming of Ascaso on the fringes of the organisation to secure the presidency of the same. The May crisis was mentioned and the political, and non-technical repercussions of our intervention. He said that aid from abroad was negligible. Defended the CNT-UGT pact, as against the "non-aggression" pact drawn up by Largo Caballero. Claimed that the collapse of the Eastern Front was delayed by the CNT-UGT pact and by our entry into the government and the Popular Front. Put the case for the Negrín government in its confrontation with the PCE and its military successes. Spoke of the cowardliness of the democracies *vis à vis* the communists. Referred to the FAI Peninsula Committee's opposition to the Popular Front, saying that the latter is an instrument for the republicans in terms of its defence of the Constitution. Defended nationalisation and municipalisation. Asserted that there were two interpretations: the FAI's, which does not want us to be in the government, and our own, which does not want us to be in opposition. Said that there are no more than a half dozen loyal professional commanders. Criticised the document forwarded to the government by the FAI... "which can only provoke laughter and is also tantamount to an offence of high treason". Our internal divisions being known to our enemies, this places us in a position of stark inferiority. He said: "What good dignity be to us if we are defeated?" Spoke of the liquidationists Prieto and Giral, asserting that Negrín had boldly raised the issue at a cabinet session. Said that Azaña is making overtures to the CNT to the same end. Praised Negrín's policy of resistance and said that we, being the people, cannot countenance liquidation. Viewed the FAI Peninsular Committee's arguments as on a par with those of Prieto and Azaña. Said that there was nobody to step into Negrín's shoes and, finally, expressed the view that our movement needs to become a compact, absolutely independent bloc with a political identity.'

The Centre Regional Committee, representing all three organisations as a bloc, that is to say representing the whole of the Libertarian Movement in that region, mounted a 'heated defence of the National Committee's position'.

The fifth session opened with the Catalan CNT's reply to the address of the National Committee. It championed the Control Patrols and the Collectives and launched scathing attacks on their detractors. It labelled the National Committee's account as sordid politicking and went on to say that 'it contributed to the mistaken view of Catalonia held by other Regional Committees'.

The Catalan CNT's retort was followed by the replies from Germinal de Sousa and Pedro Herrera, both of them members of the FAI Peninsular Committee. We reprint below what they had to say:

'GERMINAL DE SOUSA: Spoke up to comment in his turn upon the report delivered by the National Committee. His understanding was that this was a matter for the regional delegations, though some, such as the Centre, had already spoken without giving us a hearing, on the basis of the tendentious report delivered to the plenum by the National Committee in partnership with the Centre Regional Committee. The problem was not rooted in the incidents which had taken place between the two committees, the National and the Peninsular, but rather in the basic question of the two interpretations of the movement's situation. Defended the tactic of guerrilla warfare and *à propos* of this recalled that, not long before, the National Committee had asked them to come up with a draft plan for guerrilla warfare for forwarding to the Supreme War Council.

Stressed the contradiction between what Mariano had said and the report which his Defence Section had put to the delegates, when it spoke of communist preponderance in the army. Demonstrated that if the FAI still did not have a Sub-Commissar, it was because it refused to accept the appointment of a Negrín nominee, and he stressed the dignity which should be pre-eminent in all our actions. Denied that the proposition put to the Popular Front might favour the republicans and that it is an advocacy of parliament: his anti-parliamentary stance was all too well known. Reference was made to the military document put to the government, which the National Committee had slated as a puerile and he stressed that it had not drawn the same response from a variety of political and military personnel and most especially from our comrades at the front who had responsibly declared their whole-hearted endorsement of the document. *À propos* of which, he said that the communists too had described it as "defeatist and bordering upon High Treason"; he underlined this coincidence of views. The PCE's violent response to it, he stated, would be enough by itself demonstrate the document's accuracy.

Concerning the liquidationists Giral and Prieto, he expressed surprise that, for all that Negrín had said and for all that had been repeated here by Mariano, the former was still in the government and the latter eulogised by Negrín's government press on a daily basis. No trust could be placed in the resistance policy of the communists who are every whit as liquidationist as the former, and we should not forget their customary behaviour and dishonesty. Said that Giral and Prieto were not the only advocates of liquidation: Negrín himself and others are also compromised. Defended the series of circulars and the information issued by the FAI Peninsular Committee to its militants, since it represented an organisational duty towards our responsible rank and file.'

Then the other FAI Peninsular Committee member took the floor:

'PEDRO HERRERA: Said that anyone showing contempt for our principles had to be confronted. Someone who has no ideas should not be at the head of our movement, which needs to be asserted as a whole. There is absolutely no way we can associate ourselves with just anything that happens. The "doctrinal baggage" and "outmoded literature" which had been referred to cannot be dismissed out of hand by anarchists who are still proud to be such. We are what we are on account of them. Should anyone hold our teachings in contempt, because they prevent us from being indiscriminating, let him quit our ranks. We cannot be blamed for what happened in Aragón nor for the government's take-over of the collectivised industries. This tendency to excuse everything by accusing ourselves is a baneful thing and leads us into far from edifying postures.

We who still trust in our movement cannot be pessimistic, nor can we attribute every ill to that incapacity which those who say that everything failed in our ranks assure us does exist. We are optimists because we trust in what we have created, and current



weaknesses must be overcome by banishing from the leadership of our movement any who, out of ignorance or apostasy, no longer have any faith in the organisation.

The truth must be spoken in our ranks. It is an act of treachery to mislead our militants. Those who call themselves, not merely men but anarchists have a duty to cherish the notion of responsibility. Nor may current errors be excused by invoking earlier ones. If there have been errors, we need only bear them in mind lest we repeat them. As regards participation in power, we cannot countenance the placing of undue importance upon the participation of the UGT, which carries very little weight in terms of revolutionary objectives. And let it not be forgotten that its representative is a socialist.

As for military reverses, in our written reports we have pointed to a multitude of reasons for these, for which we cannot claim the responsibility in that we had no hand in any of them, as the National Committee of the CNT itself has shown.

We support the CNT-UGT pact but with adequate assurances of revolutionary implications, which is not presently the case. We do not accept that it deserves the credit for having delayed the collapse of the Eastern Front. The comrades who displayed heroism in containing the enemy do not deserve that slight. At the appropriate time, we offered pertinent guidelines as to how the pact might be made effective, and they were ignored.

Nor did our entry into the Popular Front solve anything. It was due to a suggestion from the communists. Our entry into the government cannot be considered a success, being the necessary outcome of a phase during which power went begging. One does not ask for power: one either takes it because one is strong enough, or else it is handed to one out of convenience.

Our militants are not wanting in activity, opportunity or in agility. They cannot and should not be advised to resort to the methodology of duplicity, hypocrisy, coercion and deceit involved in the misnamed skilful politicking of the communists whom we have compared to the Jesuits. For our movement, ethics is not a luxury item but something vital which sets us apart from other sectors.

The policy of resistance has been and is our movement's policy and we must not forget that it was we who championed it and who have supported it more consistently than anyone else. There is no reason to trust in those who continually prattle on about it. Negrín has hijacked it in order to make it the mainstay of his tenure in government because he could rely upon our movement's sincerity in advocating it.

Negrín is not one of those who have worked hardest, as the many military calamities which have brought us to our present straits, testify. In this regard the map of Spain is very eloquent. Negrín's position cannot command our confidence. On more than one occasion we have notified the movement of our misgivings on this score and received no satisfaction, not even when the CNT, as a partner in the government, had a duty to take cognisance of such things.

Anarchist ideas do not render impossible, but on the contrary facilitate clear examination of the issues we have raised and resolution of them. We must recover our immense force by working within our organisation and by regarding governmental action as the circumstantial thing it is. Not for a moment should we lose sight of our real, revolutionary objectives. The Libertarian Movement will have to come to its senses. It behoves it, assembled here, to indicate the solutions. We are the committee of an anarchist organisation and we know the ramifications of our mission. We have obligations to our militants and it is not for us to dictate orders.'

The Catalan FAI's speech denouncing the tendentiousness of the information released to the press concerning the plenum, and the Catalan FIJL's address concluded that particular session. The FIJL delegation rebutted the contention that one had to enter the state in order to destroy it, in these words: 'it is as if we were to subscribe to the theory that, for prostitution to be abolished, we should place our spouses and sisters in the brothels.'

The sixth session heard replies from the National Committee and the CNT of the Northern Regional Committee. Following a disquisition upon anarchist philosophy and

in a reference to the charge of jesuitry, the North's delegate alluded to Bakunin and to his 'sectarian, carbinari-style organisations'. He said:

'I am not Bakunin nor Malatesta, I am simply Horacio. I had no wish to be the first minister of the CNT, nor secretary of the AII, so let there be no talk of personal ambition...On the day when it is reckoned that I am not an anarchist, I will quit. I am not Pestana. In what I have said I have not spoken for effect. I did invent the term "Kropotkinist optimism": Malatesta and Merlino hung that label on it. I am not an academic or a philosopher. I study and I deduce the facts as appropriate. I try to reason things out and I have a method...The executive I cannot countenance: it turns our movement on its head, completely. Nothing I said about federalism has been refuted. But the federalism of the racial, historical, national variety is indefensible. Catalonia's so-called federalist policy must be amended. We are on course for a split. I would be delighted if the opposite could be demonstrated and I ask for such a demonstration. Let no one set himself up as having any patent on conduct and ideas.'

In its response, the National Committee rebutted the scruples of some delegations regarding certain political tactics and procedures with the line that 'votes are victories'. The Peninsular Committee also made a reply.

The seventh session was given over to reports concerning military matters. Enriàlgo (of the National Committee) spoke of the harm done to the movement by 'comrades' intransigence' in refusing to agree to militarisation and accept the positions of command 'necessary to hold sway in the army'. Miguel González Inestal (Sub-Commissar General of the Land Army) outlined the work of the Commissariat and offered his assessment that the movement was well-placed in that respect 'despite those positions which may be lost due to comrades' unbending attitudes'. Cardona Rosell, a National Committee member and secretary of the CNT Economic Council, wound up the session with a lengthy address on economic problems.

In sessions eight and nine, a number of delegations, especially the Catalan FAI, made their replies: the Catalan FAI, responding to criticisms from the Executive Committee of Catalonia, stated that it was not as described 'but was set up in special circumstances to co-ordinate activities and boost the spirit of internal unity.' In session ten, Montseny's address concluded as follows:

'...Negrin exercises an absolutist dictatorship, liquidationist in tendency. According to the report, she went on to defend guerrilla warfare. She spoke out against absurd procedures in official appointments undermining the dignity of organisations: she cited the instances of a Sub-Commissar General for the FAI, Peiró as Commissar-General of Electricity, and Blanco as CNT minister. She spoke out against the supply policy and against the state take-over of support and solidarity agencies, making specific reference to the National Council of Aid for Spain. Finally, she referred to comrade Manuel López's artful and irregular intervention at the joint regional plenum of the Centre as representative of the CNT's National Committee, on which grounds she demanded that any possible blame be properly apportioned.'

According to the report under examination here, a very rough debate then ensued — the document omits to summarise it — between the CNT National Committee and the FAI's Peninsular Committee. This debate lingered into the 12th session, at the end of which a working party was appointed to draft a resolution on item one of the agenda ('Scrutiny of the stewardship and policy followed by the Libertarian Movement since 19 July 1936').

Here is the proposal on this issue. Other proposals were then drawn up by way of public declarations:

'1. The Libertarian Movement reaffirms its basic principles and aspirations through the struggle waged by the Spanish people for the crushing of fascism and in defence of

its freedom, independence and entitlement to its own revolution.

It declares that our direct intervention in agencies overseeing the political, economic and military life of our country has been prompted by our lofty sense of responsibility and the need for us to co-operate in the struggle against fascism as effectively as we may, a necessary first step in the direction of victory.

What struggles and reactions there have been *vis à vis* the needs and demands of the struggle, in acting upon living realities, have amounted, not to a revision of tactics, but rather to a circumstantial and intelligent amplification of methods of action which should be understood as a response to any changes in everyday life occasioned by the civil war and the war of independence against foreign fascism and its domestic lackeys.

In making this singular intervention into politics, the Libertarian Movement declares: that political power, the state, will always be the antithesis of anarchy; and that its own circumstantial involvement in power has been prompted by the supreme interests of the Spanish people. It was designed to oppose, from a position of power, the strangulation of the revolution and any deviation from the Spanish people's revolutionary trajectory, and to win the war against fascism through our direct and responsible participation therein. The commitment to participation has been given without setting any pre-ordained term to the actual process of the Spanish revolution, which remains open to every possibility of change.

In the trajectory followed between 19 July 1936 and the present, the Libertarian Movement has, over these two years, seen differences of interpretation within its ranks which differences it considers the result of a preoccupation with bettering the Spanish people's changes in the struggle to crush fascism, although at this plenum, these differences can be left behind through its adoption of unanimous accords.'

The proposal on this very same item designed for the public consumption was phrased rather differently and in its text, paragraph 3 of the above, was omitted.

With the opening of the 13th session, item 2 of the agenda came up for discussion. At the suggestion of the CNT National Committee, that item was phrased thus:

'1. Should circumstantial involvement in politics continue?

If so, should it be the CNT which is so involved?

The approach we prescribe as the keynote of the Libertarian Movement's stewardship: in politics; (b) in military matters; (c) in economic matters; (d) in regard to other factions.'

As the debate got underway, many delegates expressed agreement with 'circumstantial political partnership' and this led on to an affirmative answer to the first question. As for the next, nearly all of the delegates took the line that it was for the CNT to participate in the government. But Horacio Prieto advocated a contrary line:

'North argued solidly that the class and technical character of the CNT precludes it representing its membership politically in that they are drawn from a variety of political parties, and advocated that it should be the FAI, operating as the Libertarian Socialist Party, that represents the Libertarian Movement in the government, leaving the CNT free to devote itself wholly to economic concerns.'

The debate on the two remaining clauses dragged on for another two sessions and in the end an appropriate working party was appointed. It came up with this proposition:

'The Libertarian Movement is reaffirmed in its basic principles through the struggle waged by the Spanish people to crush fascism and defend its freedom, independence and entitlement to its revolution. And it takes the view that it can carry on with circumstantial partnership in politics for as long as joint national plenums of all three branches, weighing the evidence at each juncture, deem this necessary and appropriate to the purposes of the best defence of the people's interests, the better achievement of their

particular objectives and the ultimate goal of the Libertarian Movement, without setting any preordained term to the process of the Spanish revolution, which remains open to every possibility of change.

Until such time as the evolution of politics enters a new phase compelling the Libertarian Movement to reassess them at its regular plenums, our line is that it is for the CNT to represent the Libertarian Movement in government.

As a partner in government, the CNT represents the Libertarian Movement as a whole, without prejudice to the other branches' being likewise able to participate should this prove necessary, so that the Libertarian Movement may have the political representation reflective of its importance alongside Marxist and republican sectors.

#### OUR PREFERRED KEYNOTE POLICY.

**INTERNAL MATTERS.** Defence of anarchism's essential principles and precepts. Reinforcement of the identity of each branch in every sphere. Mutual consideration and responsibility with full scope for exposition and criticism in propaganda. Calumny and sniping criticism are to be punishable by expulsion, no matter who the perpetrators may be. In appointments to posts on the National Committees the endorsement of the Regional Committees will be an essential prerequisite so as to preclude the elevation to such posts of persons not commanding the confidence of their regions. Comrades shall abide by the guidelines issuing from the Local Committee, the Area Committee or National Committee in the performance of whichever organisational, political or military task they may have been assigned.

**POLITICAL MATTERS.** We support the democratisation of power. We are against any selfish monopoly by any tendency and against any dictatorial ambitions. We call for the abolition of parliament and for the establishment of a People's Council with legislative powers and the right to vet the work of government. In those ministries which may require them, we advocate the establishment of Technical Councils to replace parliamentary commissions, excepting in ministries of an economic character. We advocate that the government be at all times a faithful reflection of the anti-fascist Popular Front. We advocate that anti-fascist parties and organisations have *attachés* seconded to our embassies and that our embassies be headed by personnel of the utmost reliability and capability, so that headway can be made in those countries which may be of assistance to us. Criminal investigation procedures must be rendered more humane.

**FEDERALIST POLICY.** Essentially universalists, we stand by the precepts of the unity of peoples, solidarity and economic interdependence. We acknowledge the principle of honouring the autonomous federative rights of the Hispanic peoples. The principles of defence of autonomous interests will always be our starting point. Regional and national interests being forever in competition, we shall always side with the latter. Regarding initiatives that might erode the identity of the autonomous or federated regions, the opinion will always be sought of the region concerned. Policy direction in the autonomous regions will be under the control of those responsible organs which the movement in those regions may possess or establish.

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.** The Libertarian Movement recognises that the foreign policy of loyalist Spain has not been as sure-footed as was required, and argues the case for a meeting of minds to seek maximum international support, without this signifying subordination to any unilateral policy. The Libertarian Movement expresses its advocacy of the abolition of all states, frontiers, religions and racial differences and will campaign for a foreign policy based upon the following:

- a) Spain's integrity and independence;
- b) retention of Protectorate areas until such time as international agreements may be revised;
- c) defence of the right of peoples to self-determination;
- d) increasing the influence of Spanish foreign policy in the Islamic and Ibero-American countries;
- e) tightening the bonds of solidarity with all of the world's people so as to secure peace;

- f) assertion of Spain as a Mediterranean power;
- g) opposition to all wars of aggression;
- h) maintenance of relations with those countries which support us and the severing of intercourse with those states that refuse reciprocity;
- i) prevention of Spain's mortgaging of her territorial assets;
- j) in the context of the inter-dependence of all peoples, the securing for ourselves of maximum scope;
- k) all foreign policy is to be geared towards peace for the sake of culture and civilisation.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER SECTORS. The Libertarian Movement proclaims its support for the retention of the anti-fascist Popular Front and for its activation. It advocates it also as an expression of anti-fascist unity, as an agency encapsulating the people's wishes and needs that examines matters of interest and devises solutions in order to influence the organs of power. It endorses the thesis of independence *vis à vis* other parties. It endorses the stance of non-acceptance of pacts with parties pursuing a sectarian, solipsistic and dictatorial policy, until such time as these amend their ways. It shall seek to secure and extend all its posts in the popular agencies of authority and representation.

ON MATTERS GENERALLY. Pursuit of the line of resistance laid down by the Libertarian Movement and advocacy of the need to prosecute the struggle against fascism until it is crushed and until the last invader has been successfully driven from Spain.

MILITARY MATTERS: Deeming the army circumstantially a necessity, the Libertarian Movement's view is that there must be a serious and intelligent military policy, founded upon:

- a) the Popular Army's subordination to the needs of the people, as the guarantor of their liberties and independence;
- b) the Popular Army is not to be the preserve of any party: it belongs to the people. Serving military personnel are to enjoy full civil and political rights. We declare the need for training schools to prepare servicemen drawn from the militias, equipping them most effectively for higher commands. We shall combat all partisan influence within the army, as well as unequal and unfair treatment. Entry into the Popular War Schools of specialist corps such as Artillery, Sappers, Staff and Quartermaster's must be open to any civilian applicants, whatever their military status, providing they have proper educational background: they will have to sit a special entrance examination and, in the relevant schools, take those courses which may be prescribed for them by way of demonstrable training. We hold that there is a need for a review of assignments and promotions awarded, so as to forestall discontent and damaging bias, the aim being to make the Popular Army more efficient. We advocate a war policy free of all partisanship and demand the incorporation into the army of those military passed over unfairly to the detriment of the war effort.

In the forces of public order and rearguard forces, we call for proportionality for anti-fascist groupings, with any surplus being incorporated into army units. We take the view that Carabineer forces are for revenue duties, and public order and rearguard forces for the specific duties allotted to them. The strength of these forces must be reduced. Persons serving in these forces who are included in the call-up should be placed at the disposal of the Defence Ministry. There should be no further recruitment to the armed corps. Here, too, we call for a thorough review of promotions. And call for abolition of the category of higher ranks in the Security Corps.

We call for all anti-fascist groups to serve on the National War Council, and grapple intelligently with problems and the military situation. We want to see scrupulous screening by the CRIM. We want all comrades' capabilities and attitudes analysed by the appropriate sections, and, in accordance with superior officers, the introduction of whatever changes in command personnel may be felt appropriate for the sake of increased efficiency, by means of the aforementioned analysis.

Our organisation, having been the first to promote the War Commissariat, reaffirms its value, asking that it be endowed with appropriate powers within the Army, Navy and

Air Force, with fair and proportional representation, free of any sectional bias. We advocate establishment of an Armed Forces, Public Order and Carabineers Commissariat and seek the repeal of the decree empowering the Treasury to make appointments of Inspectors-General of the Carabineers.

Given the magnitude of the mission to be performed by the SIM, we urge that it be overhauled and improved and adapted to purposes appropriate to national defence.

We speak up for unconditional solidarity with the war injured.

We call for the creation of a powerful war industry to end our dependency on outsiders. The Armaments Under-Secretariat, on which the two trade union bodies should be equally represented, will be staffed by technically qualified personnel and work towards the extension of trade union control over the procurement of war materials from abroad.

**ECONOMIC MATTERS.** We advocate a serious supply policy, free from privileged treatment. We reiterate each and every one of the accords of the Extended Economic Plenum and express our determination to carry them fully into effect. Endorsement of all earlier accords on economic issues and reaffirmation of our basic libertarian communist aspiration with whatever scope there may be for economic experimentation compatible with the potential of our country and anarchism's essential postulates.

We endorse the CNT-UGT pact and will countenance no campaign against it.

We defend the collectives and the formation of organs of a socialist type and aim to raise the levels of morale and expertise of technicians, a most crucial factor in economic reconstruction.

As a matter of urgency, we aim to set up a Higher Economic Council, with proportional representation for the two trade unions. This will stem political and economic counter-revolution, the recovery of capitalist power and any would-be exploitation of workers, industrial or agricultural.'

The 16th session began with an examination of item three of the agenda: 'How the three wings of the Libertarian Movement can be co-ordinated, the better to adhere to the prescribed line'. It was a question of setting up an umbrella body to coordinate and advise the movement at national and regional levels, in order to forestall potential recurrence of the differences which had been emerging. The CNT National Committee tried to rally support for its contention that each wing had to be assigned a 'specific mission' of its very own, but the majority stuck to the view that it was for each separate wing of the movement to determine that mission.

So, on the basis of agreement that such an umbrella arrangement should exist, its make-up and functions were established and a working party appointed to frame a resolution on this item.

Here is that resolution:

**'THE PLENUM UNANIMOUSLY AGREES:**

1. To create a body to coordinate and politically advise the Libertarian Movement. Said body is to be known as the "Libertarian Movement Liaison Committee".

It is to be made up of six distinguished militants. These will be the general secretaries of each National Committee (relieved as appropriate in the event of emergency) plus one representative freely chosen by each of the three branches.

The National Committee will examine whatever draft plans and solutions each of the three branches of the movement may submit through its representative, and has the ineluctable duty of orchestrating and devising solutions to every problem. The National Committee will not be able to implement any overall policy decision that has not first been scrutinised by the National Liaison Committee (NLC).

Matters to be dealt with and resolved by the NLC are to be solely those of a general nature, it being disqualified from examining the private organisational problems of each of the movement's branches.

The NLC will not of itself act upon any accords which it may reach, but is to forward these to the appropriate National Committee whose task it will be to act upon and

implement proposals emanating from the NLC, provided that such decisions conform to the policy line which this plenum has prescribed.

Should the need arise to arrive at some decision and it proves impossible to secure unanimity among the members of the NLC, the matter is to be submitted immediately for scrutiny by a joint meeting of all the members of all three National Committees, convened for this purpose by the NLC. This shall attempt to arrive at some unanimous resolution; in the event of failure, the minority organisation will be free to refuse to abide by the accord, but will be required not to obstruct its implementation, in public or in private. The two majority organisations will be empowered to report back to the organisation on the NLC's behalf, while the one in the minority may append its own counter-report. There shall, basically, be no reason for the minority to back down pending a decision from a further joint national plenum.

Nominations to posts of national political significance are to be made by the NLC at the prompting of the respective National Committees, this being the only way to avoid internal squabbles and ensuring that the nominated comrades reflect the feelings of the Libertarian Movement in its entirety.

Similarly and with all due regard for the characteristics peculiar to each region, regional bodies will be set up with missions akin to the one outlined in this resolution.'

The closing sessions of the plenum were of less consuming interest. Provision was made for the Libertarian Youth to receive all necessary moral and economic assistance. And, as for the request of the National Federation of the Mujeres Libres for recognition as an integral but autonomous wing of the Libertarian Movement, a resolution to this effect was drafted and would be put to the rank-and-file for approval by means of referendum.

The final document of note was the following resolution on the restructuring of the Defence Sections. This too, was referred for referendum:

'1. The Secretariat of the Defence Section shall comprise one direct delegate from each wing of the Libertarian Movement. The general secretary is to be appointed by the National Committees from among the three secretariat members. In consideration of the CNT's role in the government, steps will be taken to ensure that it is the CNT representative who is designated.

2. The secretariat, along with the National Committee of the CNT and the secretaries of the FAI and FIJL Peninsular Committees, shall second whatever expert personnel this body may need if it is to function properly.

3. It shall be the task of the secretariat to oversee all Libertarian Movement militants serving in the army, to propose appointments and promotions and resolve whatever problems of military organisation our movement may run into.

4. In the event of dissent arising within the secretariat, such disagreements are to be resolved by the National Committee of the CNT and the Peninsular Committees of the FIJL and the FAI.

5. The Regional Defence Sections will be governed by the same regulations as the National Section in terms of structure, representation and functions.

Implementation of this resolution shall be conditional upon its being submitted to a referendum of all three libertarian organisations, with a period of grace of no more than 30 days being afforded for its amendment or endorsement.'

The report concludes with the following paragraph:

'In proposing that the business of the plenum be concluded, the CNT National Committee raised the issue of its differences with the Peninsular Committee of the FAI. In reply, the latter expressed surprise, saying that it, for its part, was not aware of incompatibility with any body, in that, cognisant of its responsibilities, it would immediately tender its resignation should that occur.

With this, the chairman settled the matter, winding up the business of the joint plenum of the Libertarian Movement at midday, 30 October 1938.'

The second half of 1938 was marked by complete compliance by political and trade union forces with the government's policy. The Popular Front, revamped following the disaster in the east, remained what it always had been: a compliant tool of the government. Parliament was a charade. The Generalitat and the Basque government, which had withdrawn their representatives from the cabinet in August, eventually conceded in the face of Negrín's promises and blandishments. Ministerial collaboration bound the CNT to its National Committee, and yoked the latter to the Prime Minister's chariot. However, the government's policy, despite the CNT's input, could scarcely have been more of a catastrophe. No substantial amendment had been made to it. Military reverses continued, as did compliance with the dictates of the USSR. This particular government policy was becoming more markedly personal and absolutist. Negrín, a dictator who obeyed the dictates of Russia, set new records for extravagance and greed. His administration was bristling with administrative and financial mismanagement. The populace, weakened by hunger, had, psychologically, lost all interest in the war. It would have taken a comprehensive political change, starting with the replacement of Negrín, to give it new heart. The man empowered under the constitution to make this replacement — Azaña — was every whit as intimidated as the rest. According to Araquistáin, Azaña once made the attempt. 'You will not depose me', Negrín answered him, 'and if you try, I will resist at the head of a revolt by the masses and the army, which is on my side.'

In late 1938, a commission from the FAI Peninsular Committee had talks with the President to sound his opinion as to the chances of a radical political change beginning with the removal of Negrín. Azaña agreed with them in his assessment of the gravity of the imminent military position and the only way of standing up to it, but he showed no readiness to shoulder the responsibility for separating Negrín from the reins of power.<sup>1</sup>

The Libertarian Movement was torn by disagreements which had virtually effected a divorce between its National Committees. In his book, *Por qué perdimos la guerra*, Abad de Santillán has this to say:

'This whole series of political trifles, of hugs and concerted action in line with support for Negrín did not prevent say, the PCE from issuing its teams with instructions to so operate inside the CNT in order to dismember it, to provoke a schism inside its ranks, to bring influence to bear upon a number of more or less representative comrades, etc. It is true that our National Committee denounced this ploy, but on paper only. In its everyday conduct there was no sign of the vigour with which there had, in times past, been a backlash against this disease. And our bickering grew as we watched the CNT abide by a line of policy prescribed by the PCE.'<sup>2</sup>

We do not believe that the CNT was obedient to the PCE's line, but we do believe in the hallucinatory impact which the *negrínista* policy of all-out resistance had on the organisation. This policy was rooted in the need to prolong resistance in the hope that international tensions might work the miracle of drawing the war in Spain into a world conflagration such as was believed at the time to be imminent. Today, with hindsight of the events which ensued in Europe only a few months after the end of the civil war, Negrín's stance appears the most astute. The *negrínistas* can seize upon the argument that, had resistance been maintained for but five more months, complete victory might have been secured over Franco by means of a European war.

This argument is built on sand. No one can argue that events which came to pass in Europe in September 1939 would equally as well have come to pass had the Spanish resistance held up. Those events might well not have come to pass. There we need only remember that 1938 had seen situations cropping up in Europe which were every whit

1. Antonio García Birlán, who arranged this interview, replied to a question from the author in 1953 thus: 'It was a Commission that was entirely ours: Frederica, Santillán and I. My longstanding relations with Azaña allowed me to tell him, in no uncertain terms, what we thought of Negrín and of him, who I invited to break away from the dictator. But he was already very cowardly.'

2. Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la guerra*, p.181



as serious as the German aggression against Danzig and Poland. We refer to the annexation of Austria and to the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The democracies merely watched the *Anschluss* and cravenly backed down at Munich. In any event, international conflict appeared to hinge upon the outcome of the war in Spain.

In 1938 the Libertarian Movement still retained much of its power and influence in the shaping of events at national level. But, as we have just seen, it was split into two main tendencies: the one represented by the CNT National Committee was markedly fatalistic, while that of the Peninsular Committee of the FAI stood for a belated backlash against this fatalism. But between the CNT's fatalism and the death rattles of orthodoxy from the FAI, stood the tendency (not a circumstantialist tendency, but an enduring one) of blatant tinkering with tactics and principles: its spokesman was Horacio Prieto. This tendency, which advocated that the FAI become a political party representing the Libertarian Movement in the government, in the organs of the state and in electoral contests, was the harvest of all the seeds of ideological retreat sown since 19 July by the CNT and the FAI alike.

In a text entitled 'Polemical Essay', published by Horacio Prieto in *Timón* prior to the October 1938 National Plenum of Regional Committees. Prieto sets out at some length his plan for a revamped anarchism, revamped until only the name survived.

Here are some of the premises to his essay:

1. Libertarian communism should be thought of as the ultimate phase in the evolution of the state and the real point of departure of philosophical anarchism, endeavouring, in the period transition, to embark upon experimental ventures, without any pretence to generalising or systemising them, tailoring its tactics and procedures in accordance with a rational opportunism designed to shorten and smooth the approach to the final objective.

2. Acceptance of the coexistence and temporary compatibility of those forms of production and trade described as nationalisation, collectivisation and limited private ownership, campaigning for fair division of high office in the running of the state, between the state and the producers, making provision for an equitable sharing of dividends and prescribing appropriate levies for collective and private enterprises.

3. Advocacy of a political, juridical and administrative federalism within the limitations of the military, economic, preventive and diplomatic capacity of the central state, which would find expression as the lawful realisation of social democracy with a new constituent phase being ushered in.

4. Partnership in government alongside other anti-fascist sectors for the duration of the war, paving the way for the conquest of political power by whatever means the occasion may commend, including participating in parliament through full and direct participation in electoral contests.

5. Recognition of the current need for a regular army, public order apparatus, judicial apparatus and state administration, organs of power that must undergo a comprehensive overhaul designed to ensure their most thorough democratisation.<sup>3</sup>

As for his scheme for a 'Libertarian political party', the author, with his characteristic baroque style, has this to say:

'So as to preserve and develop its identity, the movement steps aside from apoliticism and totalitarisation. The FAI's peerless ivory tower anarchism can remain pure and this will be a splendid thing, but the Libertarian Movement has need of a homogenous force, a party, to serve as its political representative, uniting the bulk of its militants, representing a body of the spiritual refinement of which the CNT may be proud, while following its lead, and of which the Spanish people may likewise feel proud as it sees totalitarianism and petit-bourgeois ventures thwarted by a body that is the effective instrument of social evolution, the sole guarantor of liberty and democracy.

3. *Timón*, September 1938

So far, the CNT has acted as the political representative of the movement, not from any deduction from theory — even if some may think so as the result of mental aberration - nor from any authoritarian leanings on the part of its "leaders"; it entered the government for reasons which override any principled scrupulosity and because the FAI would have refused to do so, and, had it been willing, was not possessed of the necessary solvency to govern. There are wise heads aplenty who fancy that a political imbalance had arisen, tipping the scales in favour of the supposed self-sufficiency of the union and minimising the historical role of parties, not understanding that their theorising is made of the same stuff as summer clouds.

The trade union organisation cannot have any other line than that of direct interventionism and, if one will, of helping out, it being a class body with very one-sided interests and aspirations. To turn the CNT into a political/trade union body would amount to unwittingly launching it on its decline, if it is to have a lasting engagement with politics. Either the ford or the bridge. If the CNT acts as the political representative of the Libertarian Movement, the FAI is redundant, and if the movement wishes to draw a distinction between political and class considerations, then it falls to the FAI to provide the lead politically.

If, when the war ends and, taking it for granted that victory is ours, the country goes to the polls, then what are we libertarians to do? Participate, and no question about that. Given that correct hypothesis, by what rationale and with what prospect of success will the CNT be able to offer itself as a candidate? In its ranks are many members who follow bourgeois parties and lots of others who, given their bourgeois mentality, would vote for whoever best caters for their wishes, and there are those, too, who are in proletarian parties. Nobody knows for whom the neutral mass of the CNT would vote, since there is no organisational discipline binding its membership.

Also, the absurdity of it would be ironic, common knowledge as it is that competing in elections requires a preliminary campaign mounted by a specialist machinery which no trade union can ever possess; it is quite ironic that the political performance of a union can ensure that its members, who are members of other parties, receive the double benefit of being doubly represented. They put up with the governmental policy of the CNT because of the compulsory unionisation in force today. Tomorrow, once normality has been restored, they would not countenance it.

Anarchism is not the ideal of a class, nor is the FAI itself a class organisation. Beyond the class struggle lies the human, the new social ethic and the contribution of this comprehensive progressive undertaking which is not the preserve of any single class or political faction. The people's interests are many and satisfying them is a complicated business, and they are all catered for under the common heading of political action.

With the establishment of a libertarian socialist party we would be reinforcing trade union autonomy and making strides towards the unification of the proletariat in a single body, relieving the CNT of an enormous burden along the way, making it the focus of all trade union and economic matters, handling the task of promoting collectives in technical and administrative terms and handling participation in state economic agencies.

But now and always, it should be the specifically anarchist organisation which is in government and in parliament, grappling with problems and making its name through its activity and level-headedness, seeking to act as the people's social vanguard through initiative, work and a healthy ethic which gives due consideration to human needs and attending to these and rewarding man's most deserving contributions towards total emancipation. The day of the *aguiluchos* and the tribes is past. The day of the creators of wealth and the mentors of a refined and progressive future has arrived. Success will go to the most intelligent and best organised. Our history places us under an obligation to ensure that these are not the bourgeois or the dictators.<sup>4</sup>

While Prieto fails to say as much in his article, wherein he minutely reviews all the

4. *Timón*, September 1938

inconsistencies of organised Spanish anarchism, particularly as they relate to the period begun on 19 July 1936, it is easy to deduce that he correctly drew the logical consequences from the resolution approved by the FAI Peninsular Plenum of 7 July 1937.<sup>5</sup>

On 16 December 1938, the FAI Peninsular Committee issued a report to its members briefing them on political developments. Primarily, the report mentioned an interview which had brought Negrin and Companys face-to-face on 3 December. In view of the frictions existing between the central and autonomous governments, frictions which had been aggravated by the financial restraints the Treasury had been imposing on the revenues of the Generalitat, such an interview was of great political significance. According to the briefing, this necessarily 'suggests that some spectacular moves were being hatched behind the scenes', moves which might make it possible 'to consign to the waste paper basket the calculations and intrigues of political elements inimical to the policies of Negrin and the communists.'

Around this time, the communist press was whipping up public opinion with banner headlines urging a closing of ranks by the forces of the Popular Front and unreserved backing for the 'Government of National Unity'.

These siren songs always heralded political chicanery or military difficulties. The approaching situation was in that category. The communist mouthpiece, *Frente Rojo*, which seemed to have a monopoly on sensational government news, carried the following editorial on the morning of 7 December 1938:

'ON THE LOOK-OUT EVERYONE! WE HAVE A GREAT BATTLE TO FIGHT. It is perfectly obvious that the invaders of Spain are making ready to attempt operations which may compensate them for the summer losses beyond the Ebro and which may contribute some military advantage to the new international ploy of clamouring loudly for Corsica and Tunis only to win, on the quiet and Munich-style, concessions which may ease their passage into their invasion of Spain.

We are all agreed upon this essential analysis of the situation. However, occasionally it is noted that when we talk of such enemy plans we do so as if they were scheduled for the long term. Not a bit of it. Their implementation is imminent, a matter of days off.

Fascism has no time to waste. Its generals are under pressure from Rome and from Burgos by eyes focussed upon their rearguard which grows more and more hostile by the day. In April, Mussolini and Hitler believed that they had victory within their grasp, but their songs of triumph on the seashores died away many months ago and today victory seems as distant a prospect as ever.

No. The invaders will not delay. They will seek to make up for lost time with military successes boosting their standing in Spain and abroad.

Once again their plans, built upon maps and inspired in the atmosphere of the Chancelleries, will fail as they run up against the steely reality of our fronts, where these land grabbers are awaited by Spanish troops with a tremendous record, troops know that today, even more than yesterday, the value genuinely anticipated.

Given this general belief in the imminence of a further onslaught — a belief that must be spread with equal intensity right through our fronts and rearguard — the enemy must find us ready and united. Ready in the lines of battle, so that neither by surprise nor through intensity may his attack find any breach through which to make inroads into our territory, every metre of which has by now acquired an incalculable value. Prepared in the rearguard so as to increase output and mobilise all our resources to meet the requirements of the new phase of warfare which is about to begin. More united than ever. Today, the unity of the working class and the unity of all anti-fascists are more necessary to us as the focus and example of national unity, the patriotic bloc which will line up behind our army to cut the legs from under the invaders and, in the

5. See volume 2.

other zone, will raise the very stones against the common foe of all Spaniards.<sup>6</sup> On that very same 7 December, the Prime Minister summoned the representatives of the parties and organisations of the Popular Front to his residence in Pedralbes. The gathering was attended by Mariano Vázquez and Horacio Prieto for the CNT and Diego Abad de Santillán and Pedro Herrera for the FAI. Herrera took notes of the talks with Negrín and those notes are attached as an appendix to the document under examination.

Here are Herrera's impressions:

'Negrín opened by stating that the object of the gathering was simply to brief the political parties and organisations of the Popular Front on the current situation...

He went into explanations regarding the Ebro operations, going back as far as July when they had been devised and initiated. He indicated the reasons why these operations had been mounted —the need to pre-empt the enemy's initiative and to relieve the pressure of his steamroller advance on Sagunt and Valencia, which seriously endangered that zone. His opinion was that it had been a much greater success than had been initially anticipated and that, thanks to the mettle of our troops and the strength attained by our army with its discipline and good organisation, an enormous set-back had been inflicted on the enemy and precious time bought, making possible improvements in the international climate. Consequently, he reckoned it had been a laudable operation worthy of us all and that, even though we had taken heavy losses, the enemy's losses had been heavier still; and that our losses...in dead, missing, wounded and totally incapacitated, had been matched by the prisoners we had taken.

Then he alluded to past worries when we had been forced to contemplate withdrawing our troops from the far bank of the Ebro. He said that this had been planned well in advance of its having been done, which testified to the steadfastness of our will to resist. He also noted that, in a display of great goodwill, organisations and parties had presented him with plans for military operations to be mounted, amendments, etc., all of them valuable suggestions which taken into consideration as far as possible and that, of these, one had insisted upon the need to order the retreat before disaster might overtake. He reported that the withdrawal had been a marvellous achievement, accomplished tactfully and with such extreme precision that he himself had been quite startled, especially when he had already resigned himself and expected that it would be a very costly business in terms of men and materials, when it had been carried off without undue losses.

He dwelt at length on comments about the enemy's circumstances, indicating that they were very grave for the enemy since discontent was growing in his rearguard. On the international scene, he was losing credibility and was, economically, in very dire straits. All of which had obliged him to prepare for a great offensive which might bring him the military successes with which to rebuild his tremendously fractured credibility.

It appeared that they were on the verge of mounting a great offensive, as indicated by the massing of troops and material in some places. He warned that an operation planned with such a substantial deployment of troops must result in some momentary breakthrough. Of course, he reckoned that what is coming will not be too serious, since appropriate provision had been made against catastrophe. Naturally, he believed that the odd kilometre would be lost, but vital areas would not and there would not be any unduly dire consequences as long as every one of us was on the alert and ready with our support.

In such circumstances he regarded it as vital that morale be sustained in the rear and also in the army. The latter had provided ample proof of high morale and capability, whether to resist or to attack. The rearguard had likewise shown that it had guts and could stoically endure all manner of privations. However, in these times, which may be considered difficult, the anti-fascist groups had to concern themselves with maintaining their united action and thought, keeping clear of all squabbles and selfish ambitions.

6. *Frente Rojo*, 7 December 1938

He pointed out that, as far as provisions went, whilst we had weathered a very difficult period, it seemed that the worst was now over and we were on the road to recovery. Though the problem could not be considered solved, it could be argued that it was considerably improved. That being so, we all had to do our bit to keep up morale on the front and in the rear, both of them necessary, since morale in the one had a considerable influence on the other. On these grounds, he wanted parties and organisations in touch with the public to keep the public discreetly up to date, of course, as to what might be going on, so as to avert needless alarms.

Someone from Izquierda Republicana said that all sectors, cognisant of the seriousness of the situation, would strive to keep the people's morale high in order to forestall demoralisation.

Vázquez, from the CNT said that, in the light of what the premier had just said, all anti-fascist groupings had to aim to play their part in a concerted action. And that the Popular Front might come together urgently to decide on the way to act upon the commitment it had given some time ago to unity, with each organisation acting responsibly in its individual activity.

Negrin spoke again to declare that he neither wished nor was able to meddle in the lives of the parties. That he had turned to them because the irregular circumstances precluded him from addressing himself to democratic bodies and that he had gladly issued this warning to the Popular Front, which he looked upon as the highest expression of anti-fascist opinion. However, he ventured to recommend to all that there be no squabbling at the present time, nor any thought of such in the near future, since, besides its meaning that the war would be protracted, the situation in which our country would find itself once the war was over required a supreme effort, feasible only if everyone was united, as he hoped might be the case.'

Following this meeting, the government held a cabinet meeting to decide a series of measures designed to smooth over resentments and guarantee assistance from the autonomous governments, and also, no doubt, to play to the gallery. In essence, these measures accelerated the process of statist centralisation of which negrinismo had made itself the pace setter.

The ERC had its Under-Secretaryship of state returned to it, a position which the party had resigned at the time of the August crisis. The establishment of a Commissariat of Faiths was a concession to the Basque PNV. Other decrees were directed at the populace: decrees amalgamating the supply services and the administration, the overhauling of the Passive Defence Junta, amalgamation of army health services and those of the armed corps, mobilisation of people qualified in medicine and surgery, mobilisation of legal advisors and secondment to the Ministry of National Defence of mobilised personnel in the Corps of Carabineers and Assault Guards.

As for the CNT, it believed that the time had come to press its political demands as regards the government of Catalonia. A campaign to that effect was waged from *Solidaridad Obrera*. In its 17 December issue, the paper summarised the Confederation's demands as follows:

'The CNT demands a place in the government of Catalonia simply in order to inject greater vigour into the great work that Catalonia is doing and may do on behalf of the anti-fascist war effort, and to take up positions of responsibility, and not simply for the sake of having a role in government or to enjoy the "crumbs" of power. Those who seem to advocate absurd "concessions" in the form of some derisory role, with a fairly circumscribed and secondary portfolio, would do well to bear that in mind. That is not, and cannot be the issue. We have sought a responsible role with proper responsibility in the agency controlling the destinies of Catalonia, for the purposes outlined above, not for the sake of some formality or to get our hands on some power. Our stance cannot honestly be mistaken for anything other than it is. Either our honest offer of collaboration on a fair foundation is accepted or it is rejected. But it has to be done

clearly, without recourse to (censored word) solutions which our organisation's dignity forbids us to consider.<sup>7</sup>

The Confederation's demands were never heeded.

The spokesperson for the Catalan and Basque governments declaimed with the fiery words of patriotism. Needless to say, the most strident voice was that belonging to the communist press which appeared to have forgotten its persistent assault upon popular morale and its disruptive politicking. The extreme gravity of the situation furnished Negrín and the communists with their chance to capitalise upon the common danger in order to achieve two specific aims: eliminate the opposition which had been growing more acute of recent months (opposition from the Generalitat and the Basque Government especially) and, at the same time, bolster their political position with the extraordinary measures that were being adopted.

An article in the 9 December issue of *Solidaridad Obrera* mingled exhortations to heroism with quite blatant allusions to the personalised, messianic, absolutist policy of Dr Negrín. The most salient conclusion of the article is the obvious effort to spread, above all else, belief in the only possible miracle: reliance on the people.

'The entire populace fights united...the entire populace ought to give a lead through its representative bodies. For one man, the responsibility for bringing the issue to an end would be too much. There is no man in any country or in any circumstance like ours, without precedent in history, to tackle this...

We should like to come up with some new style of persuasion and communication that has not been misappropriated in pursuit of futile exhortations, the demagogy of some individual or faction...Duty must be done. It is no abstract duty. It is a direct, urgent, elemental duty. Let's defend our lives. That is it. Nothing more than our lives.

In the face of the enemy sharpening his axes and readying his gibbets, in the face of the invasion now mustering its maximum strength to crush anything which may resist its schemes, we must defend our lives, those of our womenfolk and of our children. Let us see how many men there are! We shall see who is worthy of being a free man! Who are deserving of the sacrifices of our glorious dead, of the blood spilled for the emancipation of our people, for the liberation of our land and our homes from the enslaving totalitarian invaders! Stand back, cowards! Away with the weak in spirit! Let all who have regarded the war merely as an opportunity for self-aggrandisement stand down everywhere, those who have made the war their livelihood! It is not a question of "livelihood" now! What is at stake is a fight to the finish so that our people may live eternally in history and put its present straits behind it!

...The enemy must break his horns not only against our exertions, but also against our tough morale, as terribly tough as may be necessary. We cannot afford the luxury of sentimentality and evasiveness. We should accept only those reports of defeat delivered by the dead. We would have had to shoot the soldier from Marathon.<sup>8</sup>

This is how things stood on the eve of the enemy offensive on 23 December 1938.

The military developments which put paid to resistance in Catalonia and, months later, to the war as a whole, were a logical consequence of the battle of the Ebro. Since the outbreak of hostilities, both armies — the Francoist and the republican — had fought a stubborn battle over one key objective — Madrid. The Francoists made the capture of Madrid their overriding objective, the republicans did likewise when it came to its defences. This obsession would have allowed either of the two armies to marshal its reserves and embark upon offensive operations on other, relatively less well-manned fronts. Only the Francoists managed this occasionally and this enabled them to take Málaga and mop up the whole northern coastline, but they never fully exploited this opportunity. Since the outbreak of the war we have seen them mounting repeated attacks in hope of occupying Madrid. They regarded capture of the Spanish capital as

7. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 17 December 1938

8. *Solidaridad Obrera*, 9 December 1938

vital in tipping the balance of the war in their favour.

The republican command, for its part, deployed all its military might to thwart the Francoists in this, their supreme ambition, for they, on the very same grounds as the Francoists, prioritised political and diplomatic considerations over military ones. However, while the Francoists had the capability of sometimes waging a war of movement on other fronts far removed from Madrid, their counterparts on the republican side refrained from any effective initiative along such lines. And whenever they did attempt it, they displayed manifest incompetence. The Battle of Brunete was one such example. The republicans embarked upon that operation on the very same Madrid front which they knew to be thick with enemy troops. The attack along the south Ebro in September 1937 was made after upwards of a year of inactivity on that front, which is to say, too late. Then again, in Brunete and the south Ebro alike, military successes were the least of the concerns of those who actually commanded the republican army.

The most disastrous operations were mounted from December 1937 on. The first of the series was the Teruel offensive. We have already seen that this operation was mounted at a time when the enemy had successfully concluded his campaign in the North and already had his reserves mustered in the Guadalajara sector. The enemy plan, as ever, was to encircle Madrid from the east. And the republicans' aim was to thwart this. In that event, it was quite reasonable to deploy their reserves in an all-out attack through Extremadura or Andalusia. Among other things because Teruel was a sort of arrow menacingly targeting coastal communications between Catalonia and the Centre-South zone. Given the enemy's offensive superiority, as known (as we shall see later) to the republican command, the luring of the enemy towards the Teruel salient implied — in the event of an irresistible counter-attack — the offer of access to the Mediterranean.

Thus the Teruel operation was mounted in the full knowledge that the enemy had his powerful operational forces mustered very close by, and that he had them posted at communications centres which would enable them readily to access any threatened positions and to render assistance. General Rojo, according to what we have stated above, in defending himself against charges levelled against him for confining the operation to the mere capture of Teruel and for failing to continue the offensive northwards to secure follow-up positions which might have allowed him to secure the conquered territory, has admitted that he had not sufficient troops to do that. So, the enemy was provoked on the most perilous point along the whole front, where he had his army of manoeuvres standing by, and that without there being enough troops standing by to cope with any backlash.

The Teruel operation, while it achieved its objective of protecting Madrid, compensated Franco generously for the thwarting of his own plans. With Teruel now under his control, but with his original intentions exposed, he resolved to extract maximum profit from the gift presented to him. His first move was to test the strength of the republican lines in Aragón, for he had very astutely divined that those lines had been weakened so that the 15 December attack might be mounted, and that the Republic's reserves would remain in the Teruel sector as a precaution against any possible enemy breakthrough towards Valencia and the sea. Within one month, this reasoning enabled him to mount his spectacular March 1938 offensive which led to the collapse of Aragón. The republican command had once again managed to save Madrid, but at the cost of drawing the fascist menace down upon Catalonia.

It was vital for the Republic that Aragón and Catalonia be protected. This implied the maintenance of communications between its two main zones and the communications of the whole of loyalist Spain with France and Europe via its only viable frontier. Catalonia itself was the industrial zone par excellence for the output of war materials. The importance of retaining this eastern zone outweighed any defence of Madrid. Franco's obsession with taking the Spanish capital suited the interests of the republicans, but they in turn persisted in suiting Franco's interests.

So the loss of Aragón was a consequence of the Francoist counter-attack at Teruel.

We who experienced the disaster at first hand can state that the holding of the enemy attack on the line from the Segre to Noguera Pallaresa came as a real surprise. An army which for months had been uninterruptedly retreating, exhausted by foot slogging and jettisoning its weaponry and baggage, with no fortifications or reserve troops to fall back to, with its units out of touch with one another and with hardly any ranking officers, is a defeated army.

We have seen already that the offensive was halted, not by the Republic's Army of the East, but rather by the attitude of France, and that it was diverted towards Levante until the greatest of catastrophes had befallen — the loss of the Levante land bridge and the bisection of the territories loyal to the Republic.

The enemy— in spite of himself, we believe — once having secured his bridge-heads on the left bank of the Segre and at Noguera Pallaresa, and having settled in all along the Ebro, from the junction of the Segre and Cinca rivers to the Mediterranean, pressed his attack along the Levante coastline and across the Maestrazgo in the direction of Valencia. Once again it veered away from Catalonia. But the republican high command intervened to force him back towards that region.

According to General Rojo himself, at the end of June 1938, the Republic's Central High Command drew up its operational plan for the second half of the year. It was as follows: resistance in Levante; a breakthrough across the Ebro and an attack via Extremadura. As we have seen, the enemy had overrun Extremadura in the onslaught since 19 July. But despite this drawback, the crossing of the Ebro, which was the main operation, was carried out six days later. The Francoist army of manoeuvres was again drawn back towards Catalonia. And upon the conclusion of the battle of the Ebro, which was wasteful not to say ruinous for someone who could not afford the luxury of extravagance, Franco's strategists realised that the time had come to deal a decisive blow to Catalonia and to the war as such. It had not escaped them that the republican army of Catalonia was isolated and had taken 70,000 losses on the Ebro. This time, France and England would not be cross, for, on the occasion of the Czechoslovak crisis, Franco had assured those democracies of his neutrality.

In his book *¡Alerta a los pueblos!*, General Rojo admits that the Francoist offensive of 23 December 1938 had been anticipated by the Central High Command and that, in order to resist it, a manoeuvre had been prepared in the Centre-South zone. In the words of Rojo:

'Men and weapons were in short supply, especially the latter. The former had been gobbled up by a corrupt organisation that tended to reinforce the agencies of the Interior Ministry to the detriment of combat units. The manpower available fell short of the figure of 80,000 men armed with less than 40,00 rifles.'

According to General Rojo himself, on 5 December 1938 there was in Catalonia an army of 220,00 men. But in terms of its equipment, that army was the equivalent of only 100,000 men, inclusive of its services. Its brigades were all under strength. Many of them were in the process of being reorganised as a result of the losses suffered in the battle of the Ebro and their numbers had been reduced to 50 per cent of normal strength. The minimum regulation complement of arms for such units was 1,850 rifles, 32 machine-guns and 48 automatic rifles. However, most of the units had had their equipment reduced to 1,000 rifles and 20 automatic weapons. In terms of artillery they had barely 250 artillery pieces of all calibres, and 46 anti-aircraft guns. Also available were 80 fighter planes and 26 bombers, plus 49 tanks and 80 armoured vehicles. Out of the 220,000 men available for service, only 140,000 were in combat units.

By contrast, the enemy had 340,000 men, 800 artillery pieces, 80-100 anti-aircraft guns, between 200 and 300 tanks and 500-600 planes.

Again according to General Rojo, in anticipation of the offensive, the Central High Command made provision for the following diversionary operations. An attack on the extremity of the Southern front, in conjunction with a landing at Motril that would threaten Málaga. The object here was to draw off the enemy's reserves from Andalusia



and Extremadura. This operation was scheduled to begin on 8 December. The main attack would take place on the Córdoba-Peñarroya front towards Seville. In order to sever communications between the Madrid front and Extremadura, a complementary attack would be launched in the Centre. If successful, this ploy would draw off the enemy's reserves from Catalonia. If unsuccessful, reserves from every front would be pinned down and this would prevent replacement of the troops who would be casualties in the Catalan region.

In that region, republican fighters had been issued with orders to hold out to the bitter end. In the event of a breakthrough, counter-attacks would be left to the reserve troops (?). Two lines of retreat had been provided for.

Regarding the failure of this plan, General Rojo says that Miaja, the Chief of the Army Group of the Central Region, and the Chief of the Navy, disagreed with the Motril operation and they called for the overall plan to be amended. A counter-order was issued to the ships escorting the landing brigade when they were already at sea. In response to this, the ships returned to base.

The new plan consisted of a thrust towards Granada. It was scheduled for 24 December but was then postponed until 29 December. Eventually the enemy realised what was in the offing and strengthened the front targeted for the operation, whereupon a free hand was available to mount an operation in the most suitable direction. This, as we shall see, turned out to be in the direction of Extremadura at the start of January 1939. Too late!

The enemy made no secret of his intention to attack Catalonia. So the Republic's fighting men were issued with specific and defiant watchwords. And the cry of 'Bring on the bull!' raced through the lines, especially when, on 10 December, the promised date of the enemy attack (proclaimed with a great fanfare) came and went uneventfully. But severe rain and snow forced the Francoists to postpone their moves. The attack came 13 days later, which is to say on the morning of 23 December. It came at two distant points — in the sector near to Tremp (Montsec) and via Serós, near the Ebro. These sectors were manned by the 11th and 12th Army Corps, and the troops directly attacked were from the 26th Division and the 56th Carabineer Division. The former held up well, albeit losing some ground, the latter collapsed and was routed by the mere softening-up bombardment which was really not that impressive. According to General Rojo, these Carabineer troops were as well-armed as could be. Rojo himself had this to say of the 26th Division:

'The battle reports from the Tremp area were favourable, though they erred on the side of optimism. Superb resistance had been put up: there had been a slight buckling of the front but the terrain lost was virtually negligible. To be sure, the affected area was not very large, but some of the positions lost on the other hand were very important. The 26th Division manned that sector: given its libertarian ideology, we had feared some irregularity in its conduct and for the precise purpose of gauging its true state of morale and the circumstances of its commander, I paid a visit to its headquarters a few days prior to the attack. I came away from that visit with a very good impression. In point of fact, its performance throughout the attack was excellent: let us place this on record with admiration.'

But the seal was set on the disaster when the sector of the Army of the Ebro, the vaunted military fiefdom of the PCE, gave way. With the Army of the Ebro pulverised, the enemy was able to mop up the remainder of the front with ease and thrust deeply towards the heart of Catalonia in a variety of directions; towards Tarragona, aiming to head off the evacuation of troops from the Tortosa sector; and, via Cervera, Igualada and Manresa, towards Barcelona.

Barcelona fell to the invaders on 26 January 1939. The government, which right up until the end had proclaimed its steadfast determination to re-enact the Madrid epic there, was the first to abandon the city, leaving it militarily defenceless, for it took the anti-aircraft guns with it. After a short delay, the leaders of the parties and

organisations followed the government's example. In reality, Barcelona, facing the prospect of complete encirclement by land and sea was militarily indefensible. The only way to mount a defence, and for a short time only, was first to evacuate the civilian populace which, in the wake of the retreats from Aragon and from Catalonia itself, had expanded considerably. Thought of evacuating the civilians was just a dream, especially if we remember the fruitless efforts made in this regard in Madrid. With Barcelona besieged by land, sea and air, without supplies, water and lighting, resistance could not endure much longer.

After the awful blow to morale represented by the loss of Barcelona, there was scarcely any organised resistance left. So events followed hard one upon another with a speed that startled even the most pessimistic. Negrin set up his base in Figueres and from there pressed on with his policy of lies and bravado, as is proven by his last speech, delivered at a sham meeting of the Cortes:

'Spaniards: The inevitable has happened. We have lost Barcelona. The enemy wants that loss to mean the collapse of our fronts and the collapse of our rearguard so that he can speedily achieve our final destruction. This he will not achieve...

The government needs everyone's help. It has never deceived you and the fidelity of my conduct entitles me to ask for your confidence. Unless you wish to go under like a flock of lambs or perish amid starvation and misery, you must heed my words and adhere to the instructions of the government...

I am confident that my appeal will be heeded. Should it be otherwise, the common interest and the overriding considerations of the common weal will compel the government rigorously to enforce the severest measures without a second thought or hesitation.

After the capture of Tarragona, it occurred to me to address the Spanish people in order to set the reality of the situation before you. Do you know why I did not? Because I could not confess my worries nor foster in others hopes and illusions which I did not share. Indeed, I was worried that, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, Barcelona might have a hard time avoiding falling into enemy hands...

Is there a cure for this ill? Yes. Is the remedy in our hands? Yes. To both questions I answer roundly: Yes. Let me tell you why I say this. Our army is not in disarray. It is weary and, at times, downcast, perhaps, given the inadequacies of its fighting personnel, but it retains its spirit and its morale which my words will boost.

Fresh recruits incorporated into the battle-hardened units which the government has brought in from the Centre zone, will offer reassurance to exhausted fighters, giving them encouragement to maintain their heroic efforts. The drafting in of armed units from the Centre zone, breaching the blockade contrived by the rebels and maritime forces and airborne forces of Italy and Germany, is perhaps one of the most daring, most expert undertakings ever seen in modern warfare. As far as the fighting men are concerned, as regards equipment, in circumventing the naval blockade with impressive daring, side-stepping all the difficulties posed by clandestine procurement of weaponry, into which we have been forced by Non-Intervention and laws which, ironically, go by the name of neutrality but, which as one illustrious head of state has conceded, merely favour the aggressors...Overcoming all of these obstacles, the government has managed to stockpile considerable arms reserves which, properly used, guarantee that the enemy will encounter an impregnable barrier. We have the courage of our troops. We have replacement troops which should spare us from exhaustion. We have equipment and even now it is beginning to be deployed in a quantity, scale and quality hitherto undreamt of. It has come belatedly, just as its arrival in Madrid was belated, but it has still come in time, just as it came in good time in 1936.'

Tragic reality was soon to expose the final miscalculations of a policy founded upon the ineptitude of its representatives, on their arrogance and cynicism.

On 28 January 1939, enemy forces were deployed all along a front which, stretching

from Arenys de Mar on the coast, left Barcelona, Sabadell and Terrasa in the rearguard passing through Granollers and beyond Manresa. The immediate objectives of those forces were Vic, Berga and Girona. These towns were captured between 1 and 4 February. By 5 February Girona had been swallowed up and the onslaught, meeting with scarcely any opposition, rolled on towards Ripoll, Figueres and Palamós.

In the Northern sector, the Republic's 10th Army Corps pulled out of Coll de Nargó, Organya and Seu d'Urgell. The 26th Division had been attached to the Army Corps for tactical purposes when relieved from active service on the front, shortly after the loss of Artesa de Segre. Its ferocious action in Montsec — rewarded with the Medal of Valour — had taken a very heavy toll on its men. Among the leading anarchist militants to perish in the fighting were the Commander of the 1st Battalion of the 119th Brigade, Antonio Valero (Antolín), and the Brigade's Commissar, Martín Gental. The 121st Brigade too took considerable casualties in the same sector. Whole sections held out until buried in their own dug-outs by enemy shells.

The 26th Division fell back, following the course of the Segre. When these troops reached Seu d'Urgell which is overlooked by the Pyrenees and the Serra del Cadí, the plan was to dig in for diehard resistance there. Among the psychological factors prompting that decision was the attitude of certain French newspapers which, at about this time, had begun to alert their readers, and of course their country's authorities, against the imminent invasion of the south of France by the anarchists of the Durruti Column who were described as born criminals and rapists, the dregs of society, fugitives from every Spanish prison.

The 'Republic of El Cadí' plan — as it was dubbed — consisted of fortifying the heights commanding the narrow gorge of the River Segre, the Serra del Cadí itself and, further East, the border pass known as Collada de Tosas. Tactically the set-up was as follows: the Carabineer troops and Assault Guards of the 10th Army Corps — which was under Jover's command — would be stripped of their weapons and organised into fortifications battalions. The 199th Brigade would man the approaches to the area via the Segre, and the 121st Brigade the positions in the Collada de Tosas. The 120th Brigade would be held in the rear as a stand-by force.

This Numantine scheme was, it seems, ruled out by the High Command and also by the survivors of the CNT committees who had opted for evacuation via Puigcerdá.

The seal was set upon the Republic's defeat when Negrín's last bulwark, the castle of Figueres, was captured. On 6 February, just nine days after delivery of Negrín's 'stand fast at all costs' speech, presidents Azaña, Companys and Aguirre presented their passports for inspection by the French ambassador and crossed the frontier. Negrín was not long in following suit on the night of 5-6 February without bothering to say his farewell to his Chief of Staff (for which the latter takes him to task in his book).

Civilian refugees, including women, old folk and children, mixed up with the remnants of the republican army and forming the most imposing exodus in the whole of modern history, also began to cross the frontier in their hundreds of thousands, carrying on their backs what remained of their homesteads. In the Puigcerdá sector, as night fell on 10 February, the troops of the 26th Division, marshalled into perfect ranks, finally crossed over into France. They were the last organised forces to quit Catalonia.

Inevitably, the flood of refugees swept aside the lines of Gendarmerie and French colonial troops posted at strategic border points. Having been disarmed, the civilians and servicemen were herded like flocks of human beings towards locations which would earn notoriety: the concentration camps of Argeles-sur-Mer, Barcarès, Vernet d'Ariège, etc. The vast majority of these refugees would not know complete freedom again until after the conclusion of the Second World War. Their Calvary in the French concentration camps and in the labour battalions, their tragic lot under the German occupation, the ghastly circumstances of their deportation to France's African colonies and to the death camps in Germany, where tens of thousands of them would perish, the heroic contribution of these refugees and chiefly of the libertarians to the French resistance movement, to the 'Maquis', the Allied military units, in the Sahara, in the Italian campaign, in the liberation of Paris and the ultimate victory over German





▲ French concentration camp; February 1939

▼ Exile: France, 1939



## Chapter Twelve: The Last Bulwark

We have enough unpublished material for a detailed reconstruction of the performance of the libertarian units in the Centre-South zone prior to and after the military occupation of Catalonia. Scrutiny of this documentary evidence will enable us to make a firsthand study of the events that brought the war against fascism in Spain to its tragic conclusion. For the most part, it is drawn from the official archives of the FAI and broadly consists of the minutes of its meetings, those of the Liaison Committee of the Libertarian Movement and of what came later to be known quite simply as the National Committee of the Libertarian Movement.

In January 1939, Negrín ordered the mobilisation of seven classes of draftees. Some sixteen were already on active service. This new disposition was drafting men between the ages of 17 and 35.

On 6 January 1939, the FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee held the first of a series of meetings at which the aforementioned orders were raised and it was resolved that an inquiry be mounted into their impact on military circles where, it seems, implementation of them was regarded as ill-advised. The only people regarding them as acceptable were the communists and the UGT. It was agreed at this meeting that guidance would be sought from the National Committees in Barcelona and, pending this, the federations and committees were advised to resist any moves towards a general mobilisation. Interested parties spread rumours to the effect that the government had adopted such extreme military measures on account of the meeting between Chamberlain and Mussolini, failure of which would herald the eruption of war in Europe.

At around this time correspondence had been received from the FAI Peninsular Committee in Barcelona, in which there was talk of a SIM raid on the Casa CNT-FAI in Barcelona and of a breakdown in relations between the Peninsular Committee and the CNT's National Committee.

Attempts to contact Barcelona, by telephone and by radio, proved fruitless, thanks - the minutes state - to the intemperance of the CNT's minister Segundo Blanco. And yet the general mobilisation order meant not only that manpower would be diverted away from production, but also organisational and party cadres would be thrown into disarray. Consequently, several emergency meetings were scheduled. At the 13 January meeting, the FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee reached the following conclusions:

'1. It is vital that all our resources for revolutionary action be mobilised in a solid and coherent fashion, in anticipation of any eventuality.

2. Through those organisms with political influence in which they have a foothold, they will attempt to smooth the way for whatever feasible solutions may be available for overcoming the situation, conditional upon the necessary powers to assure the survival of our regional and provincial organs of production and organisation.'

This implies that the FAI was concerned to obtain a certain number of exemptions from military service so as to ensure the normal functioning of its liaison bodies, for the mobilisation order was a blanket ordinance, affording no privileges of any sort to militants holding down any trade union or political office of responsibility.

On 19 January a Plenum of FAI Regional Committees was held, possibly in Valencia. The reason behind the meeting was to hammer out a hard and fast policy with regard to the mobilisation order. The Peninsular Sub-Committee had this to say:

'The military situation in Catalonia, as on the fronts, is testimony to the blatant incompetence of the government. As a result, the political aspects of the problem have to be tackled, bearing in mind that the government has failed in every regard. As far as

the outward aspect goes, an attempt has been made to mislead not just public opinion, but anti-fascist sectors as well, with the loans coming from America. The supply problem is as serious as ever. The war situation is difficult...The enemy has added another hundred kilometres to his hold on the Mediterranean coast, etc... If the government carries on like this it will lead us to disaster.'

It was made clear that, quite apart from offering no solution, the decrees aimed at undoing organisation completely. At the meeting, the delegation from the Centre spelled out its stance, which was as follows:

'The decrees are politically driven and are damaging to the organisation and for the country at large...Only 30% of those currently in service have weapons...

The Centre [Regional Committee] will not comply with the dismantling of the movement in any way and if the government fails to grant exemptions to enough militants, it will hold on to them in defiance of government ordinances.'

The danger represented by the armed forces held in the rearguard was also pointed out, as was the fact that numerous fascists from the countryside were holed up in the recruitment centres or, rather, were under the protection of those running such centres and that the communists were keen to have martial law declared and control of the economy concentrated into state hands.

Matters internal to the organisation were tackled and stress was laid on the CNT's National Committee's reluctance to act upon the accords of the last plenum of the Libertarian Movement. 'On which basis', the Peninsular Sub-Committee stated, 'we hold that whenever the political crisis comes to a head, the national committee itself must also be taken to task, for it is the faithful agent of the present government.' The accords mentioned as not having been implemented were primarily the ones concerning the formation of the national liaison committee, failure to observe which, it said 'means that there have been appointments and certain events of note in which the FAI has had no hand, since they have only been publicised after the fact.'

It was agreed that all these issues would be brought up at the forthcoming national plenum of the Libertarian Movement of the Centre-South zone.

That plenum went ahead in Valencia on 20, 21, 22 and 23 January and was attended by (in addition to the national sub-committees of the CNT, FAI and FIJL) the regional representatives of all three organisations.

There, it was reiterated that the general mobilisation order was acceptable only as it affected Catalonia. As far as the Central zone went, it was pointed out, among other things, that there were two army corps made up of recruits drawn from replacements drafted earlier but who had no armaments. The authorities in the zone, even taking this into consideration, simply insisted that the orders of the government had to be obeyed. The UGT representation on the national liaison committee expressed support for a general draft, though he stated that all the members of committees and union secretaries would be mobilised in the posts that they already occupied. But the Armaments Under-Secretariat militarised industries regardless.

As the CNT's National Committee had been invited to sit in on the business of the plenum, but had been unable to make the trip to Valencia, it was simply promised a report on that business. As for the FAI Peninsular Committee, it had informed its representatives in Valencia that it wanted no part in formulating the decrees in question, having not even been consulted about them. So some delegates repeated that a delegation from the CNT National Committee or from the Libertarian Movement National Committee needed to sit in on the plenum's deliberations. This suggestion implied that consideration of the problem should be put off until such a delegation turned up. The FAI queried this, arguing that there was enough evidence available to make a proper conclusion possible. The FAI delegation even threatened to walk out of the plenum unless it tackled the matter in hand. But it was decided that Barcelona would be asked to send down a rapporteur delegation that would enjoy the backing of the Libertarian Movement as a whole.

The CNT Sub-Committee (national level) then delivered a report on the military situation in the zone. In Extremadura, since the dismissal of Colonel Burillo, libertarians had been gaining the upper hand and in the Army of Extremadura. In Andalusia, they had considerable sympathy among higher-ranking officers. In the Centre, the movement controlled the 4th Army Corps, a division and eight brigades. In Levante, it had eight brigades with like-minded commanders. As for the Commissariat, the presence of the communist Jesús Hernández in the Commissariat-General was proving a real hindrance.

At the 21 January session, the FAI again raised the need to adopt a policy with regard to the mobilisation order. Already it was known from its own press that the CNT National Committee had wholeheartedly embraced the orders promulgated. But, especially on the part of the delegation from the Centre, there were still fantasies which went so far as to insist that, given the defiant posture of the totalitarian countries, the democracies, headed by England and France, had advised Negrín that it might be advisable to mobilise all his reserves, promising him the required weapons. In the minutes, the Centre delegate goes on:

'He went on to say that, if this supposition were to prove incorrect, then what we are dealing with here is a political ploy...aimed at a communist-style military dictatorship...From what we know ourselves and from the report delivered by the Defence Section of the National Sub-Committee of the CNT, upwards of 50 per cent of our present army is without weapons, and on that basis we consider the mobilisation unwarranted and catastrophic, since it will drag draftees, with all sorts of difficulties, through the recruitment centres, wearing them out, and eroding their morale for the heroic feats which may yet be required of the proletariat...working a transformation in them, the better to serve dictatorial ambitions. The government, rather than committing to this atrocious act, could and should have turned to the armed forces of the rearguard. The Corps of Carabineers has nearly 200,000 well-paid, well-fed, well-clothed, well-trained and well-armed men, but those troops are being held back for the protection of the dictatorial state...'

Another delegation from the Centre referred to the PSOE's dismissal of Prieto from the Defence Ministry and to his new role as a secret envoy working to obtain loans in the Americas, placing Spain in hock as a result. According to the same delegate, Madrid's industrial establishments were, 55 per cent of them, lying idle. The militarisation of the industries would affect all workers 'with the sole exception of the barbers'. And the government would stifle popular discontent by reading the Code of Military Justice to the militarised workers. The communists, urging state control of all the essential assets of the country, were acting in character. By obstructing such a take-over, the libertarians were being true to their own character:

'Until such time as we receive assurances that arms are available, we shall make it clear to Negrín — without recourse to violence — that the mobilisation of industry and supplies must be revoked, until such time the CNT pulls out of the government.'

The FAI delegation from Levante read a document condensing many of the aforementioned remarks about the drawbacks to militarisation in the purely military sense.

The same delegate asserted:

'That it is plainly contrary to the very interests of the Libertarian Movement...since it, *ipso facto*, implies cancellation of all the economic effort achieved by the people since 19 July and sustained by their constancy throughout the whole of the war...the entire endeavour of our collectives and economic councils would be extinguished and thus the economic benefits won by the people would be lost, and our movement's achievements would be reduced merely to ephemeral liaison activity, with our identity



in socio-political terms being completely lost...It is our reckoning that this ordinance sets the seal upon the communist's ambition of creating a formal totalitarian state by means of which they may position their unquestioning supporters in its various agencies, so that they may at all times control and determine all of our country's official policies.'

The delegate also spoke in favour of all the rearguard troops being moved up to the front.

'Allowing the rearguard troops to carry out vigilance activities on the fronts or in the rearguard is an offence against the morale of the fighting man, who then sees the blatant injustice on display.'

This delegate's contribution to proceedings called for incorporation into infantry units of all able-bodied, non-specialist personnel and their replacement by persons equipped to render auxiliary services to the army! The rounding-up of all available arms in the rearguard, a 50 per cent reduction in exemptions granted to war industries and various specialist centres and bodies, the transfer to the front lines of all available personnel serving in the rearguard, mobilisation of civil servants and their assignment to tasks for which they were qualified.

The CNT delegation from Levante, Joan Lopez, was the most moderate. He reckoned that the decrees had to be complied with, for opportunistic reasons:

'In 1936 the situation was rather more difficult for us...our aim then was to bring to government notice the need to introduce discipline...as a matter of military necessity. Let there be no repetition now of what befell us then, when, distracted by that debate, we lost a lot of ground, giving the communists their chance to cash in. What we must do is take the lead in this mobilisation, for I do not believe that it is a communist ploy.'

Another member of the same delegation expanded upon this view:

'We are conversant with the pessimism of Prieto who, from the Ministry of Defence, was willing to capitulate, but who did a sharp U-turn following the failure of European policy in Spain...let us remember that Prieto has been sent by the government to north America. We should not look upon him as Prieto the pessimist, the defeatist. We should see him only as the reputable financier. In north America, there is a strong backlash in loyalist Spain's favour...it would be suicidal not to agree to the mobilisation and militarisation decrees and to try to cling to the revolution's gains. What we should do is try to capture the commanding heights so as to bolster our positions and hold ourselves in readiness.'

Some delegates drew comfort from the argument that the decrees had, possibly, been devised to the prescriptions of the democracies, to US abandonment of her Neutrality Laws and to substantial offers of war materials. At the 22 January session, a delegation was appointed to set out for Barcelona, and again the issue of the need for democratic debate was raised. The FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee stuck by its view that resolutions should be proceeded with, and in the end a working party was set up which framed a resolution. The minutes record only one statement, which endorses the mobilisation measures, and it seems designed for public consumption more than anything else.

A commission from the plenum had had an audience with General Miaja. Miaja had expressed his readiness to mobilise 50 per cent of the workers but the plenum rejected this on the basis that the measure offered little reassurance. It was agreed that exemptions should be negotiated for militants in the socialised industries.

On 23 January, as the sixth session was under way, came the proclamation of martial law throughout the republican zone. That martial law had not yet been declared some 30 months into civil war can be explained by the reluctance of parties and organisations to

abdicate power to the military. And General Miaja, reporting this fact to the representatives of the Popular Front, had stated that he would not extend the remit of the military into those realms which were the proper preserve of the organisations and parties. In response, the FAI recalled that the October Plenum of the Libertarian Movement had passed a resolution against any declaration of martial law. Other delegates stated that any such declaration had to be opposed and the government addressed 'as one equal to another' and Miaja told that he would be made to answer for any violence sparked by implementation of such measures.

The Levante CNT delegation also spoke up at this point in support of the government. As it saw things, the government had allegedly been forced into extreme measures in order to raise reserves for the Army of Catalonia. The three National Committees were empowered to sound out General Miaja, through the CNT-UGT Liaison Committee, about the lengths to which he intended to take his latest decree.

The plenum endorsed a proposition wherein a start was made by studying the situation of the armies of the zone, flagging up any shortcomings such as inability to outgun the enemy with his superior firepower. Another point raised was the demoralisation of troops — this was ascribed to shortages and to the ineffectuality of official propaganda. There was talk of taking steps to replace certain higher-ranking army and army corps commanders, and replacements were nominated. Another proposal was to set up a higher war council on which organisations and parties would have seats and a monitoring role, overhauling the SIM to banish all political hegemony from it, and to recruit reliable volunteers. It was also proposed that wartime morale be boosted by means of propaganda against the foreign invader, propaganda likely to make an impression upon the enemy's fighters. An end to the independence of the air force, upon which the requisite co-operation with the army had to be imposed. In the matter of nominations for high commands, General Miaja was nominated as General Inspector of the Group of Armies, with an eye to 'removing him from leadership of the troops, since his is solely a decorative figure.' Colonel Segismundo Casado would replace Miaja as Commander of the Group of Armies.

At a 23 January meeting of the FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee, it determined to propose to the other wings of the movement that a national liaison committee of the Libertarian Movement be set up in the Centre-South zone. This would be modelled on the one which the National Plenum of Regional Committees had agreed to establish the previous October. Also agreed was the formation of a national defence secretariat and publication of a manifesto explaining to the public the Libertarian Movement's stance with regard to such grave times. There were measures to stem the repercussions of the possible capture of Barcelona. At all costs, loss of morale on the fronts and in the rearguard, grist to the mills of the Fifth Column, had to be avoided. It had also been anticipated that the government might well move into the zone and that a defence junta needed to be established which would prevent their being delivered up to the government bound hand and foot. A revolutionary tribunal would be set up, as would a committee of public safety or a straightforward counter-cheka with an eye to the PCE, for in Valencia there were two rearguard battalions equipped by like-minded brigades from the Levante front operating at the party's behest.

Here are some of the final conclusions:

'Establishment of relations with the military through the Popular Front and other organs of the anti-fascist movement.

Draft of a manifesto to be put to General Miaja through the National Liaison Committee. This would comprise of the following parts:

- Formal liaison through the National Committees.
- Strengthening of the national Popular Front politically.
- Purging of commanders, the question of exemptions, public order forces, the survival of industries, etc.
- Close scrutiny of the drafting of the joint manifesto in order to avoid potential loopholes.'

There was a firm decision to set up a counter-cheka made up of handpicked personnel, and on affording the co-ordination section whatever it required for its further development.

The first meeting related to the establishment of the Libertarian Movement's National Liaison Sub-Committee took place on 30 January 1939. Once formed, agreement was reached on organising a revolutionary defence system based on the old action groups, but adapted to the current realities. It was left to the co-ordination section to look into this. Other resolutions were that the formation of the Popular Front should be proceeded with and that the attitudes of trustworthy military personnel be sounded.

On 1 February 1939, the three secretaries of all three branches of the Libertarian Movement forwarded the following letter to General Miaja:

'Most excellent señor don and distinguished colleague José Miaja,  
The need for an objective analysis of the true circumstances of the struggle against the Italo-German invasion and its lackeys, the rebels, faces the anti-fascist organisations, which are duty bound to resolutely and competently tackle the problems posed by the current circumstances and solve them urgently.

These are supremely critical moments through which we are passing, not so much in terms of the objective situation, since we remain convinced that the unbreakable will of anti-fascists can overcome all the reverses which may be inflicted on our army by a materially superior enemy, but in psychological terms, what with there being an imperfect connection between the two loyalist zones, and the rumours peddled by our concealed enemies.

It will not have escaped your grasp that the best and only means of getting through these critical moments and embarking upon a new phase of resistance and re-conquest consists of strengthening the people's faith in our course and in the direction of its destinies.

It is the judgment of the undersigned organisations, representing the bulk of the front-line fighters and rearguard workers, that in these times our army must not be denied a single resource so that it may the more effectively stand up to the enemy. As hitherto, so also from now on, we stand ready to give of our blood, our manpower and our labour in defence of our common cause.

The military authorities, saddled today with the functions of government, cannot effectively perform this task without the cooperation of all anti-fascist organisations, the identities and weight of which cannot be disregarded or overlooked without inviting risks, the consequences of which would be detrimental to the anti-fascist cause. Without diminution of those authorities and precisely in order to afford them the civilian support and moral strength they deserve, it is vital that the rule of the military authorities is, at every step, backed by the support of Spanish anti-fascists. In this respect, we feel it incumbent upon us to recommend the advisability of Your Excellency's establishing ongoing and full contact with accredited national representatives of the anti-fascist organisations of the Centre-South zone.

We believe that the procedure of establishing individual contact with the Popular Front in each province enormously hampers Your Excellency's activities. As we believe also that the Popular Front of any province, be it Valencia or Madrid, is in a position to gauge only the problems in its own province, without taking into consideration a wider view with greater ramifications obtaining in that zone and right across the anti-fascist territories.

The undersigned committees, accredited national representatives, hereby volunteer their services in facilitating such tasks and their co-operation in the current situation. We have no doubt that other anti-fascist organisations will follow suit, if you, dear General, with your prestige and authority, recognise the soundness and urgency of our suggestion and take this disinterested initiative on board.

The tragic position in which the Catalan zone finds itself, the Popular Front government's remaining in that zone and the slowness and difficulties of

communications, necessarily lead to problems which the enemy is quick to exploit, sowing mistrust and pessimism in the minds of the weak and the hesitant. The maintenance of public order, the mobilisation of resources for the war effort and the marshalling of new conscripts, provisions, etc., etc...are best and only resolved through the loyal and effective co-operation which, in our view, should be publicly forthcoming from anti-fascist organisations.

While we do not think it necessary to belabour all these problems thrown up by our grave times, and which we must confront in a concerted way, and certain that calm study of the situation will already have led you to the very same conclusion as we reached above, we are confident that you will adopt these measures in which we offer our services, the better to serve the common cause.

Obviously, we reiterate our staunch belief in the final victory of the invincible Spanish people. Our actions speak louder than our words.

Accept, dear General, our best wishes and the expression of our fervent libertarian salutations.

Yours and for anti-fascism...'

On 3 February, the Libertarian Movement's Defence Secretariat met with its sub-sections and with representatives from the Extremadura and Andalusia Regional Committees. It was reported that a meeting had been held with General Miaja to sound him about a national agency that might embrace all sectors of anti-fascist opinion. At that meeting, the question of military exemptions had also been raised, and a promise had been extracted from Miaja to the effect that one of these days a *communiqué* on that point would appear in the press.

Also reported was a meeting with Generals Menéndez (commander of the Army of Levante) and Matallana, 'designed to bring pressure to bear on the Chief of the Group of Armies (Miaja). The individuals cited had shown themselves very willing.' It was reported that 600 cannons, 50,000 rifles and 2,000 machine-guns and plenty of other US-made equipment was on its way to the Centre. This information came from Miaja, who had let it slip at a meeting with Matallana, Menéndez, Camacho and Jesús Hernández.

At the meeting of the Defence Secretariats there was a lively debate about the outcome of recent operations on the Extremadura Front.

When the all-out assault on Catalonia began, the Central zone had an army of 400,000 men. Those troops might have been able to mount significant offensive operations, for they outnumbered the enemy troops facing them. The order to attack had been issued: the attack would take place in Extremadura, in a thrust towards Mérida.. The operation was launched on 5 January, which was when the Catalan front began to collapse: enemy lines were broken and the initial objectives the command had set itself were easily achieved. But on 8 January the operation ground to a halt on orders from above, with no better excuse than the rainy conditions. By the time an attempt was made to resume the offensive, the enemy had managed to reorganise and was now in a position to commit troops moving in a wide arc only seven kilometres from the breakthrough point. However, the anti-fascist troops were superior to the enemy in manpower and materials. A report from the 28th Division's Commissariat (the 28th Division being the unit actively involved in operations) mentioned 7,000 rifles against 1,000.

At the 3 January meeting there was talk of 'lack of discipline, and of the terror required in any war' and of this failure not being attributable to the commands which had laid down specific instructions, 'but in enforcement of which everybody has been too humane and which have remained dead letters.' 'Our units', it was pointed out there, 'are a very clear instance of such reports because of undue indulgence and criticism and the irresponsibility manifest in all orders being debated instead of carried out.'

The FAI representative asserted:

'We cannot systematically heap the blame for all mishaps on the trooper who merely

carries out his orders, nor ascribe excessive indiscipline to those who bear all manner of sacrifices and display a morale as high as our troops were able to demonstrate during the phases of the Extremadura offensive, maintaining it on the defensive, after they had to fall back under enemy pressure due the shortcomings of the entire artillery and of the army's own high command.'

On 6 February, the FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee held a meeting. At it the arrival of Negrin and of Alvarez del Vayo in the Centre-South zone was noted. The view was taken that, failing some change in the situation, this fact at least commended the adoption of a principled attitude. The government was a corpse, but the removal of Negrin was inappropriate: his conduct had to be subjected to the scrutiny of the organisations. Unless this was done, there might be a repetition of the chaotic situations that had been witnessed in Catalonia. Consequently, the following resolution was agreed:

'Pose the matter of Negrin's authority, not that he should be removed from the premiership, but we should insist that he sets up a mini-cabinet (*consejillo*) with representation for Marxists (socialists and communists) and libertarians (CNT and FAI), without whose endorsement he will not be able to achieve a thing.

See what plans exist, what chances and prospects there may be in every respect, for ensuring that they receive due consideration from everyone.

Authorise the Liaison Committee of the Libertarian Movement to take whatever pre-emptive action may be required.

Ensure that all accords reached are implemented as a matter of urgency.'

Once the Liaison Committee had been set up, a plenum of Libertarian Movement Regional Committees was convened. This plenum was held on 10 and 11 February in Valencia on the premises of the FIJL Peninsular Committee, and had the same characteristics as the one held in Barcelona from 16 to 30 October 1938. The agenda was as follows:

'1. Report from the delegation of the CNT National Committee and from the national representatives in Valencia.

2. The Libertarian Movement's stance *vis a vis* the current situation:

a) *vis a vis* the military situation (report from Defence);

b) *vis a vis* the political situation.

Organisational measures for tackling the situation.

General business.'

According to the plenum's minutes, the first to report was the Liaison Sub-Committee of the Libertarian Movement. There was reference to the rapporteur delegation, appointed to travel to Barcelona, having had to land in Toulouse, France, due to an inability to land on Catalan soil. Next came a report on the position regarding military exemptions. It was stated:

'Thus far, we know only that around 35,000 requests have been submitted to the Personnel Section of the army and as far as our application is concerned, no reply has been received by us although we imagine that the response will be satisfactory.'

General Miaja had been visited and the suggestion put to him that a commission (based on political and trade union members) be set up to work in collaboration with the army. Miaja had not acceded to this suggestion, arguing that he was the sole government representative in the zone, and that he was not prepared to share his political and military authority with anyone. Talks had been held with various military figures and the impression from these was that, even if the war was regarded as a lost cause, resistance might be sustained for three or four months. Miaja had revealed the PCE's

plans for setting up a sort of government under Uribe. He opposed this and Miaja indicated that he was not about to surrender command even to Negrín himself unless he was accompanied by the President of the Republic or by Martínez Barrio. The General himself had leaked a telegram appointing him *Generalissimo* of the Army, Navy and Air Force:

The minutes note:

'CENTRE REGIONAL COMMITTEE (Defence): Expressed wonder that the organisation had tolerated General Miaja's claptrap, designed to gag the people.

PENINSULAR SUB-COMMITTEE (FAI): Said that the organisation had not tolerated this. What had happened was that we had been unable to get other parties to act responsibly and treat our people properly.'

The record also includes the following remarks from one member of the National Sub-Committee of the CNT:

'The communists have virtually mounted a coup d'état. [He said] that he had just come from talks with one serviceman, the latter having indicated to him that the meeting with Miaja ought not to have concluded until such time as the relationship to obtain between the General and the people's representatives had been clarified.

...That Meula and Matallana are unquestioningly loyal to Miaja and the plenum must reach a quick decision and let these gentlemen know that there can be no toying with the organisation's 150,000 rifles.'

Note the disparity between the figures given for libertarian armaments. On the one hand, there is talk that the Libertarian Movement controlled 150,000 rifles. Elsewhere this estimate inflates to 300,000. There is disparity also in the figures for total manpower. On the one hand we have the contention that when Catalonia was occupied there 400,000 fighters in the Centre-South zone. This figure later inflates to 640,000.

All of this had been brought home to Miaja, and if nothing came of it, it was due to the cowardice of the political and trade union organisations.

Next came a report from a delegation recently arrived from Catalonia. The report, according to the minutes, was delivered not merely on behalf of the CNT National Committee, but also on the behalf of the Libertarian Movement in its entirety:

'...When Tarragona fell into the enemy hands, the Libertarian Movement thought of broadening the present government to include political personalities like Martínez Barrio, Companys and others. Let it be stressed that this viewpoint was championed by Mariano Vázquez, Frederica Montseny, García Oliver and others. But the persons concerned declined any such responsibility. Later, along came the declaration of martial law, following government consultation with the organisation, which agreed to it, albeit with reservations. Thought was given to the creation of a commissariat of the Barcelona military precinct and the post was awarded to the organisation, which thought of appointing comrade García Oliver, who declined the appointment...

...The fall of Barcelona was due more than anything else to a basic military error since there were fresh troops who might have headed off the rebels' thrust towards Barcelona. This was not done and the consequences have pained us...as a result of the fascists' advance on Barcelona, we see that demoralisation has set in agencies and parties and affects the very government. making people consider that everything is lost and they are not bothering to put up effective resistance, which, while it might not have resolved the situation, might have made possible a retreat with fewer losses in terms of men and material.

As an urgent aid to resistance, the government thought to organise eight machine-gunner battalions, but had time to set up only one because it was overtaken by events and a decision made at one point was rendered irrelevant within hours, having been overtaken by the circumstances.

If one adds to all this the fact that martial law was proclaimed just as the government was quitting Barcelona and that it took defensive equipment with it as well as evacuation trucks from the ministries, which travelled through the streets in broad daylight, one can appreciate the demoralising impact this had upon the civilian population.

Measures for boosting civilian morale were suggested by the Libertarian Movement, but it met with no response from the organisations and parties, most of their local organisations having pulled out of Barcelona...'

The report added that on 26 January, the date when the Catalan capital fell, there were only three cannons and one company of auxiliary services left there. Every single one of the militants of the Libertarian Movement had managed to escape to safety even though they had been the last to quit the capital. A delegation had not been sent to the Centre-South zone before because Negrín had forbidden movements of any sort. The Cortes, meeting in Figueres, had condensed Negrín's famous 13 Points down to just three: 1. Respect for national sovereignty and independence; 2. the holding of an immediate plebiscite by which the people might endow itself with a regime it deemed appropriate; 3. freedom for those who might so desire to leave the country without loss of rights of nationality. The aim was to seek a solution to the war on this basis: France and England were working to that end, but were meeting with intransigence from Franco, who aimed to deliver up to the courts those who had committed what he described as 'criminal' offences, and who rejected the idea of a plebiscite: the CNT's National Committee intended to relocate to the Centre-South zone, etc.

Remarks from the Defence Section of the CNT National Sub-Committee wound up this first session of the plenum:

'From talks held with military personnel, it emerges that these are still at their posts, not so much because they are anti-fascists but due to military honour. Accordingly, it cannot be entirely ruled out that someone will commit treachery against us. The sector where the enemy advance is most dangerous is the one where the 4th and 19th Army Corps meet.

In reply to a question from Defence of the Centre concerning the position *vis à vis* war materials and men, the reply was that our army today comprises 640,000 men, of which only 300,000 were under the orders of the organisation.'

The FAI Peninsular Sub-Committee reported the loss of the island of Maó. The CNT Regional Committee of Andalusia declared:

'We are in a position to resist and to win, and so all of the speeches of the Regional Committees should be designed to encourage resistance. We must ensure that morale does not fall in our zone, for there would be a repetition of what happened in Barcelona, with the aggravating circumstance that that we have no border here, but only the sea.'

In the second session there was again talk of the Negrín government coming to the zone, of its refusal to acknowledge the validity of the decree on the collection of weapons from anti-fascists, of the need to purge the rearguard and give a boost to the Popular Front 'which should now step into parliament's shoes'. In replying to the CNT National Sub-Committee, which asserted that it did not believe in a communist *coup d'état*, the Defence Section of the Centre stated that Jesús Hernández was juggling with the posts recently allocated and that it found 'Miaja's appointment as Grand General very telling, since he has wasted no time in issuing suspect orders.'

The CNT representative from Levante said that he had had reports that the government was negotiating for an armistice and that the war was about to be concluded:

'Notwithstanding, the climate of conscious resistance has to be maintained, that is, we

must resist, but not to the extreme lengths of committing collective suicide.'

While the working party which was to frame a proposition about what had been covered was meeting, the necessity was broached of paying Negrín a call to explain:

'that most military commanders were disgruntled with Miaja's appointment and that it had to be stressed to him that the most trustworthy military commander left in our army is Segismundo Casado.'

It was therefore agreed that the National Committees would call on the head of the government 'and tackle him as bluntly as circumstances recommend'.

One contribution from the co-ordinating delegation from the Centre Regional Committee stated:

'We must insist he reports fully on the present situation and on the policy which the government means to pursue in this zone. Should this be a policy of mediation or liquidation, representation must be demanded on any commissions that may be set up, so that we can salvage all of the moral and material assets of the Libertarian Movement, amounting to some 50,000 comrades... We should not be unduly trusting of the resistance plans which Negrín means to implement, but should be on the alert, lest we be wrong-footed by his manoeuvres.'

The plenum concluded its business at 3.00 am on 11 February. At 6.00 pm that very day, the FAI held a meeting of its regional secretaries. The minutes of this refer to implementation of the previous plenum's resolution about an audience with Negrín. And the Peninsular Sub-Committee reported that, having sought such an interview twice to no avail, the Sub-Committee had suggested that the Liaison Committee send Negrín a 'forceful letter'. Within minutes of the letter being sent, the head of the government replied by telephone that he was very interested in a meeting with the Libertarian Movement, but asked that he be sent another letter as he regarded the first one as unduly harsh. He was sent another letter 'which was satisfactory as regards form, but which retained, undiluted, the content of the previous one.' The delegation was sent for in the early evening. The general secretaries of the Libertarian Movement's three branches arrived for the interview, but 'as the interview began an incident of some seriousness occurred since the premier tried to reject one of our delegates, Grunfeld, the FAI secretary, on the grounds that he was not a Spanish national', and 'upon the latter's replying in the same tone employed by the former', that he was not there 'in a personal capacity, but representing a Spanish organisation, some words were exchanged and the delegation was on the verge of withdrawing. In view of which Negrín gave way, but as the other envoys lacked forcefulness, our delegate was excluded from the interview despite his being on hand.' The other delegates engaged in dialogue with Negrín and, according to the minute, 'unfortunately handled things rather clumsily, failing to implement all the accords reached at the plenum as well as by the Liaison Committee of the Libertarian Movement.'

One of those present states in the minutes:

'An important battle has been lost because Negrín, a shrewd man, managed to capture a tactically advantageous position. From our letter, he must have understood the danger looming over him and looked for some form of attack by which he might rout the enemy... That attack, while not flattering to Negrín, was enough to embarrass his adversaries... Grunfeld, under a cloud, failed to provide a detailed account of what passed at the interview, because, according to the report made to the Sub-Committee, the issue of the safety of the membership was raised, not by our delegates, but by Negrín.'

Grunfeld specified that it was Inigo who raised it, and indeed that Negrín had praised him for his candour.'



The Levante delegate said:

'We must not lose sight of the basic issue. The Libertarian Movement should not have gone to prostrate itself before Negrín. We were not equal to the challenge...The pretext cited by Negrín is worthless. We know that he has already had dealings with foreigners...with Russians, the French, etc...and so it was wrong to take his bait.'

According to that same delegate, certain issues had not been put to the Premier, matters concerning which 'immediate solutions should have been demanded, instead of which there was talk of liquidation, when it had been specifically determined that this was not to be mentioned.'

On 14 February, a circular 'To all militant comrades' was issued over the signature of the Defence Secretary. It noted the loss of Barcelona and Catalonia, the evacuation to France of the Army of Catalonia and huge masses of the population and the circumstances of those interned in France. Then it referred to the political and military situation which had emerged in the South-Centre zone:

'Appropriate analysis has been made and the results are as follows: we can hold out against the enemy for some months, using the material at our disposal and counting on the steely determination expressed by all commanders and troops not to let themselves be overrun or misled by the fascist hordes, putting maximum effort into the struggle.

Visits have been made to some army commanders and those of our comrades who are unit commanders have been consulted. What would be the point of our stating the great satisfaction we take in the knowledge of their determination to win or to die, winning or perishing like men not ready to parade their misfortunes through the world and, worse still, scorned by those countries which have thus far not seen fit to defend themselves with the commitment we have displayed in defending ourselves?

On the 10th of this month, Negrín and the Minister of State, Alvarez del Vayo, arrived in Valencia. They were promptly visited by our organisation, represented by the three secretaries of the Libertarian Movement. The stance we have set out for you above was made clear. In the course of the conversation, there was a broad agreement with our view, and the arrival of the entire government in the Centre-South zone was cited as proof of this.

In that conversation, Negrín hinted at the possibility of recovering equipment evacuated from the Catalan zone, equipment which is plentiful and good, and also expressed the hope that prolonged resistance in our zone might lead to a weakening of the international fascist onslaught which already believed the war over, and might also prompt the democratic countries, if not into a sensitivity to mutual security between countries, then at least, over time and in view of the selfishness of the dictators, into a clash of arms that would cool the totalitarian countries' enthusiasm for bullying.

In view of the vagueness of these statements, our movement has adopted a posture of closely monitoring any political developments which may ensue from this day forth.

Comrade Blanco's arrival in this zone will make this task effective, a task to which all of the higher agencies of our movement commit themselves with all enthusiasm and in close collaboration.

[We must] resist to avert a disaster that would plunge us into real chaos. And this mandate from the organisation must be honoured in spite even of the enemy war machine's superiority. It should be borne in mind that any hint of irresponsibility is tantamount to an act of treachery which the organisation will punish.

Between comrades and militants of every persuasion and especially within their own units, the most cordial relations should be established between commanders and officials. This is not the time to keep one's distance: on the contrary, it is time to reinforce our relations. Trench-digging and sentry work must be undertaken everywhere...Officers must be appreciative of the responsibilities they carry, rather than of their formal ranks, creating the required spirit of struggle for confronting any eventuality.'

On 15 February, an important meeting was held in Madrid; present were the three regional committees from the Centre, the CNT's National Sub-Committee and the Peninsular Sub-Committees of the FAI and the FIJL. The arrival of Segundo Blanco in the zone was announced to the meeting. Blanco had stated that, after the fall of Tarragona, the government had bought a huge amount of arms from Russia and that the scale of the purchase matched all previous purchases added together, especially where air force supplies were concerned. Blanco declared:

'But Russia's negligence, whether out of a desire to evade its actual commitment in respect of the shipment, or on account of the meagre interest it seems to be showing in the Spanish problem, has meant that nearly all the equipment, among which I might mention the acquisition of 500 aircraft, will be left to await shipment and that what was shipped out has not been able to get beyond the French border, because it arrived too late.'

Blanco also stated that opinion in France was in favour of a complete end to the Spanish war. 'Vázquez, Frederica and García Oliver are making overtures to Azaña with an eye to resolving the issue of the Centre-South zone', in that France and especially England intended to recognise Franco. Our committees in France had sent a letter containing a series of instructions. It bore the signatures of Mariano Vázquez and Pedro Herrera. Segundo Blanco himself had been handed another, drafted in similar terms. Here is the text of that second letter:

'INFORMATION. 1. Be it known that Negrín has reached agreement with Azaña on the pursuit of a policy to end the war.

2. The Mexican government has arranged with the Spanish government to take in 30,000 families "selected" from among the most compromised. It asks for fair-mindedness and that the place of residence, the political affiliation and the profession of each individual are recorded. Passage is to be paid.

The government has set up a Commission to take charge of this task, and has appointed Garcés from the SIM, to head it. On Mexico's insistence, Torres Campaña is to join the National Aid Committee.

POLITICAL GUIDELINES. 1. The government, though it may not say so, is liquidating. You should bear this in mind and seek to reach agreement with the republican ministers on these matters since they will know what they are about and, anyway, it is with them that we are going to work. Work and activity should be focused on the idea of saving our "militants". They must not be left behind. The others have few to rescue, while we have many lives to consider. Again our earlier proposal comes into its own: that foreign ships come to carry away the anti-fascist militants.

You must insist upon a place on the government Commission, which may be set up to handle these matters. It cannot be left to Negrín and del Vayo. This Commission should see to it:

- a) that the foreign ships arrive at the appropriate time;
- b) that the evacuation be organised with clear dossiers on who should be taken out;
- c) that it is conversant with the economic resources of the state and that these be put to proper use, each militant receiving a sum to carry him through the initial stages.

2. With the end of the war, the government disappears. But a commission must survive to take charge of the remaining sundry business and concerns. This commission should comprise Azaña, Negrín, Martínez Barrio and one figure from each party and organisation serving in the present government.

3. This commission cannot go beyond finding placements for the compromised, which is to say the militants. And steps must be taken to ensure that there is no attempt to give precedence to state functionaries, who are not exactly those most compromised. Catalans and Basques are excluded here, since their needs have already been or are being catered for in direct fashion.

4. The problem of France merits special attention. Resources are the property of the

State and, in government, responsibility is shared, so there can be no question of Negrín's being trusted with the Treasury.

**OFFICIAL POLICY.** The situation of the Public Education Ministry's services and of children must be highlighted abroad. The Delegation must be issued with sufficient francs to cope with any eventuality, even after the international recognition of Franco, to whom they will not surrender the colonies immediately. Money must be demanded to cover the pay of the functionaries left here, the Under-Secretaries prominent among them.

**ORGANISATIONAL POLICY.** 1. In anticipation of your reaching the other zone ahead of the delegation of López, Val and Amil, you should assemble the militants and brief them fully.

2. They should be informed that we will see a ship chartered for our militants and that, should we be successful in this, it will arrive and place itself at their disposal. This without prejudice to inclusion of our militants in the official evacuation arrangements.

3. We are busily ensuring that our militants can be accommodated abroad.

4. We are going to be in touch and in close collaboration with Martínez Barrio and Azaña to ensure maximum advantage for our militants.

5. Work permitting, we shall dispatch a delegation to the other zone. Meanwhile, the highest organisational authority there is vested in the Sub-Committees.

Explain our situation to them and explain that a goodly number of the members of the committees are in concentration camps.

Let dossiers be compiled on militants and their families so that they can be placed in a variety of countries or prepared for organised evacuation.

We also recommend that the CNT, FAI and FIJL operate in concert as the Libertarian Movement in order to avert duplication of efforts.

Recommend discretion in the work to be undertaken to get our militants out in order to pre-empt greater catastrophes.

There is a Popular Front accord on the creation of a similar body in that zone. You should see to it that it is set up and tackles problems better. But this should not lead to reliance upon it to resolve our problems.

On behalf of the FAI Peninsular Committee, Pedro Herrera; on behalf of the CNT National Committee, Mariano Vázquez. 10 February 1939.'

Madrid was the scene on 16 February 1939 of another meeting of the Libertarian Movement's Liaison Committee. It may have been a continuation of the preceding one. This meeting was of tremendous significance. It all revolved around an alleged attitude on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Cipriano Mera, which 'might have dangerous and counter-productive consequences for the business in which the organisation is engaged.' Until such time as organisational procedures and all political remedies had been exhausted, the secretary of the CNT National Sub-Committee took the line that there was no 'call for extreme measures'. The political issue could not be raised because of the absence of the President of the Republic or the Speaker of the Cortes... 'And a hard line might precipitate disaster'. Several communist commanders, Lister and Modesto among them, had already arrived in the zone and it was suspected that Negrín 'will want to award them some command'. Given Mera's attitude, the argument was that the organisation's accords 'stipulating that no militant and no body... may make decisions or adopt stances unaided', had to be borne in mind. Mera was just another comrade among the many and he had to be made to abide by the accords.

At which point Mera was afforded access to the meeting. And he was informed:

'That it is regarded as improper for a CNT militant to be, or to believe himself answerable to any person, even should it be Casado, rather than to the organisation. Consequently, in the belief that the time has not yet come to act in the manner sought by Mera, the organisation, along with all its militants throughout the zone, will conduct itself accordingly when it deems appropriate.'

And here, taken from the minutes, is Mera's reply:

'He states that he has made a decision on the basis of his analysis of the current situation. Alludes to the remit and confidence deserved by the committees, which cannot give assurances that their performance has always been effective. In this regard, he says that they briefed him just the other day about a commission, which had been for talks with Negrín. That commission had carried hard and fast accords from the organisation. It was a matter of treating with Negrín as one equal to another, but it emerges that when Negrín challenged one comrade on the grounds of his being a foreigner, the commission dropped its offensive posture. Men and organisations will have to answer before history for their actions.'

Mera went on to say that he regarded himself as a disciplined militant and thus regarded the reference to his allegedly showing deference to Casado as frivolous.

'Then again, his view is that the committees should be cognisant of the responsibility they incur [for] some failed committees would deserve to be shot, as happens in any revolution.'

It was pointed out to Mera 'that the organisation as a whole had to operate in accordance with plans across the whole country', that his co-operation and that of all comrades was being relied upon 'for whatever might arise', but that the committees were engaged in certain negotiations and no other decisions could be taken until such time as certain avenues had been exhausted. 'One has to remember that one wrong move in the current circumstances would enable anarchism's enemies to seek to besmirch our conduct and charge us with disasters for which the blame belongs to them alone.' It was a question of 'allowing Negrín, or any other government, to carry on just as long as we may oversee and effectively partake in this performance, and if the committees fail to achieve this aim, they will deserve shooting.'

At which point Mera withdrew from the meeting. Here are some other interesting excerpts from the minutes:

'[the secretary of the CNT National Sub-Committee] reports on the cabinet meeting at which the question of government resistance, the disposition of the Fleet and that of the provinces of Alicante, Murcia, Albacete etc. were raised. The government will definitely not reside in Madrid. All the ministers spoke out against the communists, Negrín included. A forceful telegram has been sent to Azaña urging that he come immediately so that the political issue can be tackled. A telegram was received from the Ambassador of Spain in London, who had met with Mr. Halifax to tell him that his government was authorising the British government to enter into negotiations for peace on the basis of Negrín's 13 points. According to the same source, Halifax heartily welcomed the suggestion and promised that his government would look into the matter without delay. It seems that the British government is to supply transport and food...

On the other hand, it is agreed Negrín be informed, through Blanco, that in no way will any of the communist commanders and commissars arriving from France be allowed to be appointed to any post. It is agreed, furthermore, that the Centre Regional Defence be given the go-ahead to hold talks with Casado in order to communicate our position to him directly and to forestall Modesto's or Lister's or any communist's being appointed to any position in the army...'

Through the meetings which we have been examining, one can detect an escalating friction between members of the FAI's Peninsular Sub-Committee (now the Peninsular Committee pure and simple, given the transfer of functions from the one which stayed behind in France) and the CNT's National Sub-Committee.

This sniping became acute after the incident, which occurred on the occasion of the

visit to Negrin. The ambiguous stance of minister Segundo Blanco meant that he was suspected of supporting negrinista policy.

This situation was dealt with at a meeting of the FAI Peninsular Committee on 22 February, in which there was a discussion of the 'inferiority complex in which some comrades from the movement place themselves in their official business, among them the secretary of the CNT's National Sub-Committee, no less, in his dealings with the minister of Public Education, comrade Blanco'. To overcome the situation what was needed was the 'speedy arrival of the responsible elements from the National Committees which are in France.' A telegram had to be sent off promptly to comrades Germinal de Sousa and Pedro Herrera, 'urging upon them the overriding necessity for one of them to travel with the utmost haste to this zone'. The CNT's minister had to be influenced through 'direct contact with the Libertarian Movement' and through some comrade who would be more steadfast than the secretary of the CNT National Sub-Committee. In the face of Blanco's ineffectuality as a minister and as a defender of the Libertarian Movement's interests, definitive solutions needed to be worked out at the forthcoming session of the movement's Liaison Committee. Moreover, 'in view of the PCE's action, it is vital that appropriate action be ordered in order to overcome it.'

The aforementioned meeting of the National Liaison Committee of the Libertarian Movement was held on 25 February. The secretary of the CNT's National Sub-Committee then reported back on his talks with Blanco. Blanco had confirmed that Azaña was refusing to return to the Centre-South zone, which undermined the government's prestige and simultaneously prevented any cabinet re-shuffle.

The government's intention was to carry on with the war, given that Franco was refusing a negotiated settlement. The government had agreed to restructure the army command and had appointed Miaja as Inspector-General of the fronts. There were no indication of any immediate plans for an enemy onslaught.

According to the minutes, the FAI offered the following elaboration on the information above:

'As for enemy troop movements, we have contrary reports which suggest that within one month the enemy is to launch another huge offensive.

We know that Azaña has made public statements in the French press refusing to come to this zone and talking of resigning the Presidency of the Republic.

The prime minister is forever misleading our minister and he us. We must put an end to this.

The PCE is installing its pawns. We must be wary of this since we will not be able to do anything, should we resolve to prevent it, once it is a *fait accompli*. All of the trends of which we are aware point to what we have just indicated.

Under this government, there is no possibility of arranging an honourable peace. Inevitably some government or Defence Junta offering this option will have to be set up.

The presumed reshuffle of some army commands inspires no confidence in us, given that our minister has not, as the latest accords prescribe he should, supplied the names of the replacements.'

Towards the end of February, contacts were established between parties and organisations with a view to setting up a Popular Front Liaison Committee. At a meeting held in Madrid on 26 February, the Libertarian Movement's Liaison Committee resolved to stake its claim to the secretaryship of the future Popular Front Liaison Committee and that this claim would be pressed at cabinet level. It would also make an issue of the Popular Front's laying down rules for the government to abide by.

A delegation from this committee would travel to France for talks with Azaña, inviting him to journey to Spain to resolve the political crisis.

At the aforementioned meeting, the FAI's suspicions of the secretary of the CNT's National Sub-Committee grew even more shrill. He was accused of making overtures to the government in concert with Segundo Blanco and behind the back of the

movement's Liaison Committee and especially unbeknownst to the Peninsular Committees of the FAI and the FIJL.

This meeting continued on 27 February and at it, the decision was made to raise within the Popular Front meeting, summoned for that very evening, among other suggestions, the proposal that a Higher War Council be formed and Segismundo Casado appointed chief of the Central High Command.

At the CNT's request, on 1 March there was a meeting of the Libertarian Movement. There was no more talk now of the Sub-Committees. The organisation that had summoned the meeting opened the proceedings by attacking the Libertarian Movement's Liaison Committee, describing it as useless and a hindrance to the snap decision-making required in the circumstances. It proposed that there should be one single committee making the decisions and that that committee should be the CNT committee, to which members of the FAI and FIJL might be seconded.

The minutes show the following:

'The FIJL Peninsular Committee spoke up to state that there was no time to waste and that it was taken aback at the CNT National Committee's clumsiness in disguising what it was after. That it ought to state clearly what underlay its proposal, which was nothing more than a wish to act as the guide of the Libertarian Movement without any interference from anybody.

It would not matter to us if the CNT were to take charge of everything, were not its conduct riddled with errors and miscalculations and had it shown itself throughout to be equal to the challenge. Its attitude does not surprise us, for through its performance we have observed its coolness towards us.

The CNT National Committee greatly regrets that the other committees have spoken as they have...but we declare frankly that our sole motivation in so doing is the logical consequence we deduce from the Liaison Committee's being a non-entity...This is all the more serious given the critical times we are living in, times that are aggravated by one treacherous faction which, turning a blind eye to the fellowship that should obtain between all anti-fascist sectors, seeks to impose its totalitarian views.

The FAI Peninsular Committee took the line that the CNT National Committee had declared itself in revolt, that it was operating outside of the remit of the organisation it represents and that, as such, its position is inadmissible. To date, the Liaison Committee has been simply feeding on the initiatives from the FAI and FIJL, which is testimony to the ineptitude of the CNT National Committee.

At this time, the National Committee seeks to make us accomplices in the non-implementation of accords reached by the organisation, and declares itself in breach of the accords of its own organisation.

The FIJL Peninsular Committee states that the present gathering does not have the authority to decide upon the CNT's proposition and that the discussions should be discontinued. Should the CNT believe that an executive committee needs to be set up, let it state this clearly and we shall put it to our Regional Committees.'

On 3 March, there was another meeting of the same calibre, attended this time by Segundo Blanco. In his report, Blanco said that he had taken appropriate steps to thwart Negrín's plans to have Casado replaced and that he had secured from Negrín a declaration against the 'intentions of the communists'. Nonetheless, Negrín persisted with his plans for a reshuffle in the army. The minister also reported that Azaña had tendered his resignation, which made it impossible to raise the political problem and that negotiations were under way for the speaker of the Cortes to come. But the speaker had adopted an evasive attitude. Blanco also mentioned that Franco had been recognised by France and England. On 27 February 1939, the British Prime Minister made this statement to the Commons:

'His Majesty's government has devoted particular attention to the Spanish situation and the action it should undertake on the basis of the intelligence available to it. As a

result of the fall of Barcelona and the occupation of Catalonia, General Franco now controls the larger part of Spanish territory, within the peninsula and beyond. Although the republican forces on the southern zone continue to keep up a show of resistance, there can be no doubt as to the final outcome of the struggle. Moreover, His Majesty's government cannot regard the Spanish republican government as the sovereign government of Spain, scattered, as it is, having no army nor solid appearance of authority. Given these circumstances, we have decided to communicate to General Franco our decision to acknowledge his government as the government of Spain and, to this end, formal action has been taken this very day. My understanding is that the French government is also to announce a similar decision. His Majesty's government welcomes General Franco's public declaration regarding his and his government's determination to ensure Spain's independence and take action only against those facing criminal charges.'

Segundo Blanco was optimistic with regard to the communists' attitude. The situation was not in their favour and all nervousness had to be avoided, along with any precipitate action. On arrival in the Central zone, the government had come across the parties' preparations for the rescue of their militants. Formal overtures were being made to some countries with an eye to evacuation, and governors had been issued with instructions to issue passports discreetly, but a frightful chaos had resulted from whimsical interpretation of these orders. In military terms, the government saw that the situation was very difficult. What little reserves were available could not sustain the fight for more than three months. In anticipation of the worst eventuality, contact had been established with the European powers with a view to avoiding reprisals. 'As for the possibility of ultimate victory', Blanco wound up, 'no one with any commonsense can conceive of it.'

The focus of the debate that followed Blanco's address was the speech that the leader of the government was due to deliver around this time and it was agreed that, in order to banish his customary demagogic and personal tone, guidelines should be laid down for this speech, after which the meeting moved on to consider the military position and the following opinion from the FAI appears in the minutes.

'By our reckoning, the relevant proposals spelled out by the Libertarian Movement - Central High Command, Higher War Council, reorganisation of the Commissariat, changes of command and replacement of Jesús Hernández — should be implemented immediately. There is also the Under-Secretaryship of the Army, whose reassignment would be very welcome.'

Colonel Casado's candidacy for command of the Central High Command was endorsed, and General Matallana was recommended for command of the Army of the Centre, a post that Casado would be vacating. Avelino González Entrialgo would be nominated for Commissar of the Cartagena Naval Base.

We shall leave the grave and important events triggered by the Negrin government's presence in the Central zone to the following chapter.



▲ Horrors of War: Helios Gómez, 1939





▲ Horrors of War: Helios Gómez, 1939

## Chapter Thirteen: Woe to the Vanquished

With the arrival in the Central zone of the leader of the government, together with his ministers and his communist staff, the political disintegration under way in that zone was exacerbated. From Negrín, the communist leaders had secured exclusive title to air transport to central Spain aboard the Republic's aircraft and very promptly the big guns of their demagoguery and misrepresentation fired off a salvo. This was a softening-up operation ahead of an assault upon the military and political positions upon which they had set their sights. The opening salvoes came from *Mundo Obrero* which tried to heap the blame for the loss of Catalonia on the non-communist groups. And this campaign came at a time when nobody was trying to bring communist generals to book for their repeated reverses on the Catalan front, particularly Modesto and 'El Campesino', who were the first commanders to be overrun by Italian armour there.

Publication of *Mundo Obrero* was suspended after it carried a defamatory manifesto which fell foul of the censor. It was a reprint of one released by the PCE Politburo in the middle of the disaster in Catalonia. In it, Largo Caballero was accused of bearing the responsibility for that disaster and was labelled a 'thief' and a 'murderer' and it was alleged that he had decamped to France like a coward. Despite suspension of this communist diatribe, the manifesto was reissued as a flyer and distributed among troops in the trenches.

According to Casado's account in his book *The Last Days of Madrid*, Negrín had a four-hour interview with him upon arrival in the central zone. He opened by announcing that Casado was being promoted to the rank of general. Casado briefed the Prime Minister on the situation of the fronts and the rearguard. Provisions were in alarmingly short supply. Madrid's civilian population had food for just two days. There was no milk available for children over two years of age. Electricity reserves were not enough to guarantee continued operation of the few remaining war industries. The loss of Catalonia had meant a 70 per cent reduction in war industry establishments. Raw materials and means of transport were in short supply, and there was no possibility of bringing in supplies from outside. If the enemy were to succeed in his aim of severing communications between Madrid and Levante, the unconquered capital would have to surrender within 48 hours or watch its inhabitants perish of hunger. The army was short of defensive equipment and the propaganda to which the communists applied themselves had made the army ineffective. 70 per cent of the comrades were in the hands of the PCE. Troops were going hungry and unclad and the Catalan disaster had profoundly undermined morale. The army reserves had been whittled down to eight green, poorly-armed and badly-officered divisions. Yet across the trenches from Madrid's southern flank the enemy had 32 divisions arrayed with masses of tanks, artillery and automatic weapons aplenty. A Francoist brigade had twice as many men as a republican brigade.

In conclusion, Casado broached the need to bring the war to a dignified end in order to avert pointless loss of life.

Negrín replied to all this reasoning with the tired can about there being some 10,000 machine-guns, 500 artillery pieces and 60 planes available...in France, to be sure. And that all attempts to wring peace with honour from Franco had foundered, leaving heroic resistance the only option.

Later, Negrín assembled the representatives of the Popular Front and regaled them with an eloquent speech in which his hundreds of artillery pieces and thousands of machines were brought up again. He closed his address with a paean to resistance and pre-empted any possible comeback by alleging that he had to leave for his desk as a matter of urgency.

Some days later, he summoned the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Air Force and Navy to Los Llanos (Albacete) airfield. For two hours he spoke to them about his

peace negotiations which, he revealed, dated back as far as March 1938. He had made use of friends, some of them fascists or pro-Franco, and of the British government, but to no avail. So there was nothing for it now but to resist. And he underlined his concluding words by citing the usual avalanche of weaponry of all sorts that he appeared to have within reach. Among his boasts featured the Army of Catalonia, a battered army interned in the concentration camps in France. 'He omitted to mention', Casado points out 'that, in light of his failure, he was ready to tender his resignation.'

In the face of the orator's euphoria, the high-ranking army officers insisted in a dignified way upon the need to enter into peace negotiations with the enemy. Admiral Buiza reported that the fleet was threatening to quit Cartagena unless peace was negotiated immediately.

'And why have you not had these upstarts shot?', shrieked Negrin.

'Because my opinion coincides with theirs', came the Admiral's steely reply.

Air Force Commander Camacho and Bernal, the Commander of the Naval Base, agreed with their comrades in arms. Only Miaja sought to ingratiate himself a little by taking up the Premier's song of resistance.

'Agreed', Casado cut him short, 'but let us make a start by repatriating the families of all those officers whose families are outside the country.'

Miaja was forced to hold his tongue.

As the meeting broke up, Negrin, realising that he was sitting on a powder keg, accelerated his plans for a *coup d'état*. He would begin with the army. Matallana would be appointed chief of the Central Staff, Modesto would be promoted to general, like most of the other communist military commanders, and would take over from Casado as commander of the Army of the Centre. Galán would be appointed to command of the Cartagena Naval Base.

J. García Pradas, in his book, *La traición de Stalin* has written:

'Let the reader gauge, then, how loaded was the atmosphere when the cream of libertarian militants from the Centre region prepared to hold a plenum, scheduled for the last fortnight in February. What a gathering! We came together in a hall of the Public Entertainments Union, at No. 29 in Miguel Angel Street, adjoining the mansion in which Durruti had set up his headquarters in November 1936. Present were some 250 comrades of well-trying mettle, sound revolutionary credentials and disposed to daring decisions.

That plenum was the epitome of dignity. At length we examined the situation in the zone and found it so disastrous against this background it struck us as impossible not only to resist but even to make peace. We all agreed upon the necessity of organising the pace of the fighting, with enthusiasm for the fray in our troops and in others. We aimed to negotiate a path between this war to the death of which many spoke, as if suicide by an entire people were possible, and the honourable peace which some were beginning to contemplate. We hoped we might avert the chaos, the angry chorus of the abandoned or defeated masses, the ghastliness of a military defeat followed by the disintegration of our rearguard which, in the space of a few hours, might bring mad panic and despair in its wake, as had occurred in Málaga, Santander, Asturias and Catalonia itself.

And with this end in mind and in order to undertake operations encompassing more than our own specific circles, the plenum resolved to set up a Regional Defence Committee to which all others had to be strictly subordinate and in which the following sections would come together: military organisation, statistics, political police, propaganda and guidance, supervision of our economic might, transport and deployment of technical personnel.'

The Defence Committee immediately issued a statement in which, Pradas (he having drafted it) says 'it declared itself strong enough to attempt to make a reality of the slogan "Either we are all saved or we all go under"' previously popularised by the government.

A few days later the question of a National Defence Council was raised 'and there were open talks with Casado'.

'...Whereupon we stepped up our efforts: we increased the pace to a frenzy, confident

that he who strikes first strikes twice as hard! Overnight, at a large private residence in Serrano Street, where the Marqués de Luque de Tena, owner of *ABC*, had lived prior to the war, the Defence Committee orchestrated the revolt... Two or three times daily, Val and Salgado passed on our resolutions to Casado and through this liaison the tiniest details of the rising were ironed out. Segismundo — or Segis, as we used to call him — had taken charge of liaison with the military personnel we needed. He was the most prestigious figure among them by virtue of his professional talents, republican record, his subtle and perspicacious intellect and his opposition to any chicanery against the anti-fascist unity of the people: he had had a hand in a number of plots against the Bourbon monarchy, had later commanded the presidential escort; during the war, he had emerged as a confidant of Largo Caballero as Director of Operations for the Central Staff, directing part of the battles of Jarama and Brunete — making good other people's mistakes — commanding the Army of Andalusia and the Army of Aragón and finally carrying the hopes of the Army of the Centre, which, when Negrín promoted him to the rank of general towards the end, could not have dreamt that Negrín had already made provision to have him removed and, maybe, to have him shot.<sup>1</sup>

Casado in his book notes that, on 1 March, he was summoned by Negrín to the notorious Yuste position, a sort of fortress garrisoned by elite communist troops. Negrín had ordered that, upon leaving Madrid, he should hand over command of the Army of the Centre 'temporarily' to Colonel Ortega, the communist commander of the 3rd Army Corps, whom we have already encountered. But, finding this ploy repugnant, Casado handed over to his Chief of Staff, for which Negrín naturally took him to task. Negrín's scheme collapsed, but Casado availed of his visit to Levante to have talks with General Menéndez and other military chiefs to whom he revealed the intentions he suspected Negrín of having, as well as his own intention to mount a revolt. From these chiefs he received the promises of support that he needed.

On 3 March, on returning to Madrid, Casado held talks with trusted military leaders whose number undoubtedly included Cipriano Mera, Commander of the 4th Army Corps.

That same day Casado was visited by a woman, one Rosario del Olmo, an agent of Negrín's, who showed up with a suggestion that he sign a declaration of unqualified loyalty to the government. Casado excused himself on the grounds that doing what she proposed was out of place and at odds with regulations, since in fact every serviceman had pledged his support as a functionary of the government. Casado understood perfectly well that this was an ultimatum from Negrín. This was shown by the fact that within a few hours Negrín summoned him to talks due to be held in his own home. Consequently, del Olmo's visit was closely bound up with the Premier's invitation. The summons indicated that Casado had been marked for arrest and this suspicion was confirmed by the fact that Matallana and Miaja had also been sent for. By telephone, Casado told the latter of his unshakable determination not to walk into the trap. This time Miaja gave his approval. Matallana deferred ultimately to professional scruples.

As a result, over the telephone wires, there ensued between Casado and Negrín the sort of tug of war one sees between two skilful wrestlers cognisant of each other's abilities.

On the very day the interview was to have taken place, orders elevating Modesto to General, and Tagüena and Vega to garrison commanders of Murcia and Alicante and Francisco Galán to commander of the Cartagena Naval Base were made public. By Negrín's reckoning, publication of these orders had to be timed to coincide with the arrests of Casado, Miaja and Matallana. Only Matallana, the sole member of the trio to show up at the Premier's residence, was actually detained.

Although his game had now been rumbled, Negrín persisted, sometimes with polite requests, and sometimes with veiled threats, in trying to draw Casado into the trap he

1. J. García Pradas, *La traición de Stalin*

had set for him and he offered Casado every sort of facility for making the journey, from his own personal car to a Douglas aircraft expressly dispatched to Madrid (but which returned empty to the Yuste base, of course).

On the same day, Cartagena witnessed the grave developments which led to the fleet quitting that port. Afterwards Negrín pressed Casado to present himself at his stronghold the next day (5 March), and no excuses.

Casado wrote in his book:

'I gave him my sincere word this time, for if we had not revolted he, as a prisoner of the communists, would have had to resort to force.'

In the early evening of the same day, Casado established what would be the headquarters of the Defence Council in the cellars of the Treasury Ministry. At the stroke of 8 pm the future council members gathered there, except for Miaja who remained in Valencia, oblivious of what was afoot. The declaration due to be broadcast to the nation was gone over and before that could be done, they awaited the arrival of a CNT brigade, the 70th, from the Army Corps commanded by Mera. The 70th Brigade would take over the strategic positions in the city centre in anticipation of an expected communist counter-coup.

Over to García Pradas:

'At 11.30 am the CNT brigade arrived, under the command of Bernabé López. Its troops were deployed in the agreed positions and comrade Septién, Captain of the company occupying the Treasury Ministry, went down to see Casado. The doors of the building were closed and at midday when the official declaration of war was about to be "broadcast", we all made for the department where the headquarters microphone had been installed. There was a link-up with *Radio España* and *Unión Radio*. The official "announcer", promoted to Captain of Carabineers as if by magic or by the grace of Negrín, began to read out the declaration, unaware of what was to follow, and he was dumbstruck when, as he stepped back from it, Julián Besteiro, stooped with age and suffering, stepped towards the microphone and declaimed:

"Citizens of Spain! After a long and pained silence, I find myself obliged to address you this day on grounds of conscience..."

The time has come to unleash the truth and claw away the web of lies in which we are enmeshed. It is an ineluctable necessity, a duty to humanity and a requirement of the supreme law which says that the blameless and irresponsible masses must be spared.

With its euphemisms for truth and its half-truths and deceitful intentions, the best that the Negrín government can hope for is to buy some time, time that has been squandered as far as the interests of the bulk of the citizenry, combatant and non-combatant, are concerned. And this policy of time-wasting could have had no other aim than to feed the unhealthy belief that complications in international affairs may unleash a catastrophe of worldwide implications, in which the proletarian masses of many nations would perish with us.

One can lose, but with honour and with dignity when overwhelmed by disgrace. And I tell you that a moral victory of this sort, which is no defeat at all, is worth a thousand times more than the mirage of actual victory bought with the currency of surrender and ignominy..."

In the Council's declaration, which follows, and which, according to Pradas, was drafted by the Libertarian Movement, passages like the following stand out:

'To pre-empt us, to blot out such disgrace and avoid desertion in times of greatest trial, a National Defence Council is being set up and on behalf of this body which rescues from the gutter the powers discarded there by the so-called government of Dr. Negrín. We address ourselves to all workers, all anti-fascists and all Spaniards to offer them the

assurance that no one will be able to shirk performance of his duty nor evade the responsibility incurred by his promises...

We call for resistance, lest our cause founder amid derision and disgrace. To this end, we ask the co-operation of all Spaniards and offer the guarantee that no one will abandon his responsibility. "Either we are all spared, or we all succumb to extermination and opprobrium", said Doctor Negrín: this National Defence Committee assumes as its first, last and sole task, the conversion of those words into reality.'

As the statement concluded, Negrín made a telephone call to Casado.

'General. I've just listened to the declaration you have broadcast to the nation and I consider it an act of lunacy.'

'Colonel is all that I am. As for what has occurred and insofar as I personally am concerned, my conscience is clear. I have done my duty as a soldier and as a citizen. And it has the people's endorsement. Its true representatives are here with me and as convinced as I am that they have done Spain a real service.'

'Consider. There is still time to come to some arrangement.'

'I don't understand what you mean. I believe everything has been arranged and to the people's satisfaction.'

'At least send me a representative so that I may surrender the powers of the government to him.'

'Don't bother, you cannot surrender what you do not possess. I have just picked from the gutter the powers that you and your government discarded.'

'Won't you accede to my request?'

'No.'

Since Casado had no wish to look like a dictator and since Besteiro had voiced the same misgivings, the presidency of the Council was awarded to General Miaja. The Junta was made up as follows:

Chairman	General Miaja (non-partisan)
Defence	Colonel Casado (non-partisan)
State	Julián Besteiro (non-partisan)
Internal Affairs	Wenceslao Carrillo (PSOE)
Treasury and Agriculture	González Marín (CNT)
Communications and Public Works	Eduardo Val (CNT)
Justice	M. Sanandrés (Izquierda Republicana)
Public Education	José del Río (Unión Republicana)
Labour	Antonio Pérez (UGT)

Once the Council had been constituted, Casado informed Negrín that General Matallana should present himself at his headquarters before three hours had elapsed; otherwise, all members of the government were to be shot. The message was understood and complied with. Shortly afterwards, Negrín and his ministers scuttled away to France by air.

Meanwhile, what had happened in Cartagena?

According to Casado, on 2 March, Admiral Buiza summoned together his ships' commanders and commissars to tell them of the coup being hatched by Negrín and that representatives of the army and of the political organisations were ready to retaliate by forming a National Defence Council. The latter move won the endorsement of those assembled. But when Negrín learned of this, he immediately dispatched minister Paulino Gómez to Cartagena. Gómez told the fleet's commanders that the government was aware of their conspiracy and was ready to take appropriate action. Immediately, the *Diario Oficial* carried notification of Galán's appointment to command of the naval base. Galán journeyed to Cartagena with orders to take action against the disaffected. By agreement with the base authorities, the fleet commanders had undertaken not to

surrender command to Galán, an undertaking which, inexplicably, was not honoured. As a result, a variety of attempts at subversion ensued ashore and on board the ships. One of the mutineers was Artillery Colonel Armentia

The situation was aggravated by the uprising of the Fifth Column, joined by other persons who, anticipating the way the war would turn out, were in a hurry to earn themselves some useful credits. Colonel Armentia surrendered to the fascists and later took his own life. This defection delivered into Falangist hands a number of forts complete with powerful batteries, as well as the base radio station. With these, the fascists intimidated the fleet into surrender. This threat, the all but constant over-flying of the ships by enemy aircraft and the outcome of the fighting underway inside the city still uncertain, all weighed on the minds of those in charge of the fleet who opted to put out to sea.

According to Casado, the fleet commanders on the high seas were able to verify that the revolt had been put down and that Cartagena was still loyal to the Republic. So, instead of heeding the French government's suggestion that their ships put in at Bizerta, they were able to make their way back to the base and helped rescue the thousands of anti-fascists whom their flight had condemned to become the victims of vicious Francoist repression.

Let us see now what happened in Madrid after the National Defence Council had been proclaimed

As soon as the proclamation of the Junta had been read out, Casado started talks with the Army and Army Corps commanders. Some had already pledged their support spontaneously. In the Centre, Colonel Barceló, commanding the 1st Army Corps, stated that he was unconditionally 'at your disposal' Lieutenant-Colonel Bueno, in charge of the 2nd Army Corps did not come out with a definite answer.

'With me or against me: I want no vagueness', Casado replied.

Colonel Ortega, in charge of the 3rd Army Corps, took Casado to task for not having warned him of what was afoot and asked for time to think things over. This was Casado's reply:

'Don't think me so stupid as to give you notice when I knew you to be an active member of the PCE. Tell me categorically how you stand, but remember that anyone who opposes the will of the people is to be shot.'

Casado concluded that he could only depend upon the 4th Army Corps commanded by the anarchist Mera. He had some hopes for Barceló, but was completely mistaken there, for Barceló was the first to rebel and then assumed the leadership of the revolt against the National Defence Council. As for the armoured corps, the Assault Guards and the Air Force, their commanders and even their junior officers were mostly fanatical members of the 'party' The commanders of the Armies of Levante, Andalusia and Extremadura had aligned themselves unconditionally with the new set-up but it could not be forgotten that in Levante there were three Army Corps with communist commanders and three reserve divisions of the same persuasion in Extremadura. The Army of Andalusia was in the hands of the CNT and the PSOE.

To be honest, the situation was not promising. Consequently, urgent action had to be taken. Loyal troops were positioned at strategic points around the capital, for one thing. Everything would be done to prevent the opposition forces from Levante and Extremadura from being in a position to swoop upon Madrid.

The communist rebellion was not long in coming. In the early morning hours of 5 March, the 8th Division commanded by Ascanio rebelled. Together with the reserve troops which it had some 12 kilometres outside Madrid, it marched on the city centre with tanks and artillery deployed. There were also rebellions in Alcalá de Henares and Torrejón. By 7 March the fighting was fierce. Barceló mobilised all of his reserves against the Council, and this extended even to units manning the fronts. The lines were left at the enemy's mercy. These troops also entered the city and occupied the headquarters of the Army of the Centre. Several commanders were taken prisoner and shot.

In this, the first phase, the situation could not have been more delicate. According to Pradas:

'As may be seen, our position was difficult: but, even so, we held our nerve and did not lose confidence in our decision, or our faith in the people, which applauded us. Colonel Casado, who had never let himself be drawn into political squabbling in the rearguard, placed greater hopes in the "radio" and in the press than in our arms, and even when the Council's military inactivity afforded an opportunity for some barracks inside the city to rebel, he was against one single soldier's being pulled out of the front.'

The situation remained consistent, until certain scruples were overcome. As Pradas makes clear:

'Our patience was exhausted. The 14th Division, forged in the Casa del Campo and in the Prado, put to the test in the Jarama, victorious at Brihuega and heroic in Brunete, was moved up to Madrid! Mera telephoned Guadalajara, where the UGT's Liberino had succeeded him in command of the 4th Corps:

"Send me Gutiérrez with the 14th! Let Luzón come too. They will find enemy troops in Alcalá. Hit them hard! They must be crushed without hesitation!"

These troops put down the disturbances in Guadalajara and Torrejón and pressed on towards Jarama to attack the communist forces from their rear. After heavy fighting, in which artillery was much used, the men of the 4th Corps managed to break the resistance and recaptured the Army of the Centre's headquarters. During this fighting, some 30,000 prisoners were taken from the communist forces and these were mustered in Alcalá de Henares. But in Madrid city centre there was still fierce fighting, for the opposition, well-endowed with tanks, some of them secret ones from the PCE's underground depots, put up a die-hard resistance. The position did not alter until 10 March when the headquarters of the 2nd Army Corps commanded by Ortega, surrendered. Ortega offered to mediate and wasted no time in briefing the Council as to the opposition's surrender conditions... a guarantee that the lives of the rebels would be spared, their newspapers allowed to publish again and... a place for the 'party' on the Defence Council!

The rebel forces returned to the front on 12 March. The spirit of clemency prevailed in the Council. Only Lieutenant-Colonel Barceló and his Commissar, Conesa, paid with their lives. Execution was justified in terms of the shootings which the pair had ordered against people who were their prisoners, Colonels José Pérez Gazolo, Arnaldo Fernández Urbano and José Otero.

With the communist uprising snuffed out in Madrid, other centres of resistance were easily mopped up. The equally dangerous redoubt in Levante was neutralised when a number of tanks were intercepted while en route to Valencia.

Now let us turn our attention to the organisational activities of the Libertarian Movement.

A restricted circulation letter sent out from the CNT National Committee, endorsed by General Secretary Manuel López and addressed to the Regional Committees, with the injunction that no copies should be made, but that their militants should be given a verbal briefing, spoke about the constitution of 'an Executive National Committee of the Libertarian Movement'. This was to replace the movement's Liaison Committee which, of itself, the circular asserted, was a hindrance, for such Liaison Committees deprived the CNT of '50 per cent of its representation and powers.'

The document alludes to the Confederation's suggestion that the FAI and the FIJL be absorbed into the CNT National Committee and says: 'But the whole thing was in tatters, for when our suggestion was put to both Peninsular Committees, they launched into a storm of vituperation', the National Committee being obliged to give way for fear of provoking a split in the organisation. Meeting in a further session, the three



committees agreed to the formation, under their supervision, of a panel of nine comrades, an interim arrangement which would operate until a National Plenum of the Libertarian Movement would take place. The agenda of that plenum having been issued and circulated, the CNT National Committee, it says, refrained from sending out rapporteur delegations to the Regional Committees, but this was specially undertaken by the FAI Peninsular Committee which called meetings (plenums) of militants in the regions, which it attended and at which it 'created prejudice with tendentious reports against the CNT's National Committee, for the sole purpose of excluding it from the new committee that was being formed, thereby pushing the candidacy of its own nominees just the same as any political party pushes its candidates in times of election.' The circular said that when the National Plenum met, 'an absolute majority of the comrades favoured by the FAI Peninsular Committee' were nominated to fill the new body.

The document went on to say that the body thus established had been saddled with certain exaggerated rules of procedure 'which we have agreed to in part, but not in whole, because that would be tantamount to a total eclipsing of the National Committee, which we are not prepared to countenance until such time as the organisation determines otherwise and entrusts it with the responsibility implied by such action.'

The circular closes by transcribing several letters received from that body, letters which the National Committee regarded as presumptuous and humiliating.

Now let us move on to the contents of other documents.

The Libertarian Movement's National Committee had been constituted on 7 March. It was made up as follows:

General Secretary	Joan López
Vice-Secretary	José Grunfeld
Military Affairs	Avelino G. Entrialgo
Trade Union and Economic Affairs	José Almela and José Grunfeld
Propaganda	Lorenzo Iñigo

At its 11 March meeting, the Committee turned its attention to policy guidelines. What emanates from the following contributions was adopted as such guidelines:

'GRUNFELD: Proceed with examination of the current situation in order to determine the ultimate prospects for our activities. Thought it as symptomatic that the enemy offensive had not come to pass and this he attributed to current developments. Believed that international diplomacy was seeking the speediest conclusion to our war, with assurances that all manner of outside meddling in Spain's future might be eliminated. Regarded the following as immediate issues: the evacuation issue (today all but an impossibility for a large number of the militants of the anti-fascist organisations), the rescue of the Libertarian Movement's present assets and its future prospects, with regard to which relentless vigilance was required. Innuendo about apparent similarity between our own unions and the syndicates of the Falange Española, should it take hold among our comrades, might cause us serious difficulties. Thus, as far as ending the war went, we have to be in a position to manage our movement clandestinely and nimbly. As for the PCE, even though it might be right not to insist upon its disbandment for the time being, with an eye to bringing the existing contest to an end, intelligent and calm scrutiny of ways and means of ensuring its eventual elimination is worthwhile.

LÓPEZ: We should tackle the problem from three angles: general prospects, in accordance with the National Defence Council, conclusion of our war through an honourable peace and adoption of appropriate measures and policy with regard to the PCE.

The overall trend is towards a liquidation of our war thanks to the predominance of British policy. This, however, will not render the regime ineffective. Our every act

should be designed to rescue as many militants as possible so that tomorrow they can reconstruct the life of the country in a free regime.

Our general policy should be that the National Defence Council ought to stick to a policy of resistance to the end, so as to achieve an honourable peace. A world war is regarded as inevitable and while there is any chance of victory for the democracies, I believe we must strive to sustain the Spanish revolutionary spirit that may then make it easier to recover our country's liberty. The state of public opinion, with its tendency to disintegrate, has to be taken into account, and the tact we display in the tempering of our propaganda will be very effective in this connection.

Our policy *vis à vis* the PCE. We have more than enough reasons to turn on them and wipe them out, but it is equally certain that we have scores to settle also with regard to the socialists and the republicans. The policy of the Popular Front has been responsible for all our failures and for our current predicament, including our present diplomatic position.

In this regard, we can concentrate all our criticism upon the communists, but we must be shrewd in choosing our moment. Our public stance should be: "We do not seek eradication of the PCE, nor of any party, but quite the opposite. We want everyone to join the Popular Front and cooperate fully with the National Defence Council. So far, so good. The communists will have no access to power."

When this same committee met on the morning of 16 March, there was a briefing 'on a peace overture which, should it come off, requires us to look into ways and means of evacuating our moral and material assets.' There was, it was said, very little time to lose. Should the plan fail, dogged resistance had to be organised. It was agreed at the same session that it be proposed to the National Defence Council that commissions be dispatched to France, Britain, the United States and Mexico for the purpose of recovering the assets transferred there by the Negrín government and, simultaneously, paving the way for the shipment of what produce might be exported from Spain. There would be a central commission resident in France, acting as the agent of the Defence Council.

The session continued into the evening, in the presence of the libertarian representatives on the Defence Council. The latter took note of what was agreed, in order to raise these matters at the Council scheduled for that very same evening. The meeting reconvened at 11 pm and, at it, Eduardo Val and González Marín reported that the Libertarian Movement's accords had been accepted *in toto* by the Council. Val himself reported on the substance of the Defence Council meeting:

'Among other issues, the refugee problem was dealt with: here, Besteiro spoke of the need to table negotiations in Mexico and in Paris, which gave us our opening to bring up the name of Mariano Vázquez so that the Council's official representatives might liase with him. This commission is one that we will be able to appoint, since Marín was given authority to make the necessary appointments.

Provision has been made for suspending all of the Communist Party's press organs, and PCE personnel have been warned to make a declaration of support for the National Defence Council within six days, with the concession that any failing to do so will be issued with the necessary passports to quit Spain. As regards military emblems, elimination of the five-pointed star was agreed. As regards the carrying-out of the death sentences passed on communist personnel, it was agreed that any that had not been suspended should be carried out, and that the rest be referred to the National Council for scrutiny. As for death sentences passed on fascist personnel, the dispositions of the Negrín government on the matter were accepted.

A reorganisation of the SIM has been mooted, and the matter has been left with ministers for consideration and a final decision in their forthcoming meetings, Casado being afforded full powers to decide upon outstanding, short-term business. We must find a comrade to take charge of the SIM command in Almería. It was determined that Mera will take up the command of the Army of Extremadura.'

The commissions which were to operate abroad were appointed at a meeting of the National Committee of the Libertarian Movement held for that express purpose on 17 March. The one operating in London and Paris was made up of Bartolomé Pascual, Facundo Roca and José Pros; the one in the USA, of Joan López, Higinio Noja Ruíz and Julián Martínez; the one in Mexico, of Melchor Rodríguez, Manuel Villar and Miguel Basulie. It was also resolved that National Committee personnel abroad should not be used but instead that they be 'recommended to make their way to this zone with all speed.'

On 17 March, a communist handbill was distributed on the fronts. It stated:

'Comrades: the repression targeting the PCE continues. The Defence Junta has tabled talks with our Central Committee. The party has insisted upon the following conditions if it is to recognise the Junta:

1. the establishment of unity;
2. immediate freedom for the party, the release of our prisoners from detention and reinstatement of all ousted communists;
3. a dignified and honourable peace guaranteeing Spain's independence.

Should the Junta fail to accept these conditions, the party will struggle against it, with all that this implies.

So be alert comrades. Let us not be caught unawares by any development. Ready for anything, to prevent capitulation and the handing-over of the people and, first and foremost, of communists.

Bind yourselves to the people. Refute all of the calumnies against the party. Make it be known that the formation of the Junta is a ploy by international capitalism to liquidate the people's gains, to enslave them and eliminate the communists, their finest defenders.

If we manage — and we are capable of it — to whip up tremendous mass pressure, the Junta, devised to deceive the people with the mirage of a "dignified" peace, will not be able to survive nor will it be able to capitulate.

We will achieve a dignified and honourable peace through unity and by being ready to resist.

Work, discuss, and whip up a wave of sympathy and solidarity for the party in the factories and unions, across the whole proletariat, across the entire people.

With their support, we shall triumph, have no doubt.

Long live Spain's independence! Long live the PCE!

On 22 March, the following statement was issued by the National Committee of the Libertarian Movement *apropos* of the peace talks and conditions:

'TO THE COMBATANTS, TO THE WORKERS IN GENERAL: The Libertarian Movement, averse to pointless chatter, believes that there is a need to speak out today as bluntly as the circumstances require. There is a deliberate confusion which we need to dispel immediately, intrigues which we must eradicate, possible weaknesses against whose progress we must erect the bulwark of our unshakeable steadfastness.

The time for mistakes, hypocritical palaver and half-truths worse than lies has passed. Nonetheless there are those, inured to the consistent lying of the Negrín breed of politicians, who have yet to grasp this fact, and who seek to misrepresent the facts in order to turn them to the service of their interests or ambitions.

When the National Defence Council, in a display of absolute honesty with regard to its commitments and the anti-fascist people, announced that a proposal for an honourable and dignified peace had been framed, some people were only too quick to float the rumour that the peace had been signed and indeed that this peace, far from being the result of concessions exchanged between two adversaries, is nothing but unconditional surrender, the humiliating and shameful delivery of anti-fascists to the enemy with whom they have been doing battle these 32 long months.

Under cover of this falsehood, lurk falsehoods of the pro-fascist variety, hasty

professions of totalitarian zeal by folk who have previously made a phoney pretence of anti-fascism. Confronted by such audacity on the part of our foes, the National Committee of the Libertarian Movement says to the workers: there is nothing, absolutely nothing beyond what the Council has publicly declared. A proposal to safeguard Spain's independence and the dignity of all. The war goes on and will continue without faltering or hesitation. The struggle is framed in the same terms as hitherto.

No prey to pro-fascist tendencies may remain at large. Anyone who, by word, deed or conduct seeks to undermine our fighter's morale or the security of our rearguard, must be brought to book and sentenced under summary procedure with all the severity that the laws of war demand.

When the National Defence Council was set up, it set out its aim clearly: to guarantee a decent peace and prosecution of the struggle to the end. It has done and is doing everything necessary to achieve the former, but not for one second does it lose sight of the possibility that it may have to carry on with the war with all due severity. No matter what fascists, more or less concealed, may say, the National Defence Council will countenance no settlement that might imply dishonour for the workers, the surrender of anti-fascists or humiliation for any who today adhere proudly to the same ideological positions they held on 19 July.

It is possessed of the requisite moral courage to state publicly the need for a peace that averts further bloodletting. But it will not accept such a peace unless the moral values of Spanish anti-fascism are preserved from threat. The Libertarian Movement clearly and emphatically endorses this stance. And it states, further: whereas Negrín, for all his talk of resistance, was laying preparations for the leaders to escape and for people to be sacrificed, we stand ready to save the people by arriving at an honourable peace even if it requires sacrificing all our militants.

But let it be well understood that there are conditions upon our peace. It will not be a craven "every man for himself" affair in which those with the means of escape take to their heels, betraying their comrades and leaving to the mercy of the enemy, but rather a decorous arrangement permitting all who so desire to quit Spain, and guaranteeing those who stay behind against all threat of reprisal, criminal treatment and extermination. In the absence of these conditions and whatever others may ensure the complete independence of our country, there will be no peace.

The Libertarian Movement which is on a war footing against weaknesses in all quarters, assumes full responsibility for its words. The contest will go on with all of the violence this presupposes. We have no taste for theatricality or demagogic talk. But, shunning both in equal measure, we guarantee, quite simply, that struggle to the death will be a fact.

The Libertarian Movement wholeheartedly embraces the policy publicly voiced by the National Defence Council. But to all of its militants, and, by extension, to Spanish anti-fascists generally, it says that confusion must be shunned and all manner of weaknesses strenuously repudiated.

We must stand by our every post — in trench and factory alike — with greater vigour and determination than ever. The honourable peace...the only one we will countenance...is not yet accomplished. The war goes on and at any moment may take a doubly dramatic turn. Level-headed, determined and resolute, the Libertarian Movement is on standby, just as it was on 19 July, 7 November and 5 March. With it, alongside it, showing indulgence and complacency towards none, all Spanish anti-fascists must stand, ready to prosecute the war and win the peace.

For the Libertarian Movement, the National Committee.'

At its March meeting, the Libertarian Movement's National Committee decided that comrades Melchor Rodríguez and Joan López should set out immediately for France along with Colonel Romero, to conduct the negotiations entrusted to them by the Economic Council. For the time being, the planned mission to the USA was shelved.

At the meeting, González Marin reported on the proceedings of the meeting of the

Defence Council held the previous day, at which the death sentence passed on the communist Conesa and others implicated in the recent rebellion had been dealt with.

The meeting found it necessary to look to the organisation's future in Spain, the FAI Peninsular Committee being deemed the agency best suited to look into this. There was also agreement on requisitioning the services of Ricardo Sanz, Gregorio Jover, Juan Manuel Molina, Miguel González Inestal, Miguel Yoldi, Manuel Mora Torres, Antonio Barea, Gil Roldán, Vulcar del Mateo, Mariano Vázquez, Pedro Herrera, Germinal de Sousa, Germinal Esgleas, Francisco Díaz Andino, Rafael Inigo, Juan Ripol and Angel Rodríguez for the Centre-South zone.

The minutes of this committee's meeting of 24 March, the object of which was to listen to a briefing by the anarchist Council members concerning the outcome of negotiations entered into with the enemy, read as follows:

'The enemy refuses to countenance establishment of any pact or signed document. He goes on to lay down a number of necessary preconditions for our surrender.

First among them is that on the 25th of this month, in a symbolic gesture, our aircraft should be mustered at their airfields from 3-6 pm. He was told that we would not agree to surrender without some written undertaking.

From the remainder of the conditions imposed and which we have in writing in our possession, it follows that his bona fides cannot be accepted. This has also been acknowledged by the Council itself.

The enemy reiterates the concessions made by him as long ago as 28th February, with regard to the sparing of lives and saving the lives of those looked upon as ordinary criminals. All manner of assurances have been granted to professional military personnel.

The negotiations have been conducted with, among others, Colonel Ungría who was Director-General of Security in the rebel camp and who has handled the organisation of public order services in Barcelona, without, it is said, recourse to reprisals. He showed great understanding, acknowledging that we had a case in nearly every point, but concluding that they had no authority to negotiate. The negotiations are proceeding without the slightest foreign influence.'

Val and Marín then stated that that very evening they were to report to the Defence Council meeting with specific instructions.

In the minutes, stress is laid upon the following accord:

'It is agreed that a blanket refusal to accept the conditions imposed by the rebels is called for, and that we insist upon signing of a document, agreement or undertaking specifying the conditions on which peace is to be established in accordance with the undiluted spirit of the initial parameters presented by us. In the absence of such a guarantee, it will be necessary to break off negotiations and commit ourselves to a furious defence of our interests, lives and liberty.'

March 26 saw another meeting, held at the request of the libertarians on the Council. González Marín gave a briefing on the latest negotiations with the enemy. This new contact was broken off abruptly. While the negotiations had been in progress, Franco had asked Colonel Ungría by telephone if the republican air force had been handed over and upon hearing that it had not, ordered the talks suspended.

Nevertheless, the Defence Council agreed not to regard the talks as having broken down and to send a fresh message to the rebel camp asking them to reconsider this attitude. After Casado had examined this message, he sent for the CNT representatives, Val and Marín, who made up the opposition on the Council, to tell them that the message constituted a definitive breakdown and that 'our air force commanders say that we have only 70 aged planes, scrap metal, and that there should be no problem about surrendering these.' Since the other Council members had given their consent by telephone, Val and Marín gave theirs also.

Immediately, a radio message was sent to the enemy camp: it contained a declaration by the Council that it was prepared to make the symbolic surrender of aircraft. Later, this reply was received from Burgos: 'Impossible to halt movement of our forces. Offensive begins this morning. As soon as it begins white flags should be hoisted and forces surrendered.'

The Council immediately contacted the Army commanders, to finalise the details of the defence. Once the enemy offensive began, the public would be told of the breakdown of negotiations:

'AMIL: once the offensive is unleashed, we must proceed with all severity, coordinating activities so that we may withdraw in an orderly fashion from areas we may lose without undue losses. We should not forget that we will be attacked on all sides, nor should we omit to pay due attention to our rearguard, with the rebel personnel ensconced there who will undoubtedly spring into action...

VAL: when the balloon goes up, we have to act accordingly. In our rear there is a slight danger. We already have the SIM in hand and it will, of necessity, be useful to us. The Council is well disposed to acting in accordance with our guidelines. Guidance needs to be offered to the Regional Committees and personnel moved up to the Levante and Andalusian fronts, mainly to boost morale and cultivate a favourable disposition beforehand.'

At that very moment, news arrived of the enemy's offensive having been unleashed in the Pozo Blanco sector (Andalusia).

On the morning of 27 March, the Libertarian Movement's National Committee held a further meeting, also attended by Val and Marín. The latter reported that in Andalusia, after some initial resistance, not a shot more had been fired. The enemy had advanced 40 kilometres without encountering any resistance. Val continued:

'Then we agreed to release news of the situation, which was broadcast. We had to do some tough talking, quarrelling with other Council members who were identified with the contents of the bulletin. Casado did not do badly in what he had to say.

The bulletin lacked a sufficiently strong introductory comment. And in the final section, dealing with evacuation, the first paragraph said it all. But the others insisted on the remaining paragraphs.

In anticipation of our reaching some peace arrangement, we drafted an evacuation scheme founded on a concentration on the Staffs of the Armies and Army Groups, with the unions and parties involved. Yesterday the other Council members took the line that it was high time things were set in motion, but I opposed this on the grounds that it would have a demoralising effect in that people would refuse to fight on the fronts. Today, at 10 am, we meet again and the matter will have to be ironed out. The professional soldiers, Matalana and the like, are utterly unnerved...

SALGADO: The Defence Council operates on the basis of a mistaken appreciation of the position. The document released to the public is highly dangerous because it is demoralising. The evacuation plan aims to avoid disordered flights, the fruits of collective panic, but to no avail. A further note to the enemy camp would be utterly pointless, since, in the wake of their victorious advance, they will not be amenable to reason, for they will no longer see us as seeking to avert bloodshed, but rather as being completely unnerved, and they will insist upon abject surrender. So the Defence Council's policy is totally wrongheaded. Only after some days of bitter resistance on our part could we make overtures to them again regarding negotiations.

It is vital that the whole passport business be dropped and that no one is allowed to leave, least of all those in the drafts mobilised. Unless we save all compromised personnel serving in the front lines, we cannot compromise over anybody's salvation.

MARIN: The position is extraordinarily critical. The passport policy brought down the previous government and triggered the creation of the National Defence Council. Let us analyse our situation.

Loss of morale has hit the Centre hereabouts too in the past three or four days. The "panic" by the Cuatro Caminos comrades has had a catastrophic effect on morale in this region. Desertions are multiplying on every front. As for the air force, planes are going missing daily as are officers, especially communist ones. People have no stomach for fighting. The enemy launches an offensive and our troops fail to respond.

All of this has led to violent confrontation inside the Council which was set up, not for the purpose of resisting, but for the sake of peace. To resolve the situation we arranged for a commission to leave for the outside world to make basic provision for evacuation. The previous government was already working on this. We have probably 170,000 tonnes of shipping available. We have stressed the need to halt the disorderly evacuation of runaways, but all in vain. Appropriate orders have been officially issued, yet they still leave. Unless we want to re-enact a second Numancia, let's get to work on saving our membership. The climate abroad is quite favourable for us and the same goes for the rebel zone itself. So, we need to make lists of those militants who must be saved. And to muster our forces at the point of our choosing and organise the defence of that place by our troops so as to ensure the salvation of all of our movement's moral assets.

We should place absolutely no reliance upon others. They will not concern themselves with a general rescue. They will bother only with their own people. We, then, must look to our own resources.'

The concrete conclusion of this meeting, which was to continue into the evening, was this: 'The establishment of an Evacuation Junta is endorsed.'

The record of the meeting held that evening is the last document in the series we have been looking. Let us transcribe the most essential portion of it.

'In response to the previously mooted question of admitting the PCE on to the National Evacuation Junta, and to the invitation issued to this party by a section of the army, it was agreed that granting it admittance would constitute a political error.

MARIN: Reported on the meeting held in the Defence Council that morning concerning the evacuation question, which took up all of the discussions. It was resolved that Evacuation Juntas be set up and that a start be made to the removal of compromised personnel from Madrid and from the Centre region on the basis of the level of threat they faced. To this end, he said, four ships of large tonnage have already put in, spontaneously, at the port of Valencia.

Wherever the enemy attacked, the surrender of ground would continue and personnel would be evacuated from that front without delay. There was a need — and it had been so agreed — to amass as much foreign currency as possible in order to afford each citizen some initial living expenses. With 70 or 80 million francs available, each individual would receive 2,000 francs. So the aim was to evacuate some 40,000 people.

He had already issued orders to the Director-General of Security to proceed with procurement of the maximum possible amount of foreign currency, and to proceed with the sale of products (almonds, mercury, saffron, etc.) through which such sums might be obtained. The foreign currency funds would be allocated on a proportional basis to the various Evacuation Juntas, so that the latter might oversee the dispensing of these monies. This had to be brought to the notice of our Regional Committees so that they might prepare mustering stations and gauge the numbers of comrades for evacuation. The level of the enemy offensive left the door open to the realisation of our plans.

It was agreed that a radio address be broadcast that night by the Libertarian Movement to the effect that the Defence Council should indicate to other parties and to the UGT that they in turn should do likewise, encouraging their members to maintain morale, that the Defence Council should issue another memorandum, making clear the bad impression created by the statement released to the public, that the Regional Committees be briefed on the situation and suitable guidelines drafted for their incorporation into the Evacuation Juntas, that it be understood that relocation was only

for compromised militants and not for their relatives and near ones, that the final passports were to be issued in Valencia and that special safe conduct passes would be issued by the various armies, that the use of dynamite be scrapped unless circumstances dictate its use...'

From the above, one gets some inkling of the state of disintegration which appeared on the fronts once the chances of a negotiated peace were dashed. Soldiers abandoned their trenches in small groups, fraternised with their enemy counterparts or simply crossed over to the other side, as was the case with the communist 40th and 42nd Brigades, among others. The fraternisation among the troops was infectious, and it was impossible to speak of duty or of adherence to discipline to men singing and dancing in celebration.

'At 7 am, on the morning of 28 March, when there was not one single trooper on the front, saving on the Guadalajara front. I issued orders to the commander of the Army of the Centre to make contact with the enemy with a view to formal surrender... The enemy command summoned that officer to the Clinical Hospital at 11 am, sharp, along with his staff.

When that moment arrived, I considered that my mission as a member of the National Defence Council had ended. The work which awaited me in Valencia was of greater importance. The remaining armies had to be disbanded along the same lines, although we hoped to delay this last stage long enough to successfully muster in Alicante and Valencia as many as possible of those whom Franco would classify as having a case to answer. At the same time, I wanted to urge the governments of France and Britain once again to send us, by sea, the requisite means of transport and authorisation for our refugees to remain temporarily or permanently in Oran or in France.

From Madrid, I dispatched a message to the President of the Republic of France anxiously seeking authorisation for as many as wished to get away to sail for France, and at the same time, I asked him to intercede with the British government so that the latter might allow the use of some units from its fleet for transportation purposes.'<sup>2</sup>

On 28 March, Colonel Casado quit Madrid accompanied by his aide de camp, by General Matallana and Council member Val. By the following morning, all of the armies had, to all intents and purposes, been disbanded. On the same day, messages were sent out again, this time from Valencia, to the usual democratic statesmen. The best that their consulates had to offer was facilities for specific individuals, and, at a later stage, the possibility of asylum in a British embassy. Any who accepted this offer might still be handed over to Franco should he request their surrender.

'As in Madrid, an Evacuation Junta had been set up in Valencia. In the harbour there were two merchant vessels in the process of unloading their cargo. One of them, the *Lezardieux* was able to get away that very day, sailing for Oran with upwards of 500 refugees on board, many of them communists. The one left behind, a British vessel, refused volunteer cargo-handlers and the unloading ground to a halt. Nearly all of the people packed into the port abandoned all hopes they had staked on it. The *Stanbrook*, chartered by the Council, put in at Alicante. In Cartagena, there was the *Campillo* and at various places along the coast there were fishing boats ready to sail. Our comrade Llopis, chairman of the Alicante Corporation, called us every half hour. Everything was going fine: we could send comrades to that port, for their getaway from there was assured. We passed this on to the National Committee and to the Centre and Levante Regional Committees of our movement and they decided to recommend a march on Alicante. Few comrades paid them any heed. Then passports were handed out. Tension was growing. In Valencia, which was filling with people from all over, the atmosphere

2. Casado, *The Last Days of Madrid*



was at fever pitch. The comrades from the Centre had no news of Bajatierra. The socialists told me that Henche de la Plata, the mayor of Madrid, had been unable to get out of the capital because the corporation's drivers had refused to drive him. Of Javier Bueno, there was no word either: no one had seen him. Our entire union membership arrived safely in Valencia. In mid-evening we had the joy of watching the army arrive. Mancebo, Amil and Bastán informed us that the evacuation of the Centre had been completed. The Council, meeting in permanent session, again received representatives from the International Committee — French, Norwegians, British, etc. — and from Mr Forcinal, who was its most active member. It received the promise once more that France, with her warships, would ensure the getaway of any who needed to quit Spain, and, so sure was he of what he was saying, that he did not hesitate to stake his nation's honour upon it. Discernible in the International Committee there was an especial keenness to rescue a large number of communists for reasons which I have no desire to discover, but its assistance really did not deserve to be contested by ingrates.

There was no frontier in our zone. Its evacuation was the most daunting of problems and confidence that we would be able to solve it filled us with joy. Almost at the same time we received two distinct reports: of the breaching of the Levante front, due to spontaneous and inevitable abandonment by the troops, whom it was not right to use to provide cover for the evacuation, and of the arrival in Alicante harbour of the *Maritima*, a ship of the Mid-Atlantic Line, capable of accommodating several thousand people. These reports reached the Council just as calm was beginning to fade in Valencia as the streets teemed with people. There was a disorderly procession of army trucks full of well-armed troops formed, followed by a flood of tanks from adjacent fronts. Alicante was the port furthest removed from the abandoned trenches and the only one where there were ships at that point too. Forcinal was spoken to. He said that he would get in touch with Oran and Marseilles, to get them to dispatch their shipping to Alicante. Everybody was there!

Petrol pumps throughout the region were ordered to dispense fuel free of charge. On the decision of the movement, Bastán had to leave for Cartagena and Manuel Amil for Alicante, etc. The better-known militants were entrusted with special missions. They all beavered away, holding their nerve. Thanks to this, it was possible for a caravan of hundreds of vehicles, with 4,000 or 5,000 anti-fascists led by a detachment of military forces complete with officers and weaponry, to set off, perfectly organised, from Valencia for Alicante at 8 pm.<sup>3</sup>

Few if any of the desperate figures who made for Alicante in this impressive caravan, nor of those who awaited them there, nor any of those who would arrive from the distant Guadalajara and Extremadura fronts, would manage to get out of Spain.

On 3 March, the National Defence Council had dispatched Trifón Gómez to France, to arrange the dispatch of passports needed for evacuation purposes, among other business. In France the Negrín government had the fleet of the Mid-Atlantic Line, with its capacity of 150,000 tonnes, under charter. That charter would not expire until the month of May that year. But even should things have gone wrong, Negrín had fabulous sums of money for chartering as many ships as were needed to effect the evacuation.

But with things at their most worrying, Trifón Gómez told the Council that the ships had been frozen because of a failure to honour the financial clauses of the charter. Then again, on the early morning of 28 March, the captain of the *Maritima*, a 9,000-tonne ship of the Mid-Atlantic Line, had hoisted anchor out of the port of Alicante with just 40 refugees on board, leaving the quays teeming with would-be evacuees. And worse was to come. The Mid-Atlantic Line, in whose name Negrín had deposited the merchandise of the Campsa-Gentibus (the official company for supplies to the Republic at war) had surrendered its papers and goods to the Burgos government, no less.

That action was the final straw. For all that was achieved by repeated appeals to the humanitarian feelings and generosity of the democratic heads of state can be found set out in the two documents below, which we have lifted from Casado's book.

3. J. Garcia Pradas, *La traición de Stalin*

On 4 April, the International Coordinating Committee for Aid and Information to Republican Spain released the following *communiqué*:

'This Committee, having listened to the International Delegation upon its return from Spain, and learnt of the erroneous reports carried by the press, wishes to state the following:

Due to the rapid turnabout in events, the international delegation which travelled to Spain to work on the supply of provisions to the civilian population as well as to collect useful information, found itself obliged from the moment it arrived there to undertake further efforts: the evacuation of numerous republican celebrities, scientists, writers, soldiers and politicians, including thousands of friends of France, over all of whom the threat of death was hovering.

For six days all of them, whose survival is a matter of concern to France, have lived under threat of death in Alicante where a French member of the delegation, Deputy Charles Tillon, remained behind. Since then and despite repeated reassurances from the French government, the Coordinating Committee's vessels have not been able to enter the port of Alicante and the French warships that were to have guaranteed their safety have received no instructions to protect ships and transports flying the French flag.

Today those men, women and children whom we formally promised to ferry to Mexico may yet be rescued.

The International Coordinating Committee, which during the war performed a strictly humanitarian mission (supplying provisions, medical equipment, etc.) feels that it has an ineluctable duty to see this mission through to its end, especially where the saving of jeopardised human lives is at stake.

The Committee has assumed this responsibility at its own instigation. And it has asked the relevant ministries to take steps and to rehearse those steps to the Burgos government, which France has recognised and with which diplomatic and commercial relations have been established.

The Committee, in taking this initiative, is confident of fulfilling the spirit and purest tradition of the democracies which have always acted in defence of the most selfless humanitarianism.'

On 6 April, this same International Committee published a further statement:

'Yesterday the press carried a report from an official source, declaring that the French government had done everything necessary to save the 4,000 Spanish republicans under threat of death in Alicante. This assertion is based merely upon two points.

On the one hand, the sending of a telegram to the French consul in Alicante, dated 29 March, and, on the other, on negotiations between the Quai d'Orsay and the Burgos Government on 4 April.

With regard to the first point, we have to state that the telegram reached the French consul in Alicante on the 30th, authorising him to evacuate, through any means at his disposal, specific republican figures whom he himself would select. At the same time, there were absolutely no means of effecting that evacuation in Alicante and the destroyer, *Le Tigre*, which could have come on the 30th, arrived on the 31st in Gandía.

That said, the curious official statement makes a leap from 29 March to 5 April. The Quai d'Orsay surely must have known that since 30 and 31 March, when it received a telegram from the French Consul in Alicante, there was a neutral zone there that was tolerated by the Italian authorities occupying the city.

Despite repeated, extremely urgent appeals from the Spanish Aid Organisation, the government let 24 hours pass without lifting a finger, on the pretext that the French Minister of the Interior had not authorised the disembarkation of 4,000 Spanish republicans in France, even for transit purposes.

The loss of those 24 hours, for which the French government bears the responsibility, was decisive. In any event, on the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (other ministers say that it was up to him to decide on the matter)

reiterated to our organisation formal undertakings which are yet to be honoured and to which the official statement does not deign to refer.

On the morning of 4 April, the Italian press carried a report referring to the bombing and capture of Alicante harbour. After 24 hours of deliberation, the Quai d'Orsay, probably prompted by this news, resolved at last to get in touch with Burgos, itself proof that it had not done so previously, having delayed until it was too late, or so it reckoned at any rate.

Nonetheless, we should point out that the ships of the International Committee had been off Alicante since 29 March, prevented from entering the port to ensure evacuation only by the absence of French warships. During this time, French and British torpedo boats acted as guarantors only for the rescue of Colonel Casado, the National Defence Council and certain Spanish republicans, while taking on board 167 Italian fascists who were put ashore at Palma de Mallorca.

Nor is it true that only the local authorities in Alicante had agreed to set up a neutral zone.

We recall that in Valencia, in the presence of members of the International Delegation and a dozen other persons, Colonel Casado declared that:

"Generalissimo Franco has promised me that he will not oppose the evacuation. He has signed no document because that would have been an affront to the victor. What promises he has made me, he has honoured."

Finally, the official report makes no reference to French Deputy Charles Tillon, blockaded in Alicante, of whom nothing has been heard for 4 days, nor of the French Consul in that city, regarding whom the Italian reports speak of "the erstwhile French Consul in Alicante".

These facts expose the obvious French responsibility for the imprisonment of 4,000 Spanish republicans by General Gambara's Italian troops. No one can refute this, nor can any statement disguise this fact.

The fact is that those men might yet have been rescued...'

Out of respect rather than from any false modesty, we shall leave it to the historians of the future to describe, perhaps as eye-witnesses, the macabre epilogue to the Spanish tragedy. This tragedy was symbolised in Alicante harbour by thousands upon thousands of dashed hopes, by the Numantine gesture of Máximo Franco, whose still-warm body, face serene, cigarette still smoking between his lips, was found by the invaders in a pool of his own blood; by the makeshift look-out, who, in his last second of hope, scanning the empty seas and hearing the tramp of Italian boots along the streets, plummeted from his crow's nest, falling on the quayside below. And in Madrid, which by some cruel quirk had become the tomb of anti-fascism, we saw the stoical response of Julián Besteiro and Javier Bueno and, in contrast, the classical and virile anarchist style of our own Mauro Bajatierra who, too sick to be evacuated, was ensconced in the pillbox of his own home, where he greeted the besieging pack of jackals, shooting away at them until he breathed his last, right up until the moment that death overwhelmed him.

The End

(Toulouse, 18 September 1953)



▲ Exile: France, 1939

▼ Exile: Helios Gómez, 1939



**Resistance:** for countless others the struggle continued until Franco's death in 1975

*I salute my sun and I salute my land  
I salute you Spain  
Will I again see your sky in the silver moon  
Of enchanted nights?*

*My heart is heavy and tired.  
I leave you my country*

*Juan de Pena*



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'We carry a new world here, in our hearts.' Buenaventura Durruti, September 1936



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