



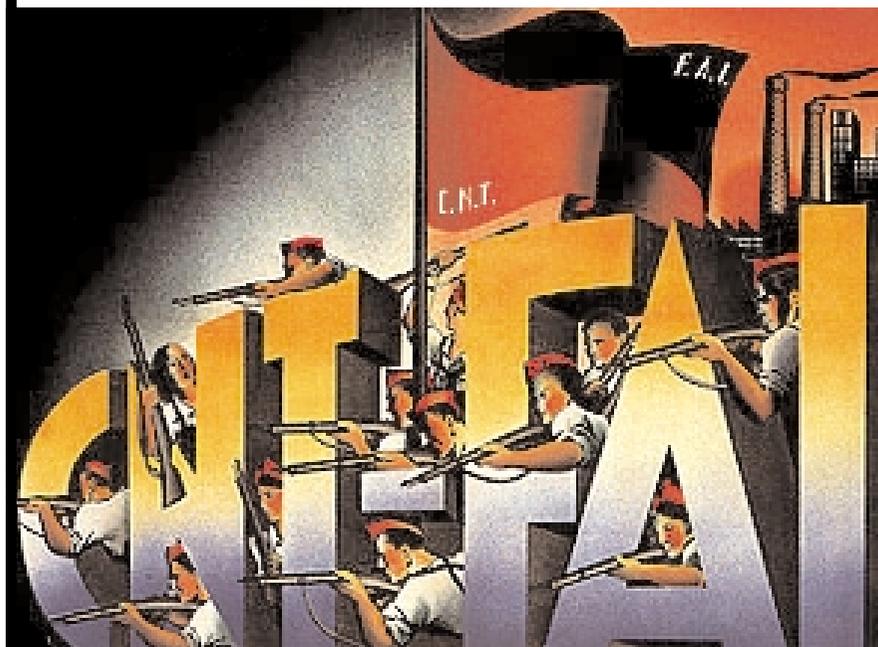
Collectives in Spain

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Post: Postnet Suite 116, Private Bag X42, Braamfontein, 2017,
Johannesburg, South Africa E-Mail: zabalaza@union.org.za
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Gaston Leval

prising permanent and refugee population in the Spain not under Franco domination. The obstacles met with in the towns are due to the application of a régime invented by governments whether of Catalonia or of Spain.

In this vast experiment, facts, characteristics, experiments, initiative and achievements of all sorts abound. I do not know if one day a historian will make a complete and impartial analysis. This would be desirable. May these pages excite the interest of honest investigators and make clear to the English speaking proletariat what is to be learnt from this daring experiment in Spain, bleeding and at the point of death, to show the world the path to happiness and dignity.

Collectives in Spain

by Gaston Leval

INDUSTRIAL socialisation was the first undertaking of the Spanish Revolution, particularly in Barcelona. But obstacles were created from the beginning, which resulted in preventing these experiments from being developed to their logical end. The war was the principal handicap.

But on the other hand, the desire for a complete social revolution was too deep, too rooted in the minds of the working masses for such a consideration to check all the workers. There was another factor to be remembered, namely that a large pro portion of employers, directors and shareholders were either self declared fascists or fascist sympathisers, who longed for a Franco triumph.

Many of these employers fled as soon as they saw that the anti-fascists, inspired by the men of the F.A.I. and the C.N.T.1 had triumphed. Others were arrested. It was inevitable that the factories and workshops owned by these should be seized and run by the workers. This is in fact what the workers did.

To the above should be added, the suspect employers who, in order to defend their interests, were much more in sympathy with the fascists than with the anti-fascists. One did not expect these men to be eager to construct tanks, aeroplanes, rifles and munitions which were essential for the triumph of those who were fighting their bosom friends. They were not going to do all in their power to develop economic production with the intensity required to guarantee the daily life of anti-fascist Spain. The workers understood this instinctively, and established in almost all workshops, control committees, which had as their aim to keep a watch on the progress in production, and to keep a check on the financial position of the owner of each establishment. In numerous cases, control was quickly passed from the control committee, to the Directive committee, in which the employer was drawn in with the workers and paid the same wage. A number of factories and workshops in Catalonia passed in this way into the hands of the workers who were engaged in them.

Footnotes

F.A.I. - *Federacion Anarquiste de Iberia* (Anarchist Federation of Iberia).

C.N.T. - *Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo* (National Confederation of Labour) - Anarcho-Syndicalist Union with a membership of 1,700,000.

★ **Collectivisation Decree**

It was in view of these facts that the Generalitat (the Government of Catalonia) published the Decree of Collectivisation in October 1936. According to this decree, the workers were allowed to take over all factories that employed 100 or more workers, besides those with less than 100 workers whose owners were officially recognised as fascists.

The decree which apparently answered the needs of the Catalan workers, and which was received with great joy by the majority of them, was in reality a filching of Socialization, for the following reasons:

Firstly. The percentage of workers in factories employing less than 100 was greater than that of the factories employing more than 100 workers; which meant that the greater numbers of workers were condemned to remain under the system of owner's exploitation.

Secondly. The workers were prevented from being the real masters of the means of production, for the administrative committees which they had to form had their ramifications in the Ministry of Economy, to which they had to give an account of their activities. This completely eliminated the syndicates in the work of Social reconstruction, and protected a section of the small employers, thus creating a dualism that sooner or later would have to end in the defeat of one of the two parties. But it was a temporary obstacle which the conscientious, responsible elements hoped to settle later.

Thirdly. A system which retained private commerce in its entirety obliged each workshop, and each factory to sell that which it produced, independently. The workers then, were competing with one another; were destroying the morale and feeling of solidarity existing among them, and were forced into competition that increased in proportion to the rate at which the economic difficulties became more acute.

The more conscious militant workers were well aware of the dangers, and their reaction was not long in expressing itself. Firstly through their press and by word of mouth, later by Union Meetings. It was understood that if the Unions did not take production into their own hands, and did not eliminate the workers' bureaucracy that had been created by the Collectivisation decree, everything accomplished would be invalidated by this irreparable moral and material blow.

Slowly, struggling against the authorities, the Unions from the majority of Industrial centres in Catalonia strove to take over the control of the "collectivised" factories and workshops. They partially succeeded. But the partial

ously affected -patients to the cities' hospitals or sanatoriums. Small dispensaries have been set up in certain villages and are maintained by the canton's efforts. No one is allowed to die or sicken for lack of care and attention.

In almost all the collectivised villages of Aragon "Homes for the Aged" were founded to which came the old people of both sexes who were without family. The best houses were chosen for them, they were looked after by young girls chosen for their gaiety and pleasant appearance. No barrack régime, no annoying rules. The old folk came and went as they wished. They still continue in those places where fascist reaction has not triumphed.

But, apart from these examples of integral collectivisation, there are examples of partial success that are worth reporting. In many places our comrades have entered the municipality and have succeeded in putting into practice appreciable reforms, such as the semi-municipalisation of medical aid, which places at the disposal of all inhabitants the services of doctors, nurses and midwives and pharmaceutical necessities; the improvement of teaching; the municipalization of lodgings. The rent is paid to the municipality, and having need of no other revenue, this eliminates the payment of rates and taxes. One can understand what this means to the inhabitants who are not rich.

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION AND HISTORY

I HAVE described on broad lines the new social organization created by the Spanish Revolution. The achievements of the libertarian socialists are a fact, and the excellence of their principles is definitely shown. About three million peasants, men, women and children have succeeded in putting into practice this system of living with immediate results, without the lowering of production that these groupings of new régimes usually produce. At least two million have benefited from the partial achievements. A large section of industry has been successfully directed by the workers' syndicates; these figures must be judged in proportion to the twelve million inhabitants com-

required.

All I have said in this synopsis should be sufficient for an understanding of the moral side of the revolution in Spain and justifies my statement, namely, that never has anything similar been achieved in the history of civilized societies. But there are other aspects which deserve a little of our attention.



EDUCATION

LET us take education as an example. Wherever the revolution has been far reaching, serious efforts in this direction are noted.

Schools have been created in convents and in seminaries that generally were the best buildings. They can be counted by the thousand. Each of the five hundred collectives in Levant has its own school, generally in beautiful surroundings, in orange groves or at the foot of snow covered mountains. In Aragon, Catalonia and Castille, everywhere one notices the same attention to education. Never before had such a great stride forward been made in the history of Spain.

Wherever the Government and the State have not been able to make themselves felt, medical aid has been socialized too, that is to say, put at everyone's disposal. The doctor looks after all sick people. The Collective pays him. The latter also provides all medicines, and sends the more seri-

triumph was the result of many long months of agitation, and during that time, the non-revolutionary forces had eliminated the C.N.T. and the Largo Caballero section from power. The forces opposing Socialization and the reactionary counter-offensive became more powerful. On the whole one can state that the action of the Unions was successful. Unfortunately the difficulties were multiplying. When real industrial Socialization was beginning, the lack of raw materials was becoming more acute. The textile industry lacked wool and cotton. The metallurgical workshops lacked steel and the carpenter's shops, timber. And, as if these difficulties were not a sufficiently great problem, the policy of the Government made things even worse.

The Government "took control of the raw material." It was a means of depriving the syndicates of power and of sabotaging their work. Then it "nationalized" the greater part of the industries. This was a pretext to take possession of those that the workers had put into action, and to destroy socialization.

However, everything did not develop as I have just described. Fortunately a few syndicates in Catalonia took the activities of their respective industries into their own hands from the beginning, disregarding Government orders. And in certain towns outside Catalonia, Socialization was put into practice immediately and has shown amazing results.

★ Barcelona

In Barcelona, the Sanitary Syndicate, the Urban Transport, the Water and Gas Syndicates as well as the Public Amusements Syndicate have directed work themselves. The first named and the last were created after the Revolution. They have nevertheless accomplished great work. The Sanitary Syndicate spread throughout Catalonia and organized medical service in such a way that every village had its doctor.

The railways in Catalonia are an eloquent example of what the workers would have done had they not been paralysed by the concessions made to the bourgeoisie. The three main lines which belonged to three foreign companies constantly competing with one another, were amalgamated to form one company and recently were directed by a central committee of the U.G.T. (General Workers' Union--Socialist) and C.N.T. made up of twelve comrades. There were very few engineers, for most of them were foreigners and had returned to their respective countries. Nevertheless wonderful results were achieved.

★ Granollers

Apart from Barcelona, one can give noteworthy cases of organization. Take the small town of Granollers for instance. Everything was socialized by the Syndicates and the Municipality. And everything worked perfectly. The small workshops disappeared--this took place in hundreds of localities where the workers took over production--and redistribution was rapidly assured by the Municipal cooperatives; small business concerns were at first controlled, then eliminated, and the tradespeople given an occupation, either in the co-operatives or in other trades.

★ Castellon

If we travel southwards along the Mediterranean on coast we reach Castellon. Little or nothing has been said about this town, in spite of the fact that since October 1936, the metallurgical industry had been entirely in the hands of the syndicates. The other industries were in the process of being socialized in a similar way. And yet in this town there was no revolutionary syndicalist tradition, but the workers were not lacking in common sense and were deeply conscious of their responsibilities.

★ Alcoy

If we take Alcoy in the Province of Alicante, we have an even more typical example. The workers have long been well organized and no mobilization decree was necessary for the militants. They quickly took over the factories and workshops and organized production in a new way.

Each industry is centralized in the Syndical Administrative Committee. This committee is divided into as many sections as there are principal industries. When an order is received by the Sales Section it is passed on to the production section whose task it is to decide which workshops are best equipped to produce the required articles. Whilst settling this question they order the required raw materials from the corresponding section. The latter gives instructions to the shops to supply the materials and finally, the Buying Section receives details of the transaction so that it can replace the material used.

These new methods have also made it possible to increase the acreage sown. In Aragon my research on the spot permits me to affirm that generally speaking the increase in wheat crop has reached an average of 30 per cent. An increase in yield, though in a smaller proportion has been obtained for other cereals, potatoes, sugar beet, lucerne, etc.

★ Family Wage

This latter fact is of utmost importance. It is the first time in modern society that the anarchist principle "to each according to his needs," has been practiced. It has been applied in two ways: without money in many villages in Aragon and by local money in others, and in the greater part of collectives established in other regions. The family wage is paid with this money and it varies according to the number of members in each family. A household in which the man and his wife both work because they have no children receives, for the sake of argument, say 5 pesetas a day. Another household in which only the man works, as his wife has to care for two, three or four children, receives six, seven or eight pesetas respectively. It is the "needs" and not only the "production" taken in the strictly economic sense which control the wage scale or that of the distribution of products where wages do not exist.

★ Mutual Aid

This principal of justice is continually extended. It does away with charity and begging and the special budgets for the indigent. There are no more destitute. Those who work do so for others in the same way as others will work to help them and their children later on.

But this mutual aid extends beyond the village. Before the Fascist invaders destroyed the Aragon collectives, the cantonal federations did all in their power to counteract the injustices of nature by obtaining for the less favoured villages the machinery, mules, seed, etc.... which were to help them increase the yield of their land. These implements were obtained through the intermediary of the Federation that undertook the delivery of the produce of twenty, thirty, forty or even fifty localities and asked in their name, for the industrial and stock breeding centres, for the products that they

sen to attend to it, and go, when necessary, from one zone to another.

In this new organization, small property has almost completely disappeared. In Aragon, 75 per cent of small proprietors have voluntarily adhered to the new order of things. Those who refused have been respected. It is untrue to say that those who took part in the collectives were forced to do so. One cannot stress this point too strongly in face of the calumnies that have been directed against the collectives on this point. It is so far from the truth that the agrarian collectivity has brought into force, everywhere, a special current account for small proprietors and has printed consumers' tickets specially for them, so as to assure for them the industrial products they require, in the same way as they do for the "collectivists".

In this transformation of property, one must put special stress on the practical sense and psychological finesse of the organizers who in almost all the villages have conceded or given to each family a bit of ground on which each peasant cultivates, for his own use, the vegetables which he prefers in the way he prefers. Their individual initiative can thereby be developed and satisfied.

★ New Methods of Cultivation

Collective work has made it possible to achieve in agriculture as well as in industry, a rationalization which was impossible under the régime of small land ownership and even under that of big landed properties. Tractors and other machinery are used where they are most necessary. Forgotten are the days when the means of production remained unused in the barns of the rich, whilst the poor peasants worked the land with roman ploughs drawn by worn out donkeys and mules! Beasts of burden are equally used on work to which they are most suited. All the strong mules do the hard work whilst the weaker ones are put on less arduous tasks.

On the other hand, better quality seeds are used. This was rendered possible by being able to buy up large stocks, which the small peasant could not afford to do in the past. Potato seeds come from Ireland and selected wheat seeds only are used. Chemical fertilizers have also been used. As modern machinery properly used--tractors and modern ploughs were obtained by exchange or bought directly from abroad--permits the soil to be more deeply worked, these seeds have produced a yield per hectare far superior to that which would have been obtained under the conditions which existed during previous years.

This summary, which, given space, could endlessly be amplified, makes one appreciate the fact that the Spanish Libertarian workers co-ordinate and rationalise production in a much more satisfactory way than Capitalism had done. And I lay special stress on the disappearance of small unhealthy and costly workshops and factories, besides the correct use of machinery for the work most suited to it. Administrative centralization is one of the most outstanding features. One can thus state that wherever collaboration with political parties has not paralysed the workers, the latter were able, even where their syndicates were of only recent formation, to organize production and public services in a highly satisfactory way. There remains to be described the role played by the workers themselves in the administration and industrial management.

The industrial administrative committee is neither an autonomous nor infallible organization. The syndicate still exists, and its central commission controls the ensemble of activities. It is nominated by the general assembly of syndicated workers and has delegates direct from the factories and workshops so as never to lose contact with the workers. In the work shops and factories exist committees elected by an assembly of workers gathered together on the spot. These committees are responsible for the application of instructions received as regards the conduct of work. In their turn they communicate their observations to the central syndical commission. And at assemblies resolutions are passed concerning both the daily work in the factories and work of the administrative committee.

We are not therefore facing an administrative dictatorship, but rather a functional democracy, in which all specialized works play their roles that have been settled after general examination by the assembly.



AGRARIAN SOCIALISATION

BUT it is in agrarian Socialization that one must look for the best example of Social achievement.

This socialization did not take place simultaneously and completely everywhere at the same time. It was commenced in Aragon, inspired by the Libertarians, and then gained ground in Levant and that part of Andalucia that remained in our hands. Finally it extended to the South of Catalonia and in Castille.

The agrarian revolution has inaugurated the practice of Libertarian right. And it has done it with such results that the Anarchist theorists themselves, those who had always defended the concepts now applied, were amazed, and will never forget the beautiful dream through which they lived.

Let us add that deep social feelings, which characterize the Spanish peasant, were required to put these ideas into practice.

★ Aragon

In about three months, most of the villages of Aragon, some of which were wrested from Fascist hands by the columns led by Durruti and other "undisciplined" guerrillas, organized agrarian collectives. One must not confuse the industrial "collectives" carried out under the aegis of the decree

mentioned earlier on, and under instructions dictated by the Catalan Government, with those of the peasants. This word "collectives" describes two quite different things.

The mechanism of the formation of the Aragonese collectives has been generally the same. After having overcome the local authorities when they were fascist, or after having replaced them by Anti-fascist or Revolutionary committees when they were not, an assembly was summoned for all the inhabitants of the locality to decide on their line of action.

One of the first steps was to gather in the crop not only in the fields of the small landowners who still remained, but what was even more important, also, on the estates of the large landowners all of whom were conservatives and rural "caciques" or chiefs. Groups were organized to reap and thresh the wheat that belonged to these large landowners. Collective work began spontaneously. Then as this wheat could not be given to anyone in particular without being unfair to all it was put under the control of a local committee, for the use of all the inhabitants, either for consumption or for the purpose of exchange for manufactured goods, such as clothes, boots, etc., for those who were most in need.

It was necessary, afterwards, to work the lands of the large landowners. They were generally the most extensive and fertile in the region. The question was again raised before the village assembly. It was then that the "collectivity" if not already definitely constituted--often this had been done at the first meeting--was definitely established.

A delegate for agriculture and stockbreeding was nominated (or one for each of these activities when breeding was extensively carried on), one delegate each for local distribution, exchanges, public works, hygiene and education and revolutionary defence. Sometimes there were more; on other occasions less.

Workers groups were then formed. These groups generally were divided into the number of zones into which the municipal territory had been divided, so as more easily to include all kinds of work. The number of zones depends not only on the extent of the land but also on the topographical lie of the land, which in Spain is generally mountainous.

Each group of workers names its delegate. The delegates meet every two days or every week with the councillor of agriculture and stockbreeding, so as to co-ordinate all the different activities.

They decide for instance, whether certain fields should be ploughed, or whether they should attend to the wheat or the vines; or to prune the olive trees and other fruit trees; or to plant potatoes or sow beetroots, etc. According to the urgency and the importance of the work, groups are cho-