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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to study the relationship between Catalan workers, the anarchist-syndicalist movement and the development of the Spanish polity between the years 1898 and 1923. Following the injunction of Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, I wish to write a work covering, on the one hand, the social history of labour and its organisational manifestations, and, on the other, its broader political impact.<sup>1</sup> In this way I hope not only to deepen knowledge of the Catalan working class and its institutions, but also to contribute to the overall understanding of early twentieth-century Spanish history.

The reasons for choosing this topic are twofold. First, anarchism showed great vitality in Catalonia – along with several other parts of Spain, most notably Andalusia – during the early twentieth century. In 1919 the anarchist-syndicalist labour confederation, the CNT, would, albeit briefly, attain over half a million members in Spain as a whole, about 60 percent of whom were Catalan. Second, the growth of labour protest, and of the CNT in particular, was perceived as a massive challenge by business, and by the military and political elite of the Restoration regime, who between 1919 and 1923 spent much of their time searching for strategies to either contain or destroy the organisation. Catalonia and especially Barcelona were at the heart of these struggles. The period ended with a coup d'état against the Restoration regime in September 1923. It is my contention that its origins cannot be understood without taking into account the violent social conflict which had racked the city over the previous four years.

I have divided the book into three parts. In Part One I have focused on several major and closely interrelated themes. First, I have studied economic and social change and its impact on workers' lives: industrial development, the recasting of the labour process, the stratification of labour, migration, urban development and living conditions. Second, I have turned to the attitude of the state and business towards labour, and the strategies which they put in place to maintain social control, 'integrate labour' and head off subversive threats. Finally, I have begun to chart how labour adapted to and crit-

icised this changing world, through the discourses used in meetings and within the press, and through associational initiatives. With respect to the latter, for reasons to be explained, the chief area of concern has been union organisation and strikes.

Within this section I shall be posing a key question which puzzled contemporaries and taxed historians. Catalan industry was, when compared with that of the major European powers, small-scale and in some respects technologically backward. Middle-class contemporaries and some more recent commentators have suggested that in these circumstances the country 'should have' enjoyed quite cordial labour relations. And yet it spawned what was, at certain times at least, an aggressive labour movement, prone to the use of violence.

In order to address these issues I will centre my attention on the key industries and centres of labour unrest. This means that Barcelona will be the focal point of my study. By the first years of the twentieth century around half the Catalan working population was to be found in the city. Furthermore, almost invariably attempts to construct general workers' confederations were launched from Barcelona and it was at the heart of the majority of labour struggles. Nevertheless, by this time much of the territory's textile industries had vacated Barcelona and were located either in the medium-sized industrial towns which surrounded the Catalan capital and dotted Catalonia's central and southern coastline, or in the smaller centres which straddled its north-eastern river valleys. Hence the discussion of textiles will include areas outside Barcelona. In particular, the woollen textile town of Sabadell and the cotton textile towns in the Ter and Freser valleys were key centres of labour organisation and will be subject to considerable attention.

In the second part of the work my focus will shift to the relationship between workers and the anarchist-syndicalist movement. A key area of discussion will be the reasons behind the growth of anarchism in Catalonia and, concomitantly, the difficulties other labour organisations, especially the Socialist party and its union, the PSOE and UGT, found in establishing themselves.

This has already been a subject of much speculation. One set of explanations has stressed the supposedly radicalising impact of rural migrant labour from southern and eastern Spain. Such interpretations tend to make a causal linkage between the growth of anarchism in Andalusia and Catalonia. What might be called the 'classic' explanation of Spanish anarchism sees it as particularly suited to the *latifundia* agrarian structure of southern Spain. Anarchism was, it is often claimed, rooted in the vast inequalities of income and wealth in the region, with impoverished landless and land-hungry peasants on the one hand, and rich and powerful landowners on the other. The power of the local political bosses or *caciques* made local elections a farce, hence the popularity of anarchist 'antipoliticism'. The isolation of the local villages from the state, with only the hated rural police or Civil Guard and tax collectors as evidence of its existence, lent credibility to anarchist calls for its disappearance. This isolation also formed the basis of support for the anarchists' decentralised vision of the society of the future, with the commune or collective as

the centre of social life. Finally, this line of interpretation sees peasant anarchist protest as backward or, to use Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, millenarian, because the mythical anarchist revolutionary General Strike, which was supposed magically to usher in the new world, substituted other more rational forms of struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Anarchist-inspired labour organisations have, on the other hand, often been seen as unsuited to the needs of urban workers. These workers, according to some, tended towards reformism, and were at home in the more centralised trade unions and political parties of the Socialists. This left the tricky problem of anarchist success in Catalonia. The simple answer was to argue that it was the result of the migration by 'unassimilated' peasants from rural areas (often seen as anarchist hotbeds), who became highly militant within their new surroundings.

This was an idea which, in the early-twentieth century, had already found favour within the Catalan nationalist middle classes, shocked that anarchism had penetrated what they believed was an inherently moderate and practical working class, which could not possibly be tempted by revolutionary adventures. It was then developed by Catalan historians, most notable Jaume Vicens i Vives, who maintained that the *patuleia*, a floating, semi-employed *classe dangereuse* of rural extraction (in this case largely from rural Catalonia) was the insurrectionary element in the popular struggles of the period between 1833 and 1868. From the 1900s, however, migrants were increasingly drawn from Aragón and they were to have a radicalising impact on the Catalan CNT.<sup>3</sup>

The theory that 'uprooted' peasants were a radicalising influence in early twentieth-century urban areas became popular with many historians, most particularly in the United States, after the Second World War. And subsequently, in the 1960s and 1970s, either through the American or Catalan route, the idea that there was a connection between rural migrant workers and Catalan anarchism appeared in the works of a number of English-speaking historians. In these studies particular attention was paid to the growing numbers of southern *murcianos* within the Catalan working class after 1914.<sup>4</sup>

A second set of explanations emphasise the importance of the small-scale nature of Catalan industry. This has at its origin the Marxist claim that anarchism was an individualist, 'petty bourgeois', phenomenon, and that whereas Marxism attracted support amongst the industrial factory proletariat the anarchists could only gain that of workers employed in more marginal sectors of the economy.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, the leading Catalan Trotskyist theoretician, Andreu Nin, stated in the 1920s that 'petty bourgeois' anarchism had prevailed in Catalonia as a result of the high degree of subdivision within its agriculture and scattered nature of its industry.<sup>6</sup> It may immediately be noted that there is a logical slippage here, given that if anarchism was 'petty bourgeois' its supporters should presumably have been elements of the lower-middle class (clerks, office workers, shopkeepers etc.) rather than skilled workers and artisans. This reflected the fact that the phrase 'petty bourgeois anarchism' was, in reality, more a term of abuse than a fully worked-out analysis.

Nevertheless, the idea that anarchism and small-scale industry went together has been developed by historians, with such interpretations stressing that the anarchists' ideal of decentralised labour federations, with each individual union retaining a large degree of autonomy, was well suited to the disperse artisanal nature of much of Catalan industry. This is compared to the more centralised, bureaucratic, nature of the Socialist labour confederation, the UGT, whose strength, it is often stated, lay amongst the industrial workers in the big iron and steel, and coal-mining industries of northern Spain.<sup>7</sup>

A third set of what may be called approximations to anarchism – in that they do not always centre exclusively on the movement or attempt to offer a full account of its rise – can be grouped under the rubric of 'populist'. These studies tend not to treat anarchism as an exclusively class-based phenomenon and dwell on the links between anarchist ideology and more widely disseminated discourses on the political Left. They focus, above all, on the development, in nineteenth-century urban Catalonia, of what they see as a popular, interclass, cultural milieu and argue that the political language which bound workers, artisans, and the lower-middle class together, was based on liberal rationalism, which championed 'progress', education and science, and demonised the Roman Catholic Church and 'reaction'. Such ideas, they maintain, penetrated deeply into working-class and popular culture, and were behind the large number of free-thinking clubs, lay schools, Masonic and spiritualist associations which sprang up during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bourgeois rationalism was, from the mid-nineteenth century, the staple of republican ideology, which gained a wide-ranging popular following in this period. Anarchists, much more than Marxist Socialists, subsequently bought into this world view and, therefore, shared many of the same presuppositions as the republicans.<sup>8</sup>

An offshoot of this interpretation is that developed by a group of historians formed around the student of labour and nationalist movements, Josep Termes, who has argued that there was a close relationship between popular protest movements and the national question in nineteenth-century Catalonia. He maintains that with the Catalan bourgeoisie linked, albeit in a subordinate position, to the dominant Castilian-Andalusian ruling oligarchy, the fight against an alien centralising state was conducted by the 'popular classes'. It was in the context of this struggle that these classes developed a national identity and, therefore, tended to form specifically Catalan unions and political parties. This remained a crucial feature of Catalan political life through to the twentieth century and a party which, like the PSOE, did not take it into account was doomed to failure.<sup>9</sup>

In at least two respects such interpretations have a more 'modern' ring than the alternatives previously discussed. First, they echo claims, made recently in 'post-structuralist' circles above all, that the significance of class as an interpretative tool has been overemphasised. Second, as in the case of the proponents of the 'linguistic turn' in labour history, much more attention is given to political discourse in its own right, though Enric Ucelay Da Cal, for example, gave his argument a socio-economic twist by claiming that the dis-

perse nature of Catalan industry provided the economic underpinning for this interclass alliance.<sup>10</sup>

There are, in my estimation, difficulties with all three interpretational strands. The key shortcoming of the first two explanatory models is that they are not based on any serious social history and, in fact, do not interrogate the anarchist movement in any detail. Hence, the radicalising influence of migrant labour and the impact of small-scale industry is stated rather than empirically explored. At the root of the problem is that Catalan historiography has, until recently, continued to focus on political history, and, with respect to labour organisation, centre its attention on the top echelons rather than the rank and file. By studying in some depth the interrelationship between the world of work, the neighbourhood, and organised labour I hope to shed further light on these matters. Furthermore, these studies lack any strong comparative perspective. Thus, for example, the extent to which urban Catalan anarchism was a unique phenomenon is open to question. Syndicalism attained considerable influence on both the European and American continents until at least 1914 and there was a marked similarity between this movement and pro-union Catalan anarchist currents. The major anarchist-syndicalist labour confederation, the CNT, formed in 1910, from the first referred to itself as syndicalist. Similarly, comparative work very much calls into question the link between Socialism and big industry, even in Spain itself. I will introduce such comparative perspectives when their usage may prove fruitful.

The third set of what I have termed approximations, by to an important degree shifting discussion onto the cultural and discursive field, do not suffer from these drawbacks. Their focus has without doubt been productive. I will endeavour to provide a careful analysis of the political languages employed by labour activists and study links between anarchism, republicanism and Catalanism. Language is, as 'post-structuralists' have reminded us, an important field of study in its own right. People do not 'read off' their understanding of the world from 'the social'. A human being's mental universe is linguistically constructed. And the cultural baggage picked up and passed from one generation to the next provides people with the raw material through which they interpret their world.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, my focus will be rather different from that of the proponents of more 'populist' readings of anarchism in a number of respects. First, I shall forcefully argue that it was above all a movement based on industrial labour. Second, I will try to show how factors rooted in workers' real experience, such as changes in the world of work and the community, recast social relations, the strategies pursued by employers and the policies of the state, along with new ideological inputs (in this case above all class-based ideologies), deeply impacted on their cosmographies, on the type of organisations they built and on the protest movements they undertook. Furthermore, it is my contention that such elements help us to understand the anarchists' ability to gain followers among Catalan workers.

As a result, worker discontent and its manifestations will be at the heart of this study. The type of protest movements on which I should concentrate is

not, however, unproblematic. In recent years the claim has been made that social and labour historians have been too centred on the industrial disputes of (largely male) workers to the detriment of other forms of dissent, often centred on issues related to consumption and frequently led by women workers.<sup>12</sup> It is an issue which I have taken on board. And in order to approach the varied forms taken by worker activism I have used Charles Tilly's concept of 'repertoires of collective action'; that is the specific forms of protest utilised by workers and other social groups in particular contexts.<sup>13</sup> For example, I shall be looking not only at strikes, but also at protests against clerical influence and the war in Morocco during the first decade of the century, and against rising food prices in 1918. In all these cases women were to the fore; in the latter men were almost totally excluded.

Indeed, I have striven to fully integrate gender relations into this study. In this respect, I have analysed the role that women workers played in early twentieth-century Catalan working-class society; taken care to understand how both the labour movement as a whole and the anarchist-syndicalist organisations in particular perceived women's place in the world of work, the neighbourhood and home, and within their associations; and studied women's own reactions and self-perceptions. Labour unions and anarchist confederations after all claimed to represent the entire working class and to be struggling for its emancipation, and it is crucial to study the extent to which they were in reality working to benefit all workers.

Nevertheless, most emphasis has been placed on labour unions and strikes. There are two good reasons for this. First, unions were the central core of the anarchist-syndicalist confederations. Second, it was the growth of union organisation and strikes which was at the heart of the explosive crisis of the Restoration regime between 1919 and 1923. It should be emphasised in this respect that such a focus does not exclude women to the extent that has sometimes been claimed. As we shall see, there was more overlap between strikes and other forms of protest, and between protests by working-class men and women, than some authors have realised.

I shall argue that it was in good measure the type of labour organisation and the 'repertoires of collective action' which emerged in urban Catalonia which made possible (though not inevitable) the rise of anarchism-syndicalism. Nevertheless, while I recognise that anarchism was born in the cauldron of social conflict and that languages of class were predominant within the movement it is not my intention to defend a simplistic class-based reading of either Catalan society or, indeed, anarchism itself. The 'populist school' was right to draw attention to the fact that anarchism was a child of liberal rationalism as well as socialism, and, as we shall see, this created tension within the movement between languages of class (workers versus industrialists) and languages of the people (anticlerics and freethinkers against the reactionary elite), and both opportunities to align with the liberal Left (as representatives of the forces of 'progress') and bitterly criticise them (as middle-class 'bourgeois'). I aim to tease out the political implications of these tensions and linkages both with respect to the development of Catalan labour and also, crucially, in relation to the possibility of constructing alliances against the Restoration regime.

In order to undertake these tasks it will be necessary to analyse in some detail the links between the anarchist-syndicalist movement and the broader working class, its real strength, component parts and ideology, and also its relations in different conjunctures with the liberal Left. As part of this endeavour a key question I will seek to answer will be how a movement which saw itself as forging a new world which liberated human potential for good came to incorporate bombers and gunmen, and, in the years of the First World War, operate what can only be described as a terrorist wing.

To do this I shall study grass-roots struggles and conflict as well as the reaction of the Spanish polity to protest movements and to the growth of anarchism. All social and labour historians now realise how important it is to place working-class history within the context of state policies. This will form a backdrop to the entire study and will be foregrounded in the third part of the book, in which I analyse the rise and fall of the CNT in the final crisis of the Restoration regime between 1917 and 1923. The period began in 1917 with a reforming, interclass, push to replace the Restoration regime by a liberal-democratic regime, but, in Catalonia above all, quickly escalated into class-based confrontation. It is a dramatic story, in which the CNT grew totally to dominate organised labour and was then largely destroyed in a counteroffensive launched by an alliance of industrialists and the military, and in which Barcelona became 'the Mediterranean Chicago' *avant la lettre*,<sup>14</sup> as fierce gun battles and shootings tinged the city's streets red.

My first concern will be to understand how such a dramatic conjuncture developed. Was it the result of totally new conditions created by the First World War: rapid economic development and inflation, an influx of 'uprooted peasants', the rise of a new class of hard-line *nouveau-riche* businessmen, or are pre-war developments of key importance in explaining subsequent events? I shall also be looking at the response of the CNT to the new opportunities for political and social change, and how the counteroffensive would impact on the organisation's strength, practice and ideology. In particular, from 1916 a reforming current developed in the Catalan CNT under the greatest labour leader of the period, Salvador Seguí. Its aim was to strengthen the organisation, build alliances against the regime, and, from 1919, rein in the gunmen. I shall study in some depth the policies Seguí pursued and attempt to answer the question as to whether, had the conditions been more favourable, he could have taken the CNT away from its roots in aggressive class-confrontational politics to play a part in shifting the balance of power towards labour while supporting democratic construction.

The story is often violent and the ending is not a happy one. Perhaps Seguí's spirit would be lifted by the thought that the strategy he advocated would, to an important degree, subsequently be taken up by the working-class opposition to Franco in Catalonia, and that labour would play an important role in laying the foundations of today's democratic Spain.

## Notes

1. Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, 'Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?'
2. Juan Díaz del Moral, *Historia de las agitaciones andaluzas*; Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, 74–92.
3. Jaume Vicens i Vives and Montserrat Llorens, *Industrials i polític del segle XIX*, 142–5 and 165–6; Jaume Vicens i Vives, 'El moviment obrerista català (1901–1939)'.
4. See, for example, C.A.M. Hennessy, *The Federal Republic in Spain*, 67; Richard Kern, *Red Years, Black Years*, 69–71; Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 69–71; Gerald Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923*, 2–3.
5. K. Marx, F. Engels, I. Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*.
6. Andreu Nin, '¿Por qué nuestro movimiento obrero ha sido anarquista?'.
7. Albert Balcells, 'Introducción', p.18; Pierre Vilar, *Historia de España*, 105–6; Manuel Tuñón de Lara, *El movimiento obrero en la historia de España*, vol. 1, 307–8.
8. José Alvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español*, 204–14; Enric Ucelay Da Cal, *La Catalunya populista*; Angel Duarte i Montserrat, *El republicanisme català a la fi del segle XIX*.
9. Josep Termes i Ardévol, 'El nacionalisme català: per una nova interpretació'.
10. Ucelay Da Cal, *Catalunya populista*, 52–6.
11. See, for example, Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, 1–24. I do not, however, agree with Stedman Jones that class can be seen in purely linguistic-discursive terms.
12. In a Spanish context see, Pamela B. Radcliffe, *From Mobilization to Civil War*.
13. See Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 151–66.
14. The expression is taken from Colin M. Winston, *Workers and the Right in Spain*, 105.