



An Anarchist Classic

La CNT en la revolución española. José Peirats Valls. 3 volumes. Edited by Chris Ealham. Hastings, East Sussex: Meltzer Press-Christie Books, London: Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies, 2001-2006.

By Andrew H. Lee

José Peirats's study has long been a standard source for information on the Spanish anarchists. Now, a half-century later, we are treated to a translation by Paul Sharkey and Christopher Ealham that, because of the added material provided by Ealham, is effectively new and much enhanced.

Peirats's text is an internal history, one that is fiercely critical not only of the CNT's ideological opponents, but also of the organization itself. Peirats miraculously reconstructs a history of the vanquished despite the fact that the documentation was scattered around the globe. Furthermore, as a militant anarchist and a former secretary-general of the libertarian movement, he was unable to travel to Salamanca to see the documentation and the material seized by the Francoists. The original work was published in three volumes from 1951 to 1953.

Peirats traces the history of the CNT and its evolution during the course of the war. He deals with the various factions and their internal conflicts, notably that involving four anarchist ministers from November 1936 through May 1937. Unlike many other accounts, he continues the his-

tory past the May Days to the very end of the war; close to half of the text deals with events after May 1937. Furthermore, a great deal of attention is devoted to economic matters. Peirats quotes extensively from documents that he tracked down across the globe. The internal economic conflict is crucial to understanding the widening rift within the Popular Front before May 1937, as the anarchists increasingly viewed Negrín in a negative light because of his activities as the Republican finance minister.

Negrín was determined to prevent the CNT ministers from achieving anything, and he obstructed the collectives from obtaining much needed (and allocated) financial resources. Thus the conflict that erupted in May 1937 grew out of domestic and internal struggles that predated the war, rather than purely external Soviet machinations, as many non-Hispanists continue to argue. This is not to downplay the role of the USSR, but rather to emphasize that

it was an overwhelmingly Spanish conflict and that the Soviets were used by the Spanish and vice versa.

There are a few problems with the new edition, but they are minor compared to the wealth of information that this publication provides. And the English edition has some decided advantages over the previous Spanish ones. It has a useable index and editorial additions by Ealham. His notes provide extensive biographical information, much of it previously difficult to find. His introductory essays in each volume provide (1) the history of this history, (2) a biography of Peirats, and (3) an essay and bibliography of English language works on Spanish anarchism. These are invaluable sources for scholars as well as for the lay reader.

The English-speaking world has had to wait over 50 years for a complete translation of Peirats's text. The added material by Chris Ealham has made it well worth the wait. ■

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