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Dissertation Abstract: This dissertation examines the social and political relations that emerged between Mexican laborers and Spanish political refugees between 1939 and 1959. Following the collapse of the Second Spanish Republic (1936-1939) and the ascension of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Mexico granted 20,000 Spaniards political asylum. The initiative marked the first time and only time in world history that a formerly colonized nation granted political asylum to inhabitants of its imperial metropole. As Mexican campesinos and workers navigated, defined, and challenged the parameters of their country’s social revolution (1906-1940), their acceptance or rejection of Spanish exiles depended on their communities’ historical relationships to land, radical thought, and the Mexican state. My dissertation therefore examines specific sites of Spanish settlement to determine how encounters between local populations and refugees challenged the Mexican state’s conceptions of class, race, and citizenship.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ambassadors of the Revolution: Anarchist Diplomacy during the Spanish Civil War

On July 17, 1936, General Francisco Franco led a military uprising against the democratically elected Second Spanish Republic, resulting in a three-year civil war that ravaged every corner of the country. The Nationalist forces' attack against the Republic also galvanized the country's militant worker and peasant movements to initiate a full-on revolution while simultaneously fending off the military coup. Democratic governments chose non-intervention over defending Europe's youngest democratic experiment in hopes of staving off a world war. With the exception of the Soviet Union, Mexico was the only country in the world to come to the diplomatic aid of the Republican government.

Throughout the Spanish Civil War, republicans and anarchists alike celebrated Mexico's gestures of diplomatic solidarity, forming a rare consensus during a conflict marred by sectarian divisions. At May Day celebrations in Aragón in 1937, civilians and combatants proclaimed Mexico as Spain's closest ally. The Aragón defense council's newspaper, *Nuevo Aragón*, covered the celebrations for over a week after they took place, reiterating the class and racial bonds that united the Mexican and Spanish people. Along with depictions of Mexican revolutionaries such as Emiliano Zapata and cartoon renderings of Mexican campesinos in the newspaper, the editors of *Nuevo Aragón* explicitly compared themselves to Mexico's marginalized native population. One front-page article proudly proclaimed that "the *aragoneses* are the 'Indians' of Spain" based on their "simplicity," "energy," and "tenacious love for the truth."¹ Although Mexican diplomatic and Spanish revolutionaries regularly espoused racial codifiers to articulate the country's ties to one another, such radical evocations were broadly associated with various forms of social conflicts that

¹ "Aragón abraza a Méjico," *Nuevo Aragón* (Caspe), May 1, 1937.

defined “race” based on social group’s lineage of struggle, exploitation, and, in revolutionary moments, emancipation.²



Figure 6: (Left) Cover of *Nuevo Aragón* (May 1, 1937). (Right) “España y Méjico” cartoon in *Nuevo Aragón* (May 1, 1937). Subheading reads: “Rejoice, little brother! The sun rises for everyone!”³

Whereas previous studies of Mexico’s interventions in the Spanish Civil War have focused on the diplomatic and humanitarian significance of the country’s financial support for the Second Republic, little has been said of the relationship between Spain’s anarchist movement and the Cárdenas

² CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); James Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Cindy Forester, *The Time of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala’s October Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001); Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Marc Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America,” *Science & Society* 70, no. 4 (2006): 450-479; James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

³ “Aragón abraza a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 1, 1937; “España y Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 1, 1937.

government.⁴ There are a number of reasons for the lack of historical examination; first, with the exception of Abdón Mateos's study of the Indalecio Prieto's ties to the Cárdenas government during and after the Civil War, few studies acknowledge any persistent interactions between revolutionary factions and the Mexican state during the duration of conflict.⁵ Second, much of the documentation of left-wing factions during the Civil War had been confiscated or destroyed by Nationalist forces. However, anarchist factions sent their collections for safekeeping at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam near the end of the Civil War, thus preserving some archival remnants. Lastly, the sheer paradox of an anarchist organization reaching out for support from a foreign national government seems to defy conventional readings of the Spanish libertarian movement. By placing archival documents located in Spain, the Netherlands, and Mexico in conversation with one another, this chapter provides an assessment of Spain's anarchist movement—namely, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT) and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI)—and its efforts to galvanize Mexican support both within Spain and through propaganda campaigns in Mexico.

As ambassadors of the Spanish Revolution, CNT representatives embarked on domestic and international campaigns to build relations with the Mexican people and the Cárdenas government. Anarchist groups' willingness to reach out to a sitting government administration reflects the unique circumstances of both countries' social revolutions. The CNT saw similar openings and—for the

⁴ Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens: Spanish Exiles in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973); Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981); José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio: México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1999); Agustín Sánchez Andrés and Pedro Pérez Herrero, *Historia de las relaciones entre España y México, 1821-2014* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2015), 155-170; Mario Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War: Political Repercussions for the Republican Cause* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

⁵ Abdón Mateos, *De la guerra civil al exilio: Los republicanos españoles y México, Indalecio Prieto y Lázaro Cárdenas* (Madrid: Fundación Indalecio Prieto, 2005).

first time ever in Spanish history—appointed government ministers within the coalitional governments of Francisco Largo Caballero and Juan Negrín at different points of the Civil War. Although seen as an act of betrayal from some of its more militant members, the decision reflected the great lengths anarchists undertook to ward off the specter of fascism in Spain.

Mexico was not just an important ally because of its government's military aid for the Popular Front; of note here is the Cárdenas government's backing of radical agrarian reforms and its ability to forge strong loyalties with working class and campesino organizations that remained only tangentially influenced by the Partido Comunista Mexicano.⁶ Revolutionaries in Spain viewed Cárdenas's initiatives as a genuine gesture to follow the demands of the nation's laboring classes. As part of their diplomatic endeavors, the Spanish anarchists deployed a discursive strategy that promoted an alternative historical connection linking Spain's laboring classes to its former colonial territories. By emphasizing a collective experience of exploitation at the hands of Spanish nobles and capitalists, anarchists promoted an explicitly anti-colonial and internationalist worldview when expressing to Spain's former colonial subjects in the Americas. In doing so, they extended their support for the Cárdenas government while also attempting to rebuild Mexico's anti-authoritarian tradition, which had been severely neglected following years of repression and disorder.

However, as this chapter demonstrates, the task of developing an anti-colonial and internationalist worldview proved far more complicated than mere salutations to global social revolution. As evident in the perceptions of revolutionaries before and during the Spanish Civil War, Spanish radicals' understandings of racial and class solidarity were articulated explicitly from the point of view of a population unfamiliar with many of the social and cultural nuances of Mexican society. A clear distinction subsequently emerged between the discursive character of the anarchist

⁶ Barry Carr, "El Partido Comunista y la movilización agraria en la Laguna, 1920-1940: ¿Una alianza obrero-campesina?" *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 51, no. 2 (1989): 115-149.

movement within Spain and the views of its delegates that travelled to Mexico. While Spanish radicals regularly lambasted the racial inequalities created by centuries of colonialism, they often did not fully comprehend the ways in which race and racism permeated not only Mexican society, but their own. In demonstrating the complex ways in which Spanish anarchists imagined race, class, and revolution in relation to Mexico, this chapter contributes to a growing body of literature that has examined the constructions of race during the Spanish Civil War.⁷ Whereas some scholars have characterized the views of certain sectors of the Spanish anarchist movement as nationalistic or, as Martin Baxmeyer claims, directly replicating the racist tropes espoused by Spanish fascists, this chapter demonstrates the ways that Spanish anarchists distinguished between notions of national and racial difference through an explicitly internationalist worldview.⁸ I thus seek to provide a more

⁷ Eduardo González Calleja and Fredes Limón Nevado, *La Hispanidad como instrumento de combate: Raza e imperio en la prensa franquista durante la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1988); Robin D.G. Kelley, "'This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do': African Americans and the Spanish Civil War," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 123-158; Abel Paz, *La cuestión de marruecos y la república española* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000); Javier Domínguez Arribas, *El enemigo judeo-masónico en la propaganda franquista, 1936-1945* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009); David Featherstone, "Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6 (2013): 1406-1420; Isabel Soto, "I Knew that Spain Once Belonged to the Moors: Langston Hughes, Race, and the Spanish Civil War," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): 130-146; Mustafa Kabha, "The Spanish Civil War as Reflected in Contemporary Palestinian Press," in *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*, ed. Israel Gershoni (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 127-137; Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, *Traveler, There Is No Road: Theatre, the Spanish Civil War, and the Decolonial Imagination in the Americas* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017); Claudia Montero, "El discurso feminista en Chile y las imágenes de la mujer en la República Española," *Estudios Feministas* 25, no. 2 (2017): 777-801; Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico, and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 211-250; Ali Al Tuma, *Guns, Culture and Moors: Racial Perceptions, Cultural Impact and the Moroccan Participation in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2018); Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War*.

⁸ Martin Baxmeyer, "'Mother Spain, We Love You!': Nationalism and Racism in Anarchist Literature during the Spanish Civil War," in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, eds. Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (Oakland: PM Press, 2017), 204. For recent examinations on the role of nationalism among Spanish anarchists, see: Pilar Salomón Chéliz, "Internacionalismo y nación en el anarquismo español anterior a 1914," in *Estudios sobre nacionalismo y nación en la España contemporánea*, eds. Ismael Saz and Ferran Archilés (Zaragoza: Pressas de la

holistic examination of the world Spanish libertarians aspired to build out of the shell of the old.

Mexican Diplomatic Relations with Spanish Anarchists

The Mexican government's first interactions with Spain's revolutionary movements began in August 1936, shortly after the Second Spanish Republic's Ambassador to Mexico, Félix Gordón Ordás, requested material aid to fend off the military coup led by General Francisco Franco. Heeding his request, Cárdenas instructed the Ministry of War and Navy to ship twenty-thousand Remington rifles and twenty-million cartridges to support Republican Spain's defenses.⁹ By November 1936, Mexican weapons had reached anarchist militias in Barcelona, one of the CNT's regional strongholds, by way of Mexican arms purchases in Central America.¹⁰ Moreover, the incorporation of four CNT ministers into the coalition government of Largo Caballero in November provided a diplomatic opening: Spanish anarchists were now in direct dialogue with the Mexican embassy. The CNT's representation in the Republican government (November 1936-May 1937, April 1938-March 1939) did not last the entire duration of the Civil War. Nevertheless, leaders of the confederation quickly established rapport with Mexican diplomats and cultural emissaries and kept those ties throughout the war, despite internal conflicts within the Republican government. In January 1937 General Secretary of the CNT Mariano R. Vázquez wrote to the Mexican Embassy in Valencia to request a meeting with its new ambassador, Ramón P. Denegri to discuss his country's

Universidad de Zaragoza, 2011), 137-168; Morris Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936-1939: Fury Over Spain* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 97-127; Danny Evans, *Revolution and the State: Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Chino: AK Press, 2020), 48-51, 146-153.

⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, Tomo 1. Apuntes, 1913-1940* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), 354; Letter from José Antonio Arias to the CNT (September 2, 1936), International Institute of Social History – Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (hereafter IISH-CNT), 62C.

¹⁰ Mexican shipments of weapons, along with Soviet-purchased arms from Mexico, were regularly sent through alternative ports to avoid detection by Nationalist, German, and Italian forces. See: Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 578.

aid for the antifascist cause in Spain.¹¹ Like all of Mexico's diplomats to Spain the approval of anarchists seeking to dramatically reorganize the Spanish countryside. Following the mass relocation of the Spanish republican government to the city of Valencia due to threats of a Nationalist takeover of the capital of Madrid, the CNT went so far as to offer the Mexican embassy office space in its Valencian headquarters, a finca expropriated by anarchist militias shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in July 1936. Anarchists persisted in their efforts to establish cordial relations with the diplomat and his staff in spite of Denegri's erratic behavior.

Even though thousands of foreign volunteers from Europe and the United States came to the defense of the Spanish Republic and social revolution in Spain, Spanish anarchists benefited more from Mexico's diplomatic and financial support than they lost from the absence of Mexican boots on the ground. Mexico's financial and material aid for republican and revolutionary factions during the Civil War was no small diplomatic gesture. The weapons embargo enacted by the League of Nations and its Non-Intervention Committee disproportionately affected the Loyalists. Franco's forces utilized weapons, materials, and volunteers from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to advance its military operations throughout Spain with virtually no repercussions from the international community.¹² Mexico, on the other hand, was scrutinized, but the country continued to secretly purchase arms from European countries then to be shipped to the Loyalist fronts.¹³ The Spanish Popular Front government in turn galvanized support for the Spanish republican cause by

¹¹ Mariano R. Vázquez to the Consulate of Mexico (January 20, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

¹² David Jorge, *War in Spain: Appeasement, Collective Insecurity, and the Failure of European Democracies against Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 27-45. For more on the German and Italian support for the Nationalist uprising, see: Fernando Schwartz, *La internacionalización de la guerra civil española: Julio de 1936-marzo de 1937* (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), 57-78; Christopher Othen, *Franco's International Brigades: Foreign Volunteers and Fascist Dictators in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Reportage Press, 2008).

¹³ For a thorough analysis of Mexico's material support for the Second Spanish Republic, see: Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 62-133.

mobilizing various state and non-state actors and movements through transnational solidarity campaigns between the two countries. The Soviets, fearful that a revolution in Spain would incite a reaction from Nazi Germany, sought to maintain the Spanish republican state as a liberal democratic ally in the face of European fascist expansion.¹⁴ Subsequently, revolutionary factions such as the CNT, the FAI, and the POUM did not receive aid from the USSR and were frequently subverted within the broader Popular Front coalitions.¹⁵ Mexico, in contrast, maintained diplomatic ties to the most radical sectors of the Spanish Popular Front and dedicated its entire arms industry to producing weapons for Republican Spain.¹⁶ Unlike political and labor groups that wished to sustain Spain's liberal-democratic experiment, anarchist and anti-Stalinist communists worked toward the complete reconfiguration of Spain through a popular-based social revolution. Mexico's aid to revolutionary sectors of the Popular Front legitimized these efforts at a time in which the Republican government condemned the popular uprisings as counterintuitive to the war effort.

Whereas politicians and labor leaders in Mexico pervasively referenced a shared blood lineage between the Mexican and Spanish people, diplomats to Spain instead focused on the mutual class interests that united the two countries. In a confidential report to Secretary of Foreign Relations Eduardo Hay, Ambassador Ramón Denegri stressed the significance of the Spanish Revolution to Mexicans. "It is not because [the Spaniard] speaks the same language [as the Mexican]," he clarified, "nor that he has part of their blood, or that there is a cultural connection."

¹⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 83-108.

¹⁵ Revolutionary organizations included the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT), the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI), the Juventudes Libertarias de España (Libertarian Youth of Spain, JJLL), as well as the anti-Stalinist Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification, POUM). For more on ideological divides during the Civil War, see: Victor Alba, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M. in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

¹⁶ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 99.

These issues, Denegri argued, reproduced a “Hispano-Americanist lie” of a spiritual connection that ignored the longer historical trajectory that connected the nations’ laboring classes:

It is that the people of Spain have been subjected to the same yoke and have been the victims of the same victimizers as the Mexican people. The same aristocratic names whose family’s prestige were gained in another era through the atrocities committed against the Indians, or [gained] today through the theft and fraud of the Mexican people, also appears on the blacklist of those that plunder the Spanish people.¹⁷

Denegri’s views reflected the broader shift in Mexican and Spanish relations during the Civil War.

To emphasize the significance of the Spanish defense against fascism, diplomats utilized their positions of power to articulate a collective response to the exploitations of capitalism both within and without the confines of racial difference. Such assessments challenged the longstanding *hispanista* rhetoric of Spanish republican and left-wing intellectuals.¹⁸ Mexican diplomats and, as explained below, Spanish anarchists instead sought to frame their societies’ relationships through the lens of class solidarity that went beyond a hegemonic impulse emanating from the former colonial metropole.

Revolutionary Visions of Mexico during the Spanish Civil War

With the exception of diplomats and the approximately 330 volunteers that participated in the Civil War, few in Spain had the opportunity to interact with Mexicans in person.¹⁹ Yet even in remote sectors of Spanish society, the solidarity between Mexico and Republican Spain was well known. Octavio Paz, one of Mexico’s most popular and controversial literary figures, fondly recalled

¹⁷ Confidential report, Denegri to Eduardo Hay (March 17, 1937), published in Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, *México y España: Solidaridad y asilo político, 1936-1942* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1990), 109.

¹⁸ Sebastiaan Faber, “Contradictions of Left-Wing *hispanismo*: The Case of Spanish Republicans in Exile,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 165-185.

¹⁹ Michael W. Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 77-78.

Spanish campesinos' warmth and fraternity during his visit to rural Valencia in 1937 when the air was air raided by Nationalist forces. Upon realizing that Paz was Mexican, local campesinos, he noted, "went back to their houses in the middle of the bombardment to look for food, and brought us a little bread, a melon, cheese, and wine." "Eating with those peasants during a bombardment," Paz later recalled, "that's something that I cannot forget."²⁰ Although Paz does not clarify how the campesinos learned of Mexico's affinities to the Spanish Revolution, the widespread dissemination of radical literature on the Mexican Revolution is a likely source. In anarchist strongholds such as Valencia, rationalist schools provided spaces in which local children and adults could learn how to read and write while being exposed to radical literature.²¹ Along with politicizing the rural and urban working class, these alternative education spaces exposed communities to the history of the Mexican Revolution as well as radical reinterpretations of Spain's relationship with Mexican society.

Spanish revolutionary factions also praised Mexico for its ongoing support of anti-fascist movements in Spain. At mass rallies in the anarchist strongholds of Aragón, Cataluña, and Valencia, revolutionaries regularly articulated their admiration for Mexico through discourses on internationalism and anti-colonialism. Just as anarchists joined the republican coalitional government in an effort to ensure a collective victory against the encroachment of fascism, groups such as the CNT and FAI praised what, from afar, seemed to be the Mexican state's dedication to worker-led social revolutions. During one tribute organized by the Amigos de México association in Valencia, anarchist and socialist labor confederations adorned the Teatro Principal with banners of praise for

²⁰ Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 108-109.

²¹ Numerous Spanish exiles of various political backgrounds recalled their politicization coming from their exposure to rationalist schools and radical literature. See: Interview with Arturo García Igual, conducted by Marisol Alonso (1981), Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia – Dirección de Estudios Históricos (hereafter INAH-DEH), PHO/10/027, 8-9; Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 21. For more on anarchist and literacy in Spain, see: Martha A. Ackelsberg, "It Takes More than A Village!: Transnational Travels of Spanish Anarchism in Argentina and Cuba," *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 29, no. 3 (2016): 207-208.

Mexico along with their respective flags. The event began with a representative of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica singing the Hymn of the Mexican Republic, further demonstrating the unique affinity that the anti-authoritarian organization expressed toward the Mexican state and Lázaro Cárdenas. Anarchists' affection toward a sitting head of state, although seemingly paradoxical, signified a deeper recognition among many Spaniards that Cárdenas openly advocated the expansion of radical social and economic reforms both in Mexico and throughout the world.

Public events such as the one organized by the Amigos de México also provided spaces for which Spanish workers and campesinos could articulate their own notions of internationalist solidarity with the Mexican working class. At the event in Valencia, a Spanish campesino by the name of J. Giménez Igualada spoke on the brotherhood between Mexicans and Spaniards. He emphasized that the bonds between the two countries' laboring masses were not only forged by blood, "but through ties between those who seek to love [each other] across borders."²² Giménez also underscored the two nation's respective revolutions as a form of popular reconciliation over the historical trauma of colonialism: "From the fanatic and conquering Spain, Mexico has a sad memory which must be forgotten. The Spanish worker was not responsible for the blunders committed by their infamous leaders during these shameful times in the history of the proletariat." Instead, Giménez encouraged Spaniards to emulate those that resisted foreign subjugation. His speech praised the resistance of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc, various Mexican independence leaders, and most specifically, the Spanish guerrilla leader Francisco Javier Mina, "who after fighting against the Napoleonic invasion in Spain went to Mexico and gave his life for the freedom of that oppressed people." Giménez concluded his speech by affirming Spain's commitment to building future bonds to Mexico that rejected the errors of their compatriots during colonial rule. "Spain has

²² "Un cariñoso acto de fraternidad a Méjico," *Nuevo Aragón*, April 16, 1937.

a debt to Mexico, a debt of blood. The blood of their children that was spilt by vandalic adventurers[.] Friends, brothers of Mexico, we must all be Spaniards who fight against imperialist barbarism and ancestral nepotism.”²³

Delegates and participants made similar statements during the Council of Aragón’s 1937 May Day celebrations dedicated to the Mexican people. Catalan and Aragonese newspapers of all political banners promoted the festivities conducted in the city of Caspe.²⁴ The celebration of Revolutionary Mexico, the first of its kind in Spain, came to fruition through the efforts of the Aragón Regional Defense Council. Although the anarcho-syndicalist CNT dominated much of eastern Aragón, communist and socialist factions joined in the festivities to praise one of Spain’s most trusted foreign allies. Various battalions from nearby fronts joined the marching processions to celebrate the Mexican delegation’s arrival. Morale remained high among the city’s population, despite an early morning aerial bombardment on the city by Nationalist forces. Upon receiving a combat flag from the leftist youth Komosol battalion, the Mexican delegation spoke to thousands of onlookers as Mexican flags draped many of the city’s balconies.²⁵ Each member of the Mexican delegation spoke to the crowd, while different representatives of the Popular Front expressed their gratitude for Mexico’s ongoing support throughout the war. After a PCE representative led a cry of “Viva Méjico!” with the audience, Mexican Colonel Roberto Calvo Ramírez gave a speech written on behalf of the absent Mexican Ambassador Denegri. The speech applauded the Spanish proletariat’s historical ties to Mexico, proclaiming that Mexico’s revolutionary consciousness was a

²³ “Asociación de ‘Amigos de Méjico,’” *Nuevo Aragón*, April 16, 1937.

²⁴ “Primer homenaje al glorioso pueblo mejicano,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 5, 1937.

²⁵ The Mexican delegation in Aragón included the poet and embassy representative Jesús Sansón Flores, Colonel Roberto Calvo Ramírez of the Mexican Army, Susana Gamboa on behalf of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR), and student representative of the Juventudes Mexicanas (Mexican Youth) and journalist, Ernesto Madero Vázquez.

result of the international solidarity of the working class and because, as Calvo claimed, Mexicans had “drops of [Spanish] blood” and that “[the Mexican] race has the spirit of your race.”²⁶ Calvo described the two countries’ histories as following a collective trajectory borne out of the violence of colonialism but vindicated by moments in history when Spaniards aided Mexico’s quest for self-determination. He continued, “[Although] yesterday the conquistadors and *encomenderos* of Spain brought us chains, slavery, and inquisitions, they also mixed their blood with Indian blood,” citing the first mestizo child born to Hernán Cortés and his Indigenous translator, Malintzin. “Now, Mexico returns rifles, solidarity, and aid so that you can keep fighting for your liberty and prosperity.” Calvo continued by describing Mexicans’ support for the Spanish commoner classes that historically fought against various “foreign” threats:

Mexico returns blood, love, hope, and labor for Spain. Not for the Spain of chains and slavery, but for the Spain that fights, works, and thinks. Not for the Spain of the Austrians or the Bourbons that were never from Spain, but for those who were immortalized in Lepanto and Sagunto, and today in Guernica and Durango. The Spain of the historic *comuneros* of Castile, who in 1520 and 1521 fought and died to conserve the *fueros* and freedoms of the municipalities against the imperial oppression of Carlos V. For the Spain of the Second of May, the glorious date on which initiated the uprising of Madrid and the war of Independence against the Napoleonic invasion. And above all, comrades of Aragón, Mexico is [for] the Spain of this Popular Front, that is writing their magnificent epic with their blood...²⁷

²⁶ “El homenaje a Méjico, celebrado ayer es la demostración más elocuente del antifascista aragonés,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 2, 1937.

²⁷ “El homenaje a Méjico, celebrado ayer es la demostración más elocuente del antifascista aragonés,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 2, 1937.



Figure 7: (Left) Cover of *ABC: Diario Republicano de Izquierdas* (May 14, 1937), May Day commemoration to Mexico in Aragón. (Right) Jesús Sansón Flores of the Mexican delegation to Aragón, giving the Spanish republican salute to marching troops on May Day 1937.²⁸



El coronel mejicano Calvo Ramírez, pronunciando un bello discurso en el acto de entrega de la bandera al batallón "Komsomol"

En la plaza de la República, ante el pueblo de Caspe en masa y de los asistentes al homenaje, los manos entonan las cadentes y viriles jotas de Aragón

Figure 8: (Left) Mexican Coronel Calvo Ramírez receiving the banner of the “Komsomol” Battalion in Aragón. (Right) Photo of May Day celebration in the Plaza de la República in Caspe.²⁹

Spanish anarchists also assessed the two countries’ ties to their shared history of economic exploitation. In January 1938, the CNT’s former minister under the Caballero government Joan

²⁸ *ABC: Diario Republicano de Izquierdas* (Madrid), May 14, 1937; “Del homenaje de Aragón,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 5, 1937.

²⁹ “Del homenaje de Aragón a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 4, 1937; “Del homenaje de Aragón a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, 4 May 1937.

Peiró published an article praising the radical agrarian reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas and their historical significance to the Spanish people. “In Mexico, as in Spain, the landowner is the slave master. The priest, arm-in-arm with the landowner, blessed the exploitation that condemned the Indians.” To Peiró and many Spanish anarchists, colonial oppression was simply a different iteration of the same class exploitation experienced by Spain’s laboring classes:

[For Spanish colonizers,] Mexico had to resemble its adoptive mother in every way. The bandit adventurers that conquered Spain left a moral and political heritage. For centuries, they chained the people to the spiritual, economic, political, and social slavery, as is sung about in muted songs throughout Castile, Extremadura, and Andalucía.³⁰

The bipartisan May Day celebration in Aragón proved short lived, since the *homenaje* to Mexico commenced just days before one of the most critical moments of the Civil War and Mexican-Spanish relations. Throughout early 1937, tensions between revolutionary and government factions in Spain increasingly polarized the already tenuous ties within the Popular Front. With food scarcity and unemployment ravaging Loyalist holdouts, violent skirmishes broke out between revolutionary factions and pro-government republican and regionalist parties that comprised the Generalitat de Catalunya. By May 3, 1937, seething hostilities exploded throughout Barcelona after the Generalitat’s security forces attempted to overtake the central telephone exchange occupied by anarchist militias, leading to deadly clashes between revolutionaries and government forces. The subsequent removal of Caballero as prime minister and the ascension of PSOE moderate Juan Negrín, socialist and communist factions made a pact to actively thwart the social revolutionary experiments organized by anarchist and anti-Stalinist groups throughout the country. In response to what became known as the Barcelona May Days, Negrín ousted the CNT government representatives from their ministerial positions, and the anti-Stalinist POUM was outlawed.³¹

³⁰ Joan Peiró, “Cárdenas,” *Mi Revista* (Barcelona), January 1, 1938.

³¹ For a comprehensive and even-handed assessment of the Barcelona May Days, see: Helen

Relations between Mexico and Republican Spain deteriorated at this time due to the Cárdenas government's decision to grant anti-Stalinist revolutionary Leon Trotsky political asylum.³² Trotsky's criticism of the Comintern's actions in Spain only further aggravated the situation. Likewise, the Partido Comunista de España accused Trotsky and his supporters of collaborating with the Nationalists and their fascist allies. While neither the Negrín government nor its Soviet backers were in a position to refuse Mexican diplomatic support, they did seek to counteract Mexico's influence by keeping its representatives at arms-length for the rest of the war. Tensions between the Republican government and Mexico only thawed upon the announcement of Cárdenas's refugee initiative in April 1938. However, the breakdown between the Republican government and Mexican Embassy inspired new collaborations within the revolutionary elements in Spain excluded by the change in international diplomatic relations. These bonds, however, were not forged without challenges. The contentious and deeply sectarian nature of the Spanish Civil War created uncertainty among revolutionary factions regarding the intentions of both their allies and foes.

Spanish Anarchists and the Mexican Embassy

The hostile political atmosphere not only affected the Popular Front, but also seeped into the CNT's diplomatic affairs with Mexico. While anarchists' and Mexican diplomats' mutual support for one another's broader political objectives fortified their relations, the personal behavior of some diplomats posed some initial obstacles to the groups' official relations. CNT leaders' private correspondence with diplomats at the Mexican embassy as well as with the Mexican government

Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 254-315.

³² Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 94-95.

demonstrates the many measures that anarchists took to sustain ties with the Cárdenas government. Shortly after the Republican government relocated from Madrid to Valencia, the CNT offered to house the Mexican Embassy on a property expropriated by anarchist militias, which had since been turned into the headquarters of the CNT, the FAI, and the Juventudes Libertarias. Yet before the organizations could finish moving their offices to make room for the diplomats, the Embassy posted armed Mexican guards around the facility. Ambassador Ramón P. Denegri, a close ally of Cárdenas and one of the proponents of Mexico's agrarian and labor law reforms, had developed a scandalous reputation during his six-month tenure.³³ In particular, he became well known for extorting asylum-seekers with Nationalist sympathies, as they asked for asylum at the Mexican Embassy. His treatment of alleged Francoist sympathizers did not cause waves among the anarchists, but his brash behavior—including coming to official events heavily armed with bodyguards—certainly caused concern. The guards' presence exasperated CNT members, and after three weeks, its national secretary Mariano Vázquez asked the Mexican Embassy to remove the guards within 24 hours. Vázquez had desperately hoped to avoid such a confrontation with one of the confederation's most trusted foreign allies.³⁴ Although there is no record of the Embassy's response, the CNT resumed correspondence with Denegri shortly after the incident, suggesting that the issue had been informally resolved.

Anarchists even defended the Mexican ambassadors after they were accused of collaborating with fascist governments. Between December 1937 and July 1938, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica

³³ Although the reasons for Denegri's short tenure as Mexico Ambassador to Spain are unknown, Mario Ojeda Revah suggests that he was likely removed due to his extortion and mistreatment of political asylum-seekers. This included an incident in March 1937 when he allowed a mob of discontented workers to forcefully remove four military officers that attempted to flee onboard a vessel of asylum-seekers. By August 1937, Denegri was recalled as ambassador and the embassy's *chargé d'affaires* General Leobardo Ruiz shortly took over the roll until a formal replacement could take his place. Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 90-93.

³⁴ Mariano Vázquez to the Ambassador of Mexico in Spain (March 30, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

launched an investigation regarding allegations made to the Mexican Senate regarding the country's two previous ambassadors to Spain, General Manuel Pérez Treviño, Ramón P. Denegri, as well as Denegri's secretary Jesús Sansón Flores. While these accusations were certainly concerning, the FAI took an impartial position due to the known political affinities of all the accused. Denegri supported Mexico's decision to provide Leon Trotsky asylum and would later befriend the anti-Stalinist revolutionary Victor Serge upon returning to Mexico.³⁵ Sansón, a fierce advocate of the revolutionary factions throughout Spain, also seemed to be an unlikely suspect to betray his Spanish comrades. Perhaps most egregious were the allegations made against Adalberto Tejeda, given his well-known support for radical political reforms and revolutionary groups during his time as governor of Veracruz and as the Mexican ambassador to France.³⁶ The accusers, Rafael García Travesí and Ignacio D. Silvia, claimed Denegri and Sansón Flores provided fascist sympathizers with visas to obtain refuge in Mexico. According to Travesí and Silvia, Tejeda—then about to serve as ambassador to Spain—was a Nazi sympathizer who wanted to organize a fascist takeover during the forthcoming presidential elections in 1940.³⁷ The claims also made headlines in Mexico as former delegates in Paris accused Tejeda and his secretary in France Manuel Escudero of using the Spanish

³⁵ Burnett Bolleton, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 203; Victor Serge, *Notebooks, 1936-1937* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2019), 143-144.

³⁶ Romana Falcón, Soledad García, and María Eugenia Terrones, *La semilla en el surco. Adalberto Tejeda y el radicalism en Veracruz, 1883-1960* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1986), 373-376; 383-384; Serafín Maldonado Aguirre, *De Tejeda a Cárdenas: El movimiento agrarista en la revolución mexicana, 1920-1934* (Guadalajara: Editorial Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992); Eitan Ginzberg, *Revolutionary Ideology and Political Destiny in Mexico, 1928-1934: Lázaro Cárdenas and Adalberto Tejeda* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

³⁷ Rafael García Travesí and Ignacio D. Silva to the FAI Sección Nacional de Coordinación, Servicio de Información Exterior (December 27, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4; Francisco Olaya Morales, *El oro de Negrín* (Móstoles, Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990), 76.

republican government's funds to purchase weapons from German businesses.³⁸

The FAI, while taking the allegations seriously, also acknowledged the possibility that the entire scheme could have been misinformation spread by Stalinist sympathizers in Spain and Mexico to discredit the Cárdenas government's diplomatic representatives in Spain. They also figured that it could have been Stalinists' retaliatory response to the president granting Trotsky asylum.³⁹ In February 1938, Mexico's Barcelona consulate forced the writer Blanca Lydia Trejo to return to Mexico in an effort to appease José Mancisidor, a vocal proponent of the Soviet Union and future head of one of the refugee relief organizations. The consulate also sent away other Mexican communists that accused Trejo of selling Mexican passports to alleged fascists. The accusations emerged after Trejo claimed that Spanish communist leaders were taking part in food pricing speculation.⁴⁰ Although neither Mexican and Spanish national archives, nor the FAI's internal records, make any mention of a verdict on the episode, the matter was seemingly resolved. It is possible that the FAI got word that Tejeda and other diplomats were purchasing weapons from European sellers, including some in Nazi Germany, under the premise that they were for Mexico while they were secretly shipped to assist Loyalist troops in Spain.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the FAI dropped the investigation, and relations between the organization and the Mexican embassy continued on without issue. In September 1938, Tejeda invited the FAI's representative, Federica Montseny, to participate in a commemoration lunch celebrating Mexico's 128th anniversary of Independence from

³⁸ FAI Sección Nacional de Coordinación, Servicio de Información Exterior. "Tejeda es publicamente acusado por su ex-lugarteniente Guzman de la revista gráfica 'Hoy' de Méjico," (no date), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4.

³⁹ Sección Nacional de Coordinación. Servicio de Información Exterior (July 28, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 4/17.

⁴⁰ Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 109.

⁴¹ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 130.

Spain.⁴²

The arrival of Ramón Denegri's successor, Adalberto Tejeda, further solidified anarchists' ties to the Embassy. Upon arriving in Spain in March 1938, Tejeda wasted no time courting Spanish anarchists. On April 27, 1938, CNT representatives took Tejeda on a tour of the newly established Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología "Luisa Michel" ("Louise Michel" Institute of Maternal and Child Care) in Barcelona, a childcare and maternity ward housing with 125 beds. Founded by the Mujeres Libres and local health care unions, the Institute enacted a city-wide health care initiative to provide basic services to Barcelona's working class.⁴³ Tejeda's ties to the Institute continued well beyond his visit. In October 1938, the ambassador relayed a message from Juan Paulís, the director of the Institute, to President Lázaro Cárdenas requesting the Mexican government to establish a new asylum expedition to protect the facility's staff and the children under their care. To fund the endeavor, Paulís proposed that the Spanish Republican government establish a national subscription initiative to ensure that the children received ample food and resources while living in Mexico. Although the expedition request and subscription initiative never came to fruition, Cárdenas notified his representatives to send food rations to the facility to alleviate some of the Institute's burdens.⁴⁴ Tejeda also visited CNT-controlled spaces on a regular basis. A month after visiting the health institute, Tejeda, his daughter María Elisa Tejeda, and other Mexican officials visited collectivized farms controlled by the CNT to study their advances in communalized agricultural production. The campesinos were obliged to show their Mexican guests that, since the outbreak of the Revolution,

⁴² Adalberto Tejeda to the President of the National Committee of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (September 14, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4; Germinal de Sousa to Adalberto Tejeda (September 16, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4.

⁴³ Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 164-165.

⁴⁴ Letter from Tejeda to Cárdenas (October 5, 1938), Archivo General de la Nación – Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (hereafter AGN-LCR), Caja 939, Expediente 550/84; Letter from Lic. Godofredo F. Beltrán to Tejeda (November 1, 1938), AGN-LCR, Caja 939, Expediente 550/84.

over 2,000 hectares of irrigable land had been seized and fieldworkers' salaries went from 10 pesetas a day to 150 pesetas per week. An ardent proponent of radical agrarian initiatives, Tejada applauded the campesinos in their endeavors.⁴⁵



Figure 9: Adalberto Tejada visiting the Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología “Luisa Michel” (“Louise Michel” Institute of Maternal and Child Care) in Barcelona (April 27, 1938).⁴⁶

Just three months before Franco’s forces captured Barcelona, the local branch of the Amigos de México hosted a week-long celebration in October 1938 to commemorate Mexico’s successful struggle for independence against Spain as well as the celebration of Día de la Raza on October 12th. As seen throughout the Civil War, Spaniards flocked to celebrate what would become one of the last major celebrations of the Republic’s existence. The Amigos de México, largely consisting of various union locals affiliated with the CNT, hosted multiple rallies and commemorations to mark the occasion, including a speech made by María Elisa Tejada on behalf of all Mexican women and their solidarity with the Spaniards’ social revolution. Residents of Barcelona were undeterred by persistent aerial bombardments and attended the week-long events in droves.

Like other anarchist commemorations of Mexico, the weeklong program highlighted the

⁴⁵ “Vista del embajador de Méjico y del delegado extraordinario de aquel gobierno, señor Aguilar, a las colectividades de campesinos de Barcelona,” *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), May 14, 1938.

⁴⁶ “Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología Louise Michel. Visita del embajador de Méjico, 1938” (Barcelona), April 27, 1938, IISH-CNT Photo Collection, 5331, 5337.

deep bonds between Mexico and Spanish republicans. In its declaration “to the people of Barcelona,” the organization emphasized the two countries’ fraternal relationship through the struggle for social revolution and against fascism. It further suggested that Mexico and Spain were composed of “two peoples of the same strong and heroic race, [one] that knows struggle against adversity and always vanquishes its tyrants and its enemies that have tried to impede its progress towards liberty and justice.” The brochure went on to claim that the two nations would never succumb to fascism “because their children carry Hispanic blood in their veins.”⁴⁷ The festivities ended with an homage to Ambassador Tejeda on behalf of children from the Colonia “México” of Barcelona. Like the CNT’s many declarations, such public celebrations of Mexico and its Independence struggle against Spain further emphasized an anti-colonial vision of future relations between the two countries. Just a few months after the event, some of the attendees found themselves seeking asylum in the sister nation whose independence they had celebrated.



Figure 10: Cover art and program for “Semana de México” festivities (October 1938).⁴⁸

The rapport between Spanish anarchists and Mexican diplomats greatly contrasted with the interactions between libertarian organizations and other foreign supporters, even those who shared

⁴⁷ “Semana de México,” IISH-CNT, 62C+D.

⁴⁸ “Semana de México,” (October 9-16, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C; “Programa de la Semana de México. Gran Festival Infantil” (October 9, 1938).

their anarchist ideology. As Morris Brodie demonstrates in his study of transnational anarchist networks during the Spanish Civil War, conflicts between Spaniards and foreign anarchist volunteers—namely those from Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States—were usually rooted in debates regarding race and nationalism.⁴⁹ In part, these disagreements came out of Spaniards' sense that anarchists from industrialized nations should and could do more to galvanize arms and volunteers or, at the very least, to mobilize their nation's labor movements to apply pressure on their respective governments to end their support for non-intervention. However, the Spanish anarchists' criticisms also indicate their misinterpretation of the scale of their comrades' influence within these countries. By the late 1930s, the anarchist movements in Germany, the U.S., Great Britain, and Ireland paled in comparison to the Comintern's influence among these nations' working-class and labor movements. Although Western countries contributed a large number of the foreign participants of the International Brigades, for anarchists, pressuring their home governments to provide more resources for Spain would have been a daunting task.⁵⁰

Spanish Anarchists in Mexico, 1936-1939

As Spanish anarchists forged relations with Mexico diplomats, the CNT looked to the Americas to garner support for the Spanish Revolution. Both the CNT and the FAI utilized official and popular channels to galvanize support abroad, unlike other Spanish political parties and labor organizations. Interestingly, anarchist groups' decision to establish a propaganda office in Mexico was not the most obvious choice. Whereas other Latin American nations and the United States maintained Spanish immigrant populations that expressed their sympathies with the Popular Front government, Mexico's Spanish colony had the most fervent proponents of the Franco uprising.

⁴⁹ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-116.

What the country lacked in a sympathetic immigrant base it made up for in its government's strong support for the Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Revolution. This was in part due to the anarchists' decision to join the Caballero government in November 1936, which validated the libertarian movement in the eyes of the international Left, particularly among groups outside of the direct control of the Communist International.⁵¹

Although Cárdenas's reforms seemed favorable from afar, Mexico's radical political culture had changed dramatically since the early years of the Mexican Revolution. With the exception of some veterans of the earlier Mexican anarchist movement who remained active in the transnational distribution of radical literature, the country's labor movement had been largely subsumed by state-supported labor entities such as such as the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁵² This was in part a result of years of state repression and deportation of Spanish organizers, but also due to the growing allure of communism following the success of the Russian Revolution. Nonetheless, the outbreak of revolution in Spain provided a new opportunity for revolutionary militants to throw their weight to the support of a genuine popular uprising which in turn could unite the fractured international anarchist movement. It was within this context that Spanish anarchist groups conceptualized a new propaganda campaign that provided both financial

⁵¹ The Partido Comunista Mexicano, for instance, spoke favorably of the CNT in its newspapers *El Machete* and *La Voz de México*, despite the party's longstanding animosity toward anarchists and Trotskyists. While the POUM was regularly heralded as a fifth column entity in support of Franco and his fascist allies, the CNT's incorporation into the Cabellero government was heralded as a necessary step toward a unified anti-fascist front.

⁵² For more on transnational anarchist literary networks, see: Aurora Mónica Alcayaga Sasso, "Librado Rivera y los Hermanos Rojos en el movimiento social y cultural anarquista en Villa Cecilia y Tampico, Tamaulipas, 1915-1931" (Ph.D. Diss, Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006); Jorell A. Meléndez-Badillo, "The Anarchist Imaginary: Max Nettlau and Latin America, 1890-1934," in *Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States*, eds. Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 175-193. Myrna I. Santiago's study of the shifting political climate of the petroleum labor movement provides an excellent assessment of the changing of ideological tendencies in 1920s and 1930s Mexico. See: Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

and moral backing for their cause against both fascism and the state.

On August 22, 1936, over 500 left-wing Spanish immigrants living in Mexico convened to establish the Frente Popular Español de México in an effort to raise funds and to encourage their compatriots.⁵³ One of the attendees, José Antonio Ariás, a thirty-four-year-old industrial worker living in Mexico City, soon after wrote to the CNT and the FAI to offer his service as an anarchist representative for the Frente Popular Español de México. Although Ariás had been in Mexico since 1918, he remained an avid reader of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT's newspaper and followed the anarchist movement's development. The outbreak of the Civil War and subsequent revolution motivated Ariás to officially join the two groups and to dedicate his energies to countering the growing influence of pro-Franco propaganda in his adopted country.⁵⁴ A month after Ariás wrote to the organizations, the newly appointed Minister of Health and Social Assistance and CNT/FAI leader Federica Montseny responded to him with encouragement, but the Minister also noted that membership in the FAI was reserved to militants living in the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding, Montseny encouraged Ariás to seek out likeminded individuals in Mexico to help establish an anarchist federation, which could then collaborate directly with the FAI by way of the Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores (International Workers' Association, AIT).⁵⁶ As an anarchist alternative to the Comintern, the AIT was particularly prominent in Europe and South America but

⁵³ Matesanz, *Los raíces del exilio*, 90.

⁵⁴ José Antonio Ariás to the FAI (September 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16; Federica Montseny to Ariás (October 2, 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁵⁵ In July 1938, the FAI's Secretary of Foreign Relations Jacobo Prince similarly notified Domingo Rivas of the Legión Cultura Contra el Fascismo en el Estado de México that the group could not become members of the FAI due to the specific Iberian focus of the organization. Prince did, however, welcome the organization to reproduce articles from the FAI's newspaper *Tierra y Libertad* in Mexico and encouraged the group to notify the Spaniards of any political developments in Mexico. See: Domingo Rivas to the Directive Committee of the FAI, IISH-FAI, CP 58.16, 13; Jacobo Prince to Domingo Rivas (July 26, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁵⁶ Federica Montseny to Ariás (October 2, 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

lacked representation in Mexico and Central America. The Mexican anarchist movement of the era was composed only of a small assemblage of groups and educational centers throughout the country, and the prospect of a new libertarian federation raised the interest of the remaining anarchist militants.⁵⁷ In turn, the prospect of an allied organization in the AIT proved enticing for the leadership CNT and FAI following a series of clashes with other organizational affiliates from Europe, Chile, and the United States.⁵⁸ The Mexican state's aid for revolutionary factions in Spain as well as the country's longstanding anarchist tradition made it a logical place to build a propaganda apparatus.

Differing from the FAI's strict membership rules, the CNT welcomed the membership of Spaniards abroad and utilized these ties to develop a North American speaking tour to galvanize popular support for the antifascist cause in Spain. One such individual was Manuel Berrondo Martínez. A Barcelona native, Berrondo had moved to Mexico City in 1931 at the age of twenty-four but maintained relations with the CNT. Berrondo's experience living in Mexico made him a viable candidate to conduct the CNT's efforts to galvanize popular support for the Spanish war effort. Soon after the initiation of the campaign, Berrondo sent word back to the confederation's Office of Information and Propaganda with an assessment of the political climate in Mexico. Berrondo was struck by the sympathetic coverage of the Francoist military uprising in the Mexican national press, saving the few prominent left-wing newspapers with ties to Cárdenas's ruling-party. His view of the Spanish immigrant community in Mexico was just as bleak as his assessment of the Spanish

⁵⁷ In January 1937, Efrén Castrejón of the Centro Racionalista "Tierra y Libertad" wrote to the FAI to receive additional information on a proposed International Anarchist Congress to be held in Madrid. He requested that the Center's representatives serve as Mexican delegates and wished to reach out to other anarchist groups throughout Mexico and Central America that would also be interested in attending the meeting. See: Efrén Castrejón to the FAI (January 25, 1937), IISH-FAI, 58.16.

⁵⁸ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 97-127.

republican cause: 90% of the Spaniards in Mexico supported the Nationalists.⁵⁹ With little help from the Spanish consulate in Mexico, Berrondo proposed to his compatriots to look to the United States instead, pointing out that the only pro-revolutionary elements in Mexico were those in the Cárdenas government.⁶⁰ Like many anarcho-syndicalists of the era, Berrondo saw U.S. society's rampant industrial economy as a more suitable space to mobilize aid for the worker's revolution in Spain. What is more, Berrondo bemoaned the fact that Mexico's laboring classes were comprised of predominantly Indigenous people whose "passive character" limited their productivity and lack of class consciousness.⁶¹

Notwithstanding Berrondo's observations, the CNT's Office of Information and Propaganda insisted on the initial plan to establish a new anti-fascist committee in Mexico. The CNT suggested that it should be comprised of officials close to the Cárdenas government, delegates from the Mexican and Spanish Popular Fronts, prominent Mexican labor unions, the CNT, and the AIT—the latter two representing Spain.⁶² Berrondo had some initial reservations but eventually saw the plausibility of such a coalition. In May 1937, José Antonio Ariás notified the FAI that the Frente Popular Español in Mexico had coordinated a dozen screenings of the film *España en llamas* (*Spain in Flames*) and collected the equivalent of 125,000 francs through the Comité Pro-Ayuda al Niño Español to purchase clothes for children affected by the war. Moreover, Ariás mentioned that the

⁵⁹ Cablegram from Manuel Berrondo to Nemesio Galvez (May 13, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C; José Antonio Ariás of the Frente Popular Español in Mexico came to a similar assessment of the Spanish colony in Mexico, noting in a letter to the FAI that 90% of Spanish immigrants in Mexico were Francoist sympathizers. See: José Antonio Ariás to FAI (May 17, 1937), IISH-FAI, 58.16.

⁶⁰ Cablegrams, Manuel Berrondo to Nemesio Galvez (May 13, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C; For more on Spanish anarchist activities in the United States during and after the Civil War, see: Michael Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution: Transnational Networks and the U.S. Circulation of Anarchist Propaganda during the Spanish Civil War," in *Writing Revolution*, 227-244; Montse Feu, *Fighting Fascist Spain: Worker Protest from the Printing Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Frente also supported funding the creation of a newspaper entitled *Regeneración*, named after the periodical established by Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. The paper would give updates on the war effort in Spain as well as promoting anarchist ideas to a Mexican audience. Through the paper's dissemination, Ariás and Berrondo hoped to solidify ties with anarchist groups throughout the country in the effort to organize a nation-wide Federación Anarquista Mexicano (Mexican Anarchist Federation).⁶³

Race and Racism among Spanish Anarchists

Ariás's optimism abated when he and his compatriots saw few developments after two months. In July of that year, Manuel Berrondo wrote to CNT national secretary Mariano Vázquez requesting \$1,000 to return to Europe, declaring the propaganda campaign an utter disaster. He notified Vázquez that although the Frente Popular Español in Mexico organized a meeting to discuss creating the Asociación Antifascista de México (Antifascist Association of Mexico), Vicente Lombardo Toledano—the head of the CTM and the individual who initially called for the meeting to take place—did not show up due to an ongoing dispute with representatives from other labor unions.⁶⁴ Interpersonal conflicts also derailed the Federación Anarquista del Distrito Federal, the organization that was to serve as the basis for a broader nationwide anarchist federation. Berrondo believed that the lack of funds from the CNT worsened the waning support demonstrated by the Mexican labor movement and the struggling newspaper *Regeneración*. Despite all his efforts, Berrondo felt that the CNT leadership had abandoned him after it ignored his reports for two months. An

⁶³ José Antonio Ariás to the FAI (May 17, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁶⁴ Established in February 1936, the CTM was marred by internal infighting between different labor leaders, as well as an ongoing struggle to maintain organizational autonomy from the Partido Comunista Mexicano. See: Daniela Spenser, *In Combat: The Life of Lombardo Toledano* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020), 107-130.

additional problem, Berrondo sarcastically noted, was that “the President of the Republic [Lázaro Cárdenas] is [seen as] the greatest anarchist in the country” and therefore impervious to criticism by the Mexican Left. The cult of personality surrounding Cárdenas made any criticism or scrutiny of his policies virtually useless, especially for foreign radicals who functioned outside of most of the administration’s apparatuses of popular support, such as the CTM. “You will understand that our ideology cannot achieve consistency in a country where not even the President can manage to form agrarian collectives, where the workers won’t stop killing each other rather than fighting against the capitalist, and where the [labor] leaders—all of whom are lawyers—exploit the bosses and the workers through the Board of Reconciliation and Arbitration.”⁶⁵

Berrondo’s assessment highlighted both the complexities of the Mexican political sphere under Cárdenas and his own prejudices toward Mexican people. On the one hand, Berrondo attributed the paternalistic relationships between Cárdenas, labor leaders such as Lombardo Toledano, and the country’s laboring masses to byproducts of the government’s corporatist incorporation of popular movements. Indeed, the 1931 decision to make the state the primary arbitrator in labor disputes disproportionately favored state-backed labor confederations to the detriment of anarchist-leaning labor organizations such as the Confederación General de Trabajadores.⁶⁶

On the other hand, Berrondo’s critical judgement of the racial makeup of Mexican society also informed his pessimistic views regarding the revolutionary potential of the country’s working class and peasantry. In a letter to the CNT national committee, he opposed making Mexico the

⁶⁵ Berrondo to Bernardo Pou (July 10, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁶⁶ Jorge Basurto, *El proletariado industrial en México, 1850-1930* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975), 247; John Mason Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 172-173; Jeffrey Bortz, “The Genesis of Mexican Labor Relations: federal Labor Policy and the Textile Industry,” *The Americas* 51, no. 1 (1995): 44.

primary site of propaganda dissemination in the Americas. From Berrondo's perspective, the workers' general lack of interest in anarchist organizing was compounded by another problem: the country's largely Indigenous population, which he felt lacked the "mental capacity" to formulate proletarian ideals, and that, "the historical process of the Indian race will likely lead to its disappearance." Taking much the same line as other Mexican politicians of the time, Berrondo characterized indigeneity as a social construction based on the grounds of an inherently flawed ethnic trait. Moreover, his Eurocentric worldview ignored the long legacy of Indigenous-led anarchist movements regularly discussed in the Mexican and Spanish radical presses for much of the 1920s and 1930s. Falsely claiming that no revolutionary movements existed in Mexico, Berrondo suggested that the national committee either relay all propaganda requests from the Americas through the CNT's Paris headquarters or move their operations to the Southern Cone. He reasoned that "the racial mixture of [Argentines and Chileans] are very superior to the Mexican, where the Indigenous masses prevail."⁶⁷ Spaniards were not the only ones to articulate such reductive characterizations. Efrén Castrejón, one of the Mexican editors of the new incarnation of *Regeneración*, similarly claimed that the Mexican people "suffer from tropical indolence and moral-economic insufficiency."⁶⁸

Berrondo's racialist notions of Mexican society also appeared in the political initiatives proposed by the Federación Anarquista Mexicana del Distrito Federal (Mexican Anarchist Federation of the Federal District, FAMDF). The FAMDF was mostly composed of Spanish anarchist immigrants and a handful of veterans of the Mexican Revolution's earlier anarchist movements. Whereas the CNT attempted to build relations to Cárdenas's left-wing bases in Mexico, the FAMDF condemned the government's agrarian initiatives. In a scathing exposé directed to

⁶⁷ Berrondo to Bernardo Pou (10 July 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁶⁸ Efrén Castrejón to Herrera (February 27, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

anarchist organizations through Europe and Latin America, the FAMDF lambasted the effect of the nation's agrarian reform on Indigenous peoples.⁶⁹ In particular, the authors' criticized the creation of the Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal (National Bank of Ejidal Credit), which financially bankrolled economic ventures for newly establish *ejidos*. In their view, the Ejidal Bank propagated the state's corporatist economic policies and deterred the radical distribution of lands. "[...]The [Mexican] campesino, the overwhelming majority of which are Indigenous," the FAMDF claimed, "lacks the calculating and commercial spirit of intensive modern exploitation." Stressing the organization's vision of Indigenous people's inclination toward communist economic practices, it suggested that campesinos naturally "reduce production to their own needs, which are very limited given the cultural backwardness in which they find themselves."⁷⁰ Claims of Indigenous people's proclivity towards communism were neither new nor specific to the Mexican Left. The Peruvian anarchist Manuel González Prada and marxist José Carlos Mariátegui both made similar claims about the Andean region's Indigenous masses and encouraged the idea of building revolutionary movements

⁶⁹ "Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional" (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B. The letter exposé was penned by Efrén Castrejón Marín, the Secretary of the FAMDF; Dantón Canut Martorell, a representative of Spanish teachers affiliated with the Spanish CNT living in Mexico; and Héctor Villegas Cammas, a "commissioned informant" from the Chilean branch of the CGT. Born in 1895 in Churumuco, Michoacán, Castrejón initially joined the *villistas* before later becoming acquainted with the PLM organizer Nicolas T. Bernal and the CGT. Dantón Canut Martorell was born in Valencia in 1907 and became a primary school teacher during the early years of the Second Spanish Republic. In May 1937, Canut moved to Mexico as part of the niños de Morelia expedition. In 1938, he would become a professor at the "Heroes Ferrocarriles" worker's education center of the Universidad Obrera de México. During his time in Mexico, Canut Matorell helped establish and edit the anarchist newspapers *Regeneración* and *Tierra y Libertad*. He eventually went on to establish a children's holiday colony as part of the normal school of Palmira, Morelos. For more information, see: Ulises Ortega Aguilar, "Regeneración y la Federación Anarquista Mexicana" (BA Thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011), 253; *Amistad: Magazine of American Society of Mexico*, Vol 32 (1969): 36; Cristina Escrivá Moscardó, *El internado-Escuela Durruti, 1937-1939* (Valencia: L'Eixam, 2011).

⁷⁰ "Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional" (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B.

based on these communistic practices.⁷¹ Much like the Peruvian left, the FAMDF would accuse the Mexican state's modernization initiatives as exploitative of the country's native populations. Where the group differed from thinkers such as Mariátegui was in their belief that industrialization was necessary for native people to become proletarians.⁷² To the FAMDF, the state's economic industrial modernization initiatives were "backward," as they forced native peoples to adapt to an economic model that was not "natural" to their social and cultural dispositions, seemingly reproducing longstanding racist tropes toward the country's Indigenous population.

The FAMDF's criticism of Mexico's agrarian reform primarily focused on the issue that native peoples were forced to engage with state corporatist entities to achieve land restitution. Following the passing of Mexico's 1934 Agrarian Code, the state required that campesinos petition the National Agrarian Commission for endowments and restitutions of communal lands.⁷³ Such policies sought to institutionalize land expropriation through the government and to deter community-based land seizures as promoted by groups such as the FAMDF. Furthermore, the National Agrarian Commission's practice of relocating *ejidatarios* onto newly assigned lands rather than their ancestral properties dispersed communities onto lands with varying degrees of cultivability. The Commission thus created a new heterogeneous social organization based upon the ejidalization process rather than social, cultural, or economic relations. Agrarian officials also did not seek to transform the countryside through communalization as seen in the Soviet Union, but rather through the establishment of new agricultural economies that encouraged the "economic and moral

⁷¹ Manuel González Prada, *Free Pages and Other Essays: Anarchist Musings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181-194; José Carlos Mariátegui, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, eds. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 137-172.

⁷² Paulo Drinot, *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race, and the Making of the Peruvian State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 46.

⁷³ Manuel Fabila, *Cinco siglos de legislación agraria en México, 1493-1940* (México, D.F.: Los Talleres de Industrial Gráfica, S.A., 1941), 586.

empowerment of the farmworker.”⁷⁴ However, the claims that Indigenous cultural and land practices were inherently communalistic overlooked the complex practice of native property ownership dating back to the colonial era. The FAMDF’s assertion that Indigenous people lacked the social wherewithal to participate in markets also ignored their ongoing engagement with market systems as well as their relationship to *communitarian*, rather than communal, land tenure practices that did not necessarily eschew forms of private property ownership.⁷⁵ In the view of the Mexican and Spanish anarchists of the FAMDF, the government’s agrarian initiatives restricted Indigenous communities from emancipating themselves through communalization. Although the 1934 Agrarian Code tasked the Ejidal Bank’s team of engineers to educate Indigenous communities in cooperative land tenure practices, the high rate of illiteracy within these communities meant that few benefited from such endeavors.⁷⁶ Without the “freedom of action” of native people, the FAMDF warned, the state’s claim of being the vanguard of the Mexican Revolution was largely performative, as it did not protect the country’s Indigenous population from capitalist exploitation.

Despite its criticisms of the state, the FAMDF also acknowledged its own incapacity to foment social revolution. “In general and above all,” the group admitted that it did not hold much sway among the country’s laboring classes. Consisting of a few, self-proclaimed “old school”

⁷⁴ Jesús Méndez Reyes, *Capitalizar el campo. Financiamiento y organización rural en México* (Ciudad de México, El Colegio de México, 2017), 182-183.

⁷⁵ Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Frans J. Schryer, *The Rancheros of Pisaflores: The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Emilio Kourí, *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Gabriela Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories: Mexican Peasants, National Projects, and the Making of the Pill* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Terese Newman, *Biography of a Hacienda: Work and Revolution in Rural Mexico* (University of Arizona Press, 2014); Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, eds. *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 31-106; Helga Baitenmann, *Matters of Justice: Pueblos, the Judiciary, and Agrarian Reform in Revolutionary Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

⁷⁶ Méndez Reyes, *Capitalizar el campo*, 186.

anarchists, the organization was keenly aware of its limitations in providing any serious alternative to the Mexican state's initiatives. While it acknowledged having some popular support in organized labor and rural communities, the contemporary anarchist movement in Mexico by and large existed solely as a pedagogical project based upon news publications.⁷⁷ The FAMDF therefore looked outward in an effort to rekindle Mexico's anarchist tradition. Their letter requested that Spanish and Latin American anarchists, particularly those from Argentina, migrate to Mexico and organize the nation's urban working class and Indigenous peasantry. The group optimistically claimed that in just one to two years' time, the settlement of young revolutionaries would be a surefire way to revitalize Mexico's dormant libertarian movement.⁷⁸ The relocation of South Americans to Mexico was more difficult due to financial constraints and the country's immigration restrictions, however, the state's initiative to provide asylum to Spaniards offered the group a tangible means to rebuild the Mexican anarchist movement with young Spanish militants.

Throughout its existence, the CNT went to great lengths to connect the Spanish proletariat's historical ties to Mexican people of various ethnic backgrounds. Yet its leaders' inconsistent assessments and personal proclivities diverged from this line of practice. More than just overlooking race, their class reductionism created an ideological tension within the anarchist movement. Since the late nineteenth century, Spanish anarchists deviated from orthodox interpretations of proletarianization to include all "disinherited" laborers, including rural workers.⁷⁹ Berrondo's and Castrejón's view that Mexican society lacked the proper social, economic, and political conditions to develop class consciousness is predicated upon the deeply racialized notion that Indigenous peoples

⁷⁷ "Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional" (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁹ Clara E. Lida, *Anarquismo y revolución en la España del XIX* (Madrid: Veintiuno de España Editores, 1972); George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 98-116.

were unable to mobilize for their own emancipation. Similarly, the FAMDF framed the “Indian question” solely based on the paternalistic relationship between campesinos and the Cárdenas government rather than the aspirations and needs of native communities. Much in the same vein as the anarcho-syndicalists of the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker, COM) during the 1910s, Berrondo and Castrejón characterized campesinos as Indigenous, devout Catholics whom the ruling class manipulated through superstitions and “fanaticism.”⁸⁰ These conclusions actively ignored the important contributions of Indigenous people to pressure the state to expand revolutionary reforms.

Berrondo’s generalizations about Mexican people became a contentious point in developing ties to the country’s urban labor movements. In October 1937, the CNT in Spain received word that Berrondo was at the center of a political scandal following a dispute with the editors of the Mexican CGT’s newspaper, *Alba Roja*. Representatives from the CGT reached out to the CNT’s national secretary, Mariano Vázquez, to notify of Berrondo’s article criticizing the Mexican people’s lack of radical consciousness regarding the Mexican state. The *Regeneración* article, which Berrondo alleged would also be published in the CGT’s *Alba Roja* that same day, lambasted Mexicans’ support for leaders tied to the Catholic Church during the War of Independence, suggesting that this act subsequently legitimated the Church despite its role in repressing the nation’s masses.⁸¹ Berrondo’s patronizing tone incensed the editors of *Alba Roja*, who subsequently refused to republish the article. The editors went further, writing a scathing critique of the Spaniard and his radical credentials: “Being the redeemer of the working class is not the same as being a pelota player that gets drunk on champagne in the Basque Center,” the article charged. “It is not for you to judge those who gave us

⁸⁰ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 260-261; Anna Ribera Carbó, *La Casa del Obrero Mundial: Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en México* (México, D.F.: INAH, 2010), 109-115.

⁸¹ “¡Perdoname!...,” *Regeneración: Periódico Libertario* (Mexico City), August 1, 1937.

Independence,” it continued, “they have been priests and anarchists, such as yourself.” The article concluded by noting that since Berrondo’s arrival in the country, the Mexican labor movement had welcomed him and treated him as a respected comrade. “But the hospitality and affection that we offered you does not empower you to judge and insult us as Mexicans. If you do not like how we live in our country, you can go back to Spain and take up arms against Franco rather than insult him from the other side of the ocean.”⁸² Berrondo’s slight reflected similar contentions emerging between Spanish anarchist organizations and the affiliates with of the Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores, which accused the leaders of the CNT and FAI of bullying other member organizations concerning their alleged lack of support for the Spanish Revolution.⁸³ As representatives of one of the only anarchist social revolutions to have successfully maintained control of large swaths of territory, anarchist delegates from Spain regularly chastised their foreign compatriots for their inability to mobilize larger support for their cause. Berrondo’s criticism represented a particularly disrespectful tone toward one of Spain’s few diplomatic allies. In an effort to quell the tension between the two labor groups, Mariano Vázquez requested the CGT to send a comprehensive account of the incident and stressed that the CNT did not and would not tolerate “any immorality or behavior on the part of anyone that represents [the CNT] or its activists.”⁸⁴ Though a seemingly petty war of words played out in two obscure radical newspapers, the incident proved to be a significant hurdle for the propaganda initiative set out by the Spanish anarchist movement.

⁸² “¡Perdonadme Señor Berrondo!” *Alba Roja* (Mexico City), August 31, 1937.

⁸³ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 109-110; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 146-153.

⁸⁴ Mariano Vázquez to the CGT (October 11, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

Conflicts and Reconciliations: Spanish Anarchists and the Mexican Left after May 1937

Berrondo's feud with the CGT soured any interest in the Spanish anarchist movement's propaganda initiative in Mexico and reflected the broader deterioration of the movement on all fronts.⁸⁵ The eroding alliance of the Popular Front in Spain following the aftermath of the Barcelona May Days, the ousting of the CNT from the Negrín coalition government, and the growing influence of the Soviet Union in Spain all contributed to a growing sectarian divide between those wishing to defend Republican Spain's last holdouts and those intent on expanding the revolution throughout the country. These tensions made their way across the Atlantic and fueled the flames ignited by Berrondo's behavior. During an October 1937 commemoration of Mexico's first national labor confederation, the Casa del Obrero Mundial, audience members heckled Berrondo as he gave a lecture on the history of anarchism, eventually chanting "vivas" for the Spanish Popular Front, the Negrín government, and the Communist Party's Catalan affiliate.⁸⁶ Just as political divisions were splintering anti-fascist groups in Spain, the ideological divisions of the conflict had made their way into Mexican politics as well.

As the dispute between Berrondo and the CGT unfolded in Mexico, the CNT and FAI decided to send a delegation to Mexico in an effort to further galvanize support for their cause in Spain. Throughout the month of August 1937, Serafin Aliaga of the CNT, Dr. Felix Marti-Ibañez of the Juventudes Libertarias, and Juan López, the former Minister of Commerce under the Caballero government, comprised a CNT delegation participating in a North American speaking tour, starting with an extensive leg through the United States. By the time the delegation arrived in Mexico in September of 1937, the fallout was too great to ignore. Initial efforts to organize meetings through the CTM went unheeded, with many labor leaders refusing to provide the foreign delegates an

⁸⁵ Berrondo to the FAI (August 28, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁸⁶ "Bodas de plata de la Casa del Obrero Mundial," *El Machete* (Mexico City), August 29, 1937.

opportunity to speak at rallies or conferences.⁸⁷ Despite these setbacks, the group was able to speak at a well-attended rally that the Frente Popular Español de Mexico organized. In an effort to mend relations between the two countries' radical movements, Serafín Aliaga, speaking on behalf of the Juventudes Libertarias de España (Spanish Libertarian Youth, JJLL de España), dedicated his lecture to the two countries' laboring classes' historic exploitation:

Until yesterday, Spain was not ours...it was an industrial colony of the foreigner, a country sunk in the usury of a semi-feudal capitalism, bleeding at the hands of the incompetent bourgeoisie. Today the proletariat knows that the factories are ours. The campesino eagerly defends the [Eastern front] because he knows that the earth is theirs. He says that yesterday's struggle in Mexico to conquer their liberties is today the struggle of the Spanish people. Just as yesterday Mexico did not shed the Spanish spirit, but instead emancipated itself from the feudal castes, just as we cast off the shame of foreign invasion from our soil and fight for our economic and social freedoms.⁸⁸

Juan López followed Aliaga's sentiments by applauding the contributions that Spanish-descended *criollos* played in Mexico's Independence movement:

It is true that colonization brought predatory conquerors and monarchical despotism [to Mexico]. But people of the Spanish race with positive virtues also emigrated to these lands. People with active and entrepreneurial spirits inspired by the French Revolution's principles of liberty. These men that Spain lost, America won.⁸⁹

The presentations caught the attention of the government-friendly newspaper *El Nacional*, and after interviewing the delegates, the paper's correspondents praised the men's representation of the Spanish people. In reports sent to the CNT, López noted that the delegation received a warm reaction from the audience, despite some initial reservations.⁹⁰ An unexpected delay in receiving U.S. visas allowed the delegation to continue their efforts to rebuild ties to the Mexican working class

⁸⁷ Aliaga and López to Galvez (October 3, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁸⁸ "Comité Nacional. La Delegación de la CNT en México" (September 20, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Berrondo also noted the positive response received from the event in his correspondence with the CNT national committee. See: Berrondo to CNT National Committee (September 22, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

throughout the month of October 1937. Although Vicente Lombardo Toldeano was absent for most of the CNT delegates' tour of country, he quickly organized a meeting with the men after being notified that they had been blacklisted from speaking events organized by the CTM. Much to the surprise of the delegates, Lombardo published a public declaration in various national newspapers expressing his support for the CNT, leading to a surge of requests for the delegation's presence at rallies and conferences.⁹¹ Moreover, Lombardo immediately organized an interview between the CNT delegation and President Lázaro Cárdenas, which Berrondo had failed to do.⁹² Along with these gestures of good will, Lombardo wrote a letter to the National Committee of the CNT to applaud the delegates' articulation of conditions in Spain. He also noted the labor confederation's continued interest in cooperating with the Negrín government, a misunderstanding he alleged was exacerbated by the "bourgeois and reactionary" press coverage of the Spanish conflict.⁹³

⁹¹ Serafin Aliaga and Juan Lopez to the Nemesio Galvez (November 5, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹² Ibid.; Berrondo to the CNT National Committee (September 22, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹³ Serafin Aliaga and Juan Lopez to the Nemesio Galvez (November 5, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.



Figure 11: CNT Delegation to North America while in New York (from left to right): Juan López, José Claro Sendón, and Serafín Aliaga.⁹⁴

The CNT delegation’s connection to the CTM’s Vicente Lombardo Toledano would continue to fortify friendly relations between the two labor confederations for the duration of the Civil War. In January 1938, Lombardo notified the national committee of the CTM that Narciso Bassols, Mexico’s ambassador to France, was tasked to serve as a delegate for the CTM to establish stronger ties to Spanish worker organizations.⁹⁵ Upon Bassols’s arrival to Spain in March, Mariano Vázquez sent him an extensive dossier on the CNT’s policies and practices during the Civil War, as well as documentation of the confederation’s allegations of abuse towards revolutionary movements by the republican government, most specifically against the leadership of the POUM.⁹⁶ The CNT’s

⁹⁴ Clipping from *La Prensa* (New York), August 24, 1937, IISH-CNT, 62C.
⁹⁵ Lombardo Toledano to the CNT (January 7, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.
⁹⁶ Bassols was an avowed Marxist and supporter of Soviet involvement in Spain who would later resign from his position as Mexico’s French ambassador due to President Cárdenas’s decision to provide Leon Trotsky political asylum. Despite this, he maintained cordial relations with the CNT, despite their open support for the POUM. See: Rodolfo Piña Soría to Mariano Vázquez (April 25, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

backing of policies of Lázaro Cárdenas's policies and its readmission into the Negrín coalition government in April 1938 further substantiated the anarchists' position as legitimate political actors within the eyes of the Mexican Left. After receiving word from Lombardo Toledano that the Mexican government had legally decreed the expropriation of foreign-owned oil companies, Mariano Vázquez congratulated the CTM leader and applauded President Cárdenas's steadfast opposition to capitalist imperialism.⁹⁷ In July of that year, Lombardo Toledano notified the CNT national committee to notify them that as a result of their warm reception of Bassols, the CNT's Mexico delegates were invited to participate in two forthcoming conferences; the Congress Against Open City Bombardments and the inaugural congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (Confederation of Latin American Workers, CTAL), the latter of which represented Lombardo Toledano's first efforts to establish an explicitly anti-imperialist labor confederation throughout the Americas.⁹⁸ That a Spanish anarchist labor confederation was invited to attend the CTAL conference suggests that the CNT's propaganda campaign made great strides since its arrival the previous year. Mariano Vázquez responded to Lombardo Toledano to notify him that the two North American delegates, Serafín Aliaga and Dr. Félix Martí-Ibáñez, would serve as representatives of the CNT at the conferences, and concluded his letter thanking the CTM and the Mexican people for their support: "I only regret that Mexico isn't located where France is. If that were the case, we are certain that our conflict would have ended with the victory of the people over the invaders many months ago."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Vicente Lombardo Toledano to the CNT (March 3, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹⁸ Vicente Lombardo Toledano to the CNT (July 8, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹⁹ Mariano Vázquez to Lombardo Toledano (June 13, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

Conclusion

The CNT's unique relationship with Mexican diplomats and the Mexican Left demonstrated the possibilities and shortcomings of transnational solidarity efforts. Although, as in Spain, the CNT successfully established relations with certain sectors of Mexican society, the ongoing task of reconciling colonial and postcolonial constructions of racial difference through an explicitly class-oriented framework fomented misunderstandings and outright disagreements. Nonetheless, the persistence of some delegates to affirm a shared historical legacy of exploitation between Spaniards and Mexicans speaks to their desire to overcome such differences. Like many other radicals at the time, Mexican and Spanish anarchists regularly perceived racial inequality as a by-product of capitalism rather than a structural regime inherent within modern material relations. As in the cases of Berrondo and the *Federación Anarquista Mexicana*, these assessments reproduced racialized tropes of productivity and development that had long debilitated organizing efforts in Mexico as well as in other parts of the world. However, the CNT's willingness to enact self-criticism and inquiry also demonstrated an effort to transcend artificial understandings of race and class differences in order to build deeper bonds between its constituents and Spain's former colonies. This became especially apparent when Spanish revolutionaries found themselves face to face with Mexico's structural inequality, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

While scholars such as Brodie and others have claimed that nationalist tendencies within the Spanish anarchist movement provoked xenophobic sentiments towards allies and enemies alike, other political tendencies simultaneously existed that encouraged a radical reinterpretation of national and imperial relationships between working class people. As Spanish anarchists emphasized the particular conflicts the "Spanish race" faced in the wake of the Civil War, European and U.S. anarchists deemed such assessments as a recantation of the Civil War's broader internationalist

significance.¹⁰⁰ The specificities of language and cultural notions of race and nation in the relations between Mexicans and Spaniards suggest that the various factions simply misunderstood the nuances of such terms in their Spanish-speaking countries. Indeed, the particularities of a specific region's social, cultural, economic, and political landscape have always imprinted unique qualities to emancipatory struggles.¹⁰¹ The distinct ways that both Mexicans and Spaniards expressed their solidarity for one another provide an alternative reading of the formulation of nationalism and internationalism in Spain. Such amalgamations posited a radical interpretation of a future classless society that simultaneously reckoned with the Spanish nation's imperialist past. While these visions were not universally accepted, with some Spanish anarchists certain continuing to uphold xenophobic and racist views of non-European people, they do demonstrate how many various notions of difference emerged within the new political realities created during Mexico's and Spain's respective social upheavals.

This chapter sheds light on the difficult and often messy nature of transnational solidarity. In particular, it demonstrates the ways in which Spanish revolutionaries articulated notions of racial solidarity and difference within their depictions of Mexicans in print and in person. What is more, the fact that Spanish anarchists sought the support of left-wing groups beyond those of their own ideological ilk helps us reconsider the sectarian divisions that have long been the focus of studies on the Spanish Civil War. Not only did these relations exhibit an attempt to build coalitions with groups of various political persuasions, but it was in such ideas and actions that a radical reinterpretation of postcolonial relations emerged within the two countries' laboring classes. One that, unbeknownst to

¹⁰⁰ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico, and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

all, proved especially important following the ascension of the Franco dictatorship and the collapse of the Second Spanish Republic in April 1939.