

## **Anarchism, communism and *hispanidad*: Australian Spanish migrants and the Civil War**

*Despite thorough analysis of the Civil War, its impact on Spain's emigrant communities remains largely unstudied. The article focuses on the Australian Spanish community to demonstrate that migrants experienced a two-fold response. They were galvanised to oppose Anglo-Australian control of the Solidarity campaign, and attempted to create an alternative public discourse. Secondly, the Civil War prompted the community to reassess their relationship to politics, dividing local Spaniards according to radical ideologies, as they debated how best to achieve socialist goals in both Spain and Australia.*

Scholarship on the Spanish Civil War has tended to ignore Spanish emigrants' reception of Republican politics throughout the world. The Australian Spanish community is often forgotten amongst analyses of the larger Hispanic groups in the United States, Europe or Latin America. The Australian community presents a useful case study of migrants' responses to the struggles that surrounded political identities in interwar Europe. Most Australian Spaniards lived in either Queensland or Victoria, and were physically isolated from other radical Hispanic emigrants. Nonetheless, the Civil War made a decisive impact on the emigrants' political identity, and on their relationship to Australian society.

The Civil War raised Australian Spaniards' sensitivity to their status as radical émigrés. They viewed Spain's political polemics through the prism of an established

Australian migrant group however, and were accustomed to both racism and poverty in their new homes. The article focuses on Spaniards' struggles to reject Anglo-Australian control of the local Solidarity campaign for Republican Spain.<sup>1</sup> The Civil War also revealed differences within the Spanish community, as emigrants sought internal consensus on how to achieve radical change in both Spain and Australia, and what form that change should take.

### Spaniards in Queensland

Australia's Spanish community has rarely been studied as an example of a highly politicised migrant identity.<sup>2</sup> The large community in Queensland numbered approximately one thousand individuals, and its constituent ethnic groups had generally settled in separate areas. Basques formed almost three-quarters of the population and were settled predominantly in the area surrounding the northern region of the Burdekin. Basque reactions to the Civil War differed fundamentally from Queensland's other Spanish communities however, and have been excluded from this article. The other predominant groups were Catalans and Andalusians. The two communities had settled together 100 kilometres north of the Basques, and form the article's focus. Their social networks and patterns of chain migration operated almost entirely separately to the Basques.

Large-scale Spanish immigration to Queensland began in 1907 with the arrival of 91 Catalans. The group arrived as part of a government and industry partnership to provide cheap labour for Queensland's sugar industry. The immigrants were overwhelmingly from Barcelona, and were entirely unprepared for the subtropical frontier state. The project occurred in a period when a number of British firms

sourced cheap workers from Catalonia,<sup>3</sup> where urban immigration had caused a surfeit of labour and low wages. The men quickly made a reputation for themselves in Queensland as provocative and unpredictable workers, who were prone to disregard employers' authority.<sup>4</sup> Farmers were forced to arm themselves before approaching the men, and confrontational strikes became commonplace. Almost all the Spaniards were arrested within the first year, and extra police were dispatched to prevent the detained men from rioting. Worried Australian authorities described the men as 'anarchists in their own country [where] the police there put them in our way to get them out of the country'.<sup>5</sup>

A second large group arrived in Australia in 1915, most of whom had settled in Queensland by 1919. The group set sail from Argentina, where they had worked in ports and railways famed as centres for anarcho-syndicalism.<sup>6</sup> The majority had spent fewer than ten years in Argentina, and originated from Andalusia. Similarly to the Catalans, the group established a reputation for violent disregard of authority. The Andalusians were less tolerant of Queensland's capitalist framework than the Catalans, and manifested millenarian traditions that echoed southern Spanish anarchism. Within a decade of settlement, the Andalusians had been involved in one attempted mutiny, had threatened the Administrator of the Northern Territory, assaulted his guards, briefly taken over one township, and attempted to blow up a sugar mill owned by a major Queensland corporation.

There was a network of Spanish communities throughout Interwar Australia. Spaniards were most numerous in Melbourne, where they owned a number of landmark hotels and cafés, and had established themselves as leading entrepreneurs.

The Melbourne community had originated from nineteenth-century Catalan emigrants, who could easily access the shipping routes to Australia. Once in Australia, they applied their commercial knowledge to the hospitality industry. Spanish communities in Melbourne and rural Victoria engaged enthusiastically in leftwing politics, and considerable numbers of Spanish radicals moved between the two states.

Spaniards' life in north Queensland was exceptionally difficult. Cane cutting was the largest industry, and men lived in isolated barracks in hot and humid conditions. Over a number of years, the more successful were able to clear virgin rainforest, establish cane farms, and sponsor chain migration from their villages of origin. Less successful Spaniards lived in the scrub, surviving alone through timber getting or copper gorging. Many labourers retired to regional centres like Innisfail, where they frequently purchased guesthouses and cafés. These became hubs for socialisation, especially at weekends, when farmers and labourers would flood into Innisfail to discuss news. The cafés and hotels were highly politicised centres for the exchange of views and information about Spain and Australia.

Queensland's Spanish community was fully integrated in the global networks of Hispanic radicals. Many Queensland Spaniards had earlier worked in French cities, and a significant portion had also worked in Great Britain before stowing away on ships to Australia after the First World War.<sup>7</sup> Australia remained a marginal destination for those fleeing the 'corruption and crimes of old Europe', and many arrived only after tortuous journeys via Latin and North America.<sup>8</sup> Australian Spaniards' radicalism was reinforced by anarchist networks operating in French cities

and gaols, which directed harassed Spaniards to the relative freedom of frontier Australia.<sup>9</sup>

Queensland Spaniards actively participated in these radical networks. Some facilitated the emigration of friends, whilst others maintained correspondence with leftwing radicals in Europe, Latin America and the United States until the 1950s. Large quantities of Spanish, American and French publications were imported, as well as Australian and British literature from the Left Book Club. Some locals, such as Salvador Torrents, wrote regularly for American publications like *Cultura Proletaria*. Their use of written media created a safe and effective public space to sustain their identity as emigrant radicals.<sup>10</sup> Queensland Spaniards' physical isolation made such an avenue all the more vital, and associated local struggles with comparable battles in the Spanish spaces of their youth.

Queensland's political culture was characterised by a proclivity for radical leftwing populism. Canberra was a remote reality to the isolated inhabitants of the state's north, for whom even the state capital was one thousand kilometres south. Northern townships retained a frontier mentality, with vast swathes of virgin rainforest cementing their isolation. This lack of effective government control provided a powerful allure to migrants who were suspicious of political oppression. Although north Queensland was ethnically cosmopolitan, non-Europeans were marginalized in public discourse. Anglo-Australians were horrified by the public articulation of non-British cultures. Complaints at migrants' perceived failure to learn English were dwarfed by their presumed failure to set prior political convictions aside.

The Australian Communist Party (ACP) garnered great support in north Queensland. Despite its protestations of proletarian solidarity, the ACP retained a pervasive Anglo-centricity in its organisation and decision-making. The ACP was not the only vehicle for radical political expression, and Spaniards were particularly attracted to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). IWW ideology aligned closely to anarcho-syndicalism, whilst its eschewal of organisational hierarchy offered significant potential for migrant participation. Many Spaniards who had worked on the Argentine railways found similar anarcho-syndicalist agitation in Queensland's own expanding rail network. Men like Jesús Rosende worked on the railways with well-known IWW sympathisers, helping to develop cells that staged a series of disruptive strikes.<sup>11</sup> Some Spaniards were monitored as members, whilst a number were deported to Chile for their participation in illegal IWW activities.<sup>12</sup> Spaniards used their anarcho-syndicalist experiences to assume senior positions in the IWW, and maverick Australian strikers regularly sought the advice of Spanish 'expert agitators'.<sup>13</sup>

The ACP had secured ascendancy amongst Queensland radicals by the mid-1920s. Most Spaniards were pragmatists however, and were content to participate in the body best placed to further tangible local improvements. The ACP's emphasis on hierarchical control would not become apparent until the mid-1930s, by which time Spaniards were thoroughly marginalized in local politics. They remained committed to the socialist alternatives that had defined their lives, but were confined to the fringe of Australian radicalism. This situation altered sharply during the Civil War, when debates impinged directly on Spaniards' social memories. Well-established political

networks, and an accepted ideological consensus, galvanised the Spanish community and prompted it to contest the passive rôle the ACP offered.

### Response to Civil War

Queensland Spaniards greeted the Spanish monarchy's fall with glee, and pored over any news from the Republic. Their relationship with Republican Spain was often confused however, given many had spent decades defining their lives in opposition to the social oppression and economic injustice associated with the country's political élite. Queensland Spaniards rarely followed politics in detail, but empathised with the new emphasis on ideals of popular sovereignty and socialist progress. Despite differences between local anarchists and communists, the shared threat posed by a rightwing electoral resurgence in Spain helped to minimise serious disagreement.

Queensland Spaniards were acutely sensitive to anticlericalism, and associated the Church with images of repression and hypocrisy. James Duhig, Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, urged the faithful to disregard cables that favoured the Republican government, whom he characterised as fraudulently elected vigilantes. Northern Spaniards tried to refute the Catholic Bishop of Cairns who also spoke of his admiration for General Franco's anti-communist Crusade. Pascual Escuder of Cooktown wrote an open letter to the bishop 'to correct [his] misleading and ridiculous' position. Rather than accept Franco was the only alternative to 'hoards [*sic.*] of barbarians', Escuder lambasted the general as the 'spawn of the devil'.<sup>14</sup> Relatives from Spain sent images of alleged clerical atrocities, which Queensland Spaniards immediately assimilated to narratives of a remorseless and resurgent medieval Inquisition.<sup>15</sup>

First-generation Spanish emigrants identified powerfully with freedom from want and political oppression. These ideals were anchored in the fields and urban spaces of Spain, which complicated the transmission of migrants' passion to their Australian-raised children. Second-generation Spaniards showed an understandable tendency to frame radical political and social issues in the context of Queensland. Many Spaniards were eager to return immediately to the 'New Spain', and frequently arranged for their children to return where they could witness the historic changes firsthand. Unable to leave their farms during the Depression, parents planned to join their children as soon as possible.

Celia and Eliseo Zamora of Tully had been sent to Spain at the start of the Second Republic by their anti-fascist father to learn how 'to become a Spaniard'.<sup>16</sup> On the generals' coup, the two youths were trapped in Spain, but provided first hand accounts of Republican life after their return to north Queensland. Eliseo had been with relatives in rural Spain on the outbreak of war, and remembered his flight from forced conscription in the Nationalist army as the rebels advanced on his aunt's village. Eliseo became a proud communist supporter after his return to Queensland, and would travel with his brother to listen to iconic local communists like Fred Patterson.<sup>17</sup> His sister Celia was in Madrid in 1936, and recalled the excitement of attending political meetings to hear the legendary communist, 'La Passionara' debate freely with other radicals.<sup>18</sup> On the advice of the British Embassy however, Celia was evacuated within the first few months of conflict, and met her brother in Valencia, from where they travelled to Marseilles and home to Queensland. Celia also continued her passion for leftwing politics after her return, and became active in the



Tully Spanish Relief Committee, maintaining friendly contact with local communists until the late 1970s.

The Civil War presented obvious practical concerns to Queensland Spaniards, many of whom had friends and family in Spain. Although migrants garnered as much information as they could through correspondence, firm details of developments were rare. From 1936, Trinidad Garcia, another northern Spaniard, corresponded with *Nueva España Antifascista* to receive more accurate news which she distributed throughout the region. Such sources of information were inherently uncertain and irregular though, and contributed to José Ruiz's complaint to Innisfail's Jack Garcia that the 'proletariat of the world' were indifferent to Spain's fate.<sup>19</sup>

Those Spaniards who thirsted for more detailed and accurate information were obliged to rely on information from communist networks. The communist *North Queensland Guardian* gave greater coverage to the Civil War than most papers, and was eagerly received. The Melbourne communist Ken Coldicutt toured Queensland to raise money for Spanish Republicans in early 1938, screening films like *They Shall Not Pass* to packed audiences of local Spaniards. Coldicutt recalled 'the exhilaration of screening his films to passionately anti-fascist audiences, including many migrants from Italy, Spain and Yugoslavia; of hearing the roars of execration and shouts of 'Abasso Il Duce' [...] and of speaking to audiences who hung on every word'.<sup>20</sup> The responses' vivacity derived not only from the films' novelty, but from also the appearance that the distance separating migrants from the conflict had been temporarily condensed. As such, locals could receive a relatively unmediated presentation of the military conflict that had become an integral part of their identity.

Most Anglo-Australians remained studiously uninformed and apathetic however. The then Attorney-General, Robert Menzies, stated that Australia had no real interest in fascism's defeat by communism, nor indeed in fascists' victory.<sup>21</sup> The literary figure Nettie Palmer was a firm supporter of Republican Spain, but noted with irritation that people's responses abdicated any responsibility: 'we don't know what to think, do we?'<sup>22</sup> The progressive characterisation of lawlessness throughout the Republican zone caused many Australians to support Franco, who seemed most likely to stop communism's spread.

In common with Spanish emigrants throughout the world, a number of Queensland Spaniards volunteered to return to distant Spain. North Queenslander Ray Jordana was the son of a Catalan anarchist, and moved south to Melbourne where he quickly began to associate with established and influential leftwing politicians such as Maurice Blackburn. Palmer noted in her diary that 'Mr Blackburn brought young Jordana to lecture: he has spent 15 years in Innisfail with his family but was born and bred in Mataró, Catalonia. Charismatic chap, good to meet'.<sup>23</sup> Jordana 'became involved in a moral sense', speaking at large public rallies, the biggest of which was at the Princess Theatre in March 1937.<sup>24</sup> Palmer participated in the same meeting and praised Jordana's 'good, clear moderate speech'.<sup>25</sup> Jordana left for Spain where he attempted to enlist with a socialist battalion, before joining a communist brigade as a driver.

Jack Garcia was another Queensland Spaniard who returned to fight for the Republicans. Garcia had arrived in Australia from Patagonia, but had been born in

Asturias. Although his wife, Trinidad, was an anarchist, Jack's politics appear to be a pragmatic mix of socialism and anti-authoritarianism. Unlike Jordana, Garcia fought in the International Brigades until he was invalided home in 1938. By the late 1940s, Garcia had become heavily involved with the ACP in north Queensland. Like Jordana, Garcia's actions in Spain brought him under the suspicion of the Australian intelligence authorities. Whilst Jordana was almost interned as a result of his participation, Garcia appears to have escaped harassment during World War II.

Garcia and Jordana were not the only Australian Spaniards to fight for the Republicans. At the war's outbreak, 48 Spanish Australians had immediately volunteered to fight, but it is unclear how many of these were able to afford the journey.<sup>26</sup> Bartholomew Blanchart, like Torrents a former resident of both Essendon (in Victoria) and Mataró, retrospectively justified his decision to fight in Spain because he wanted 'to assist the Spanish people to have the same freedom that I enjoyed in Australia. My whole aim was to fight against fascism. I felt that by helping the democratic government in Spain I was helping Australia'. Angelo Plaza had lived in Queensland since 1924, but also returned to Spain to fight Franco. Another Queenslander, Rosendo Sala had arrived in the early 1920s and became a naturalised British subject in 1929, but returned to Spain to join the Republican forces on the Civil War's outbreak. Commitment was not confined to those who had been born in Spain, and Queensland-born Salvador Barker also left Australia to fight with the Republicans.

Australian leftwing groups also mobilised quickly to support the Republicans, but did so within traditional parameters of Anglo-Australian control. Australia's

Spanish Relief Committees (SRCs) liaised closely with their British counterparts, sending the money they raised to London to be included in the British contribution. SRC members did not question this arrangement, which appeared a cost-effective and natural understanding with like-minded socialists. The Sydney SRC focussed its efforts on mobilising Australia's Anglophone leftwing groups. Whilst it had initially sought to liaise with the Spanish consulate, the relationship was fraught and quickly set aside. The assumption that any Australian contribution would be donated according to British cultural assumptions was in accordance with contemporary Australian public culture, but disregarded the expectations of large numbers of migrants who participated in the SRCs.

Queensland's influence in Australia's SRC movement was disproportionate to its population, and 16 of Australia's 21 SRCs were in Queensland. Nonetheless, Sydney established a hierarchical structure, with its predominantly communist leadership assuming executive authority throughout Australia. Sydney SRC had written to Trinidad Garcia to urge that she establish a committee in Innisfail, which she duly began. Enquiries from other Queensland Spaniards successfully led to the establishment of a number of similar local committees by mid-1937. Spaniards became increasingly angry at the scrupulous application of the hierarchical structure however. Whilst migrants' endorsed the imperative for global revolution, the Civil War had prioritised Spanish issues and Spaniards resisted communist attempts to subordinate the Civil War to Australian politics.

### Anglo-Australian Control

Queensland's strategically vulnerable position and multiethnic population generated a powerful public discourse that centred on loyalty to Anglo-Australian cultural norms. Migrants frequently struggled to find space to critique capitalism without accusations of disloyalty to Australia and Imperial Britain. Fascist and anti-fascist migrants were equally vulnerable to accusations of disloyalty, through their apparent refusal to accept the institutional parameters of British politics. Authorities were extremely suspicious of migrants who continued to engage with European political debates. Concern for Australian security was one element in this distrust, but migrants' participation was primarily viewed through the prism of social morality rather than potential political contagion.

Queenslanders were particularly confused by the difference between anti-fascism, communism and opposition to the British Empire. The Security Services deemed Jordana's anti-capitalism to be synonymous with 'anti-British sentiments'.<sup>27</sup> Although he had taken the oath of allegiance, intelligence officers continued to monitor him, following a muttered comment that 'the time is not far distant when they will do away with sovereign heads. They are only parasites'.<sup>28</sup> Miguel Torrente's statement 'that Italy and Germany and Spain would soon be one country and would drive the British to the ends of the earth' was assumed to be hostile, although it was almost certainly an attempt to prompt British intervention in Spain.<sup>29</sup> Police ability to distinguish between anarchism and communism was almost non-existent, and Antonio Canet's 'communist tendencies' were held to be self-evident despite the fact he was under investigation for importing an anarchist paper.<sup>30</sup>

Queensland Spaniards' own beliefs on the links between capitalism, imperialism and war were confirmed by the Civil War. Barcelona's 1909 Tragic Week of riots had been triggered by protests against the despatch of further working-class troops to support capitalist enterprises in Spanish Morocco. Jordana's father and Torrents had participated in the riots, and had fled for France when it became impossible to remain in Barcelona. Anglo-Australians' emphasis on the British monarchy as a symbol of loyalty posed an ethical quandary to many such radicals, who continued to associate monarchical government with capitalist oppression. That capitalism led inexorably to war was a central tenet of belief for Queensland Spaniards.

The Civil War confirmed many Spaniards' belief that Western democratic powers preferred fascist expansion to democratic leftwing governments. Queensland Spaniards angrily noted that the French and British policy of non-intervention had hampered Spain's elected government, and ultimately had caused it to lose the war. They appealed to Spaniards throughout Australia to pressure governments to lobby the Anglophone establishment.<sup>31</sup> Jordana remembers Spaniards' disbelief that their dreams of an emancipated Spain could be shattered by British and French duplicity and self-interest.<sup>32</sup> His own journey to Spain had almost failed, when Canberra denied him an Australian passport because of an alleged technical mistake that had lain dormant since his arrival in 1921. Instead, Jordana liaised with Melbourne's impoverished Republican consul to arrange a Spanish passport that allowed him to depart. Canberra's apparently deliberate obfuscation confirmed Spaniards' belief that British imperial interests surpassed any moral imperative for action.

Spaniards' sense of disempowerment by the Anglo-Australian establishment, was replicated in their relations with SRCs. Sydney SRC's role had expanded significantly over time to include the coordination of revenue and had further marginalized migrants in local communities. When the response from lesser SRCs was deemed inadequate, Sydney acted aggressively to correct the situation. Sydney berated Queenslanders that the

response from Brisbane when we have appealed for simultaneous meetings has been poor.... In the city the Spanish campaign has been weaker than in any other city.... Brisbane is the only city that has failed to respond to our appeals from time to time to hold meetings and send cables abroad at the same time as other centres.<sup>33</sup>

Brisbane's poor organisation did not detract from Queensland's status as the jewel in the SRC crown. In 1938 the tour of the returned Civil War nurse, Mary Lowson generated £41 9s. 4d, in Western Australia, £50 0s. 0d. in Victoria, £92 14s. 2d. in New South Wales, and £251 15s. 5d. in Queensland. This did not derive from Anglo-Australian fundraising, but from the well-organised community-level fundraising carried out by immigrants.

Spaniards with strong anarchist susceptibilities found Sydney's control patronising and counterintuitive, particularly given it was almost two thousand kilometres south of the Spanish population. Communist speakers who were sent north remembered that 'the most spectacular of all results for country towns with films for Spain were obtained in north Queensland, covering the sugar towns between Mackay and Mossman, as well as the Atherton Tableland. Over a period of six weeks, 28 screenings took place, attendances were more than 10,000 and collections about

£580'.<sup>34</sup> Yet, Spaniards felt belittled and marginalized in the local trade unions that the ACP used to reinforce its control of SRCs. Many Spaniards ripped their union tickets in organisers' faces immediately after being obliged to purchase them, to protest the racism that permeated workplaces. Others bitterly recalled being snubbed and interrupted when they attempted to speak at union meetings. Forced to tolerate this situation in everyday life, Spaniards mobilised to combat Anglo-Australian dominance in discussions relating to the Civil War.

Spaniards in Innisfail rejected Anglophone communists' control, and pioneered the foundation of the Australian branch of the International Anti-Fascist Solidarity (IAS) in defiance of the ACP. Headed by the former Patagonian Spaniard, Francisco Martinez, the Queensland group described itself as a democratic movement that was open to all nationalities. However, the IAS prided itself on the membership of almost all local Spaniards, and it seems unlikely the anarchist emphasis attracted large numbers of Anglo-Australians. There was a clear ideological distance between the ACP and IAS, with the latter advocating anarchist communitarian solutions to Spain's crisis.

The Anglo-Australian police quickly became suspicious of the group's political focus, which was outside the parameters of established Australian politics. Torrente was interned during World War II because of confusion about the IAS's anarchist emphasis. Despite his known record of brawling with Italian nationalists, police described Torrente as a 'well known local fascist having anti-British feelings'.<sup>35</sup> Torrente's anarchist lapel badge 'was the facsimile of a clenched fist grasping a dagger, both ends of which protruded on each side of the clenched fist'.<sup>36</sup>



Police erroneously concluded this represented the Italian fascist salute, whilst the bemused Torrente lamented from his internment camp that ‘I have never been a fascist or a member of a fascist organisation in my life. In fact I am, and have for years past been, a member of the Australian Section of the International Anti-Fascist Solidarity and have worn a badge of such Solidarity’.<sup>37</sup> Such misunderstandings were frequent, and increased Spaniards’ exasperation with the Anglo-Australian community.

Spaniards recognised that the ACP was best placed to combat racist and unfair work practices in Queensland, but they did not accept it offered the best model to respond to the Civil War in Spain. Its Anglo-centric decision-making, excluded Spaniards’ expertise and opinions in favour of Anglo-Australian priorities. IAS pamphlets pointedly distanced themselves from what they perceived to be communist groups’ rigid and doctrinal parameters, which sustained programmes that ‘banished the free discussion of thoughts’.<sup>38</sup> Even Spaniards who were sympathetic to communism resigned from the ACP in protest, as the centre of authority became progressively concentrated in the party’s Sydney offices.

The IAS deliberately distanced itself from the Anglo-Australian SRC structure. In a Spanish-language advert in an unidentified Australian paper, the newly formed IAS declared it had launched ‘a manifesto urging liberals all over the world to form IAS’.<sup>39</sup> The local committee consistently emphasised their Spanish heritage and denigrated communists’ supposed alien, and self-interested posturing. They took pride that unlike local communist groups, ‘the IAS is not organised by men and women who sit down along side of sugar fields and sentimentalise about Catalonia without

knowing the facts. It [...] is at all times in direct communication with Spain'.<sup>40</sup> The IAS secretary deliberately denied any distinction between Spaniards' commitment to Queensland and their current overseas political focus. He declared the formation of the IAS showed that

30 years after we began to live in this country, most of us remain on the side of those who fight for justice today, when the fascist storm has risen on the horizon. Spaniards ought to come together to form part of the IAS group, and so help to clear the terrorist atmosphere which closes around us, and to prepare the way for a freer and more secure life.<sup>41</sup>

Sydney SRC became concerned by the IAS's rising profile, and spent considerable effort trying to limit its independent initiatives. Concerned Anglo-Australian communists noted that 'I came in touch with it while I was there [in Queensland] and saw some of its vague anarchist propaganda, but did not take it very seriously. Since then however it has been launching Spain appeals in opposition to the existing SRCs and has been sending circulars all over Australia'.<sup>42</sup> The Sydney SRC angrily condemned the IAS, since 'apart from the fact that it is splitting Spanish Relief, it is an organisation which \_\_\_\_ [?] will form the basis for Trotskyist anarchy. The leading spirits seem to be the Garcias and the often recalcitrant \_\_\_\_ [?] the Innisfail SRC'.<sup>43</sup>

Conflict reached a crisis regarding the distribution of funds. Queensland Spaniards provided a disproportionately large contribution to Australia's SRC effort, and wielded considerable influence with local anti-fascist groups. From early 1937, the IAS decided to divide its funds between Sydney SRC, and the anarchist IAS

umbrella organisation based in France. After Sydney protested, the IAS retaliated by sending all its funds directly to anarchists in France and Spain. Sydney sought to use local trade union representation to force compliance. In 1938, the secretary of the Innisfail Trade and Labour Council wrote to Trinidad Garcia, then the IAS president,

Dear Comrade, In reply to your letter dated 4 Oct. 1938, I have been told to inform you that we have serious complaints about the way in which your committee sends money. You send it to an organisation in France instead of sending it to the National Relief Committee in Sydney. My council cannot send you any help until we are sure that the money collected will be sent directly to its destination. Fraternally yours,<sup>44</sup>

Other trade unions vocalised similar concerns that the money raised would fund groups ideologically hostile to organised socialism and communism. The Railway Union (ARU) refused to donate until the IAS would ‘guarantee the money would go to the workers, and [had] the greatest suspicion that it may be used to further dissension and disruption fostered by anarchists with whom the majority of the ARU had no sympathy’.<sup>45</sup>

Local Spaniards furiously refuted Sydney’s claim to be the only group that was eligible to send funds overseas. One member wrote retrospectively to *Cultura Proletaria* in the late 1940s, that ‘using our total freedom, because we thought that we had a right to it, we had the idea to send the money that we had collected directly to France’.<sup>46</sup> Queensland Spaniards were proud of the large amount of money raised by the small, and relatively poor rural community. On one Christmas Day alone, a party raised £18 that was donated to the IAS committee. On New Year’s Eve a week later, a Spanish Relief Ball raised a record £28 more. A total of £88 was cabled from Innisfail

to the IAS office at Marseilles for the preceding six months. The size of Spaniards' contributions ensured that exchanges between communists and the IAS continued to be acrimonious. The rupture between the two groups became complete, as relations between anarchists and communists deteriorated in Spain.

### Internal Political Division

The establishment of the IAS increased the need for a public anarchist voice. Yet, unlike the communists, the IAS had no means to receive regular news about the war's progress in Spain. Jordana recalled

All we knew was what you could read in the papers, which wasn't very much. The papers didn't report very accurately, in fact mostly inaccurately, and certainly biased.... They were definitely slanted towards Franco. Always.<sup>47</sup>

Spaniards had to be guided by the very sketchy media reports, which 'were all contradictory, meant really nothing... got them together and you'd have got nothing. In months we just knew that the struggle was [based] on that [anti-fascist] purpose'.<sup>48</sup> The media was also biased in its characterisation of anarchists as, at best, the unruly Republican fringe.

Media confusion exacerbated Spaniards' own uncertainty of how best to connect their experience of Australian radicalism with the Civil War. Spaniards focussed on their own memories in lieu of accurate information, and inserted unfolding events into outdated Spanish contexts. This became more problematic as increasingly acrimonious debates sought to explain reports of fratricidal conflict between Republicans in Spain. The IAS sought to project itself as the representative

voice of emancipated Spaniards, but other dissenting interpretations existed within the community. The struggle to understand events in Spain reopened competing political narratives within Queensland's Spaniards that had hitherto been irrelevant to their political identities in Australia.

A significant proportion of Queensland Spaniards supported communism and opposed the IAS. Anarchists such as Torrents or Gabriel Sorli regularly proselytised and accosted passers-by in northern town centres, but communists identified Spanish sympathisers more systematically in order to bind them into the ACP's social networks. Local communists like Emilio Duran were highly integrated in both Anglo-Australian and migrant communities, and became central to the local communist organisation. The IAS invited Duran to join their group, but rebuffed his attempts to involve trade unions in decision-making. Duran recalled, 'I had the audacity to ask who was getting the money collected. That put me beyond the pale. I was accused of not being a good Spaniard. One thing led to another and all relations ended, even to the extent of talking to me'.<sup>49</sup>

Internal divisions within the community became more noticeable after reports reached Australia of Barcelona's May Day clashes in 1937. Reports made clear that long-running street battles had occurred between anarchists and government-sanctioned forces. The reason for the violence and locus of culpability was obscure however. Mutually incompatible reports suggested either that communists had provoked anarchists in order to consolidate political power or that anarchists were deliberately undermining the war effort and had to be controlled. Unable to understand the complex political reality, Queensland Spaniards instead inserted

reports into their pre-existing perceptions of the ACP. For local anarchists, the fratricidal May Days appeared to betray the very communal ideals that were fundamental to their support of the Republican government. Local Spaniards who accepted communists' arguments were quickly ostracised, but arguments also erupted between anarchist sympathisers.

Anglo-Australians present in Barcelona concurred that anarchists were undermining the effort on the frontline, and had to be restrained by the Republican administration. Judith Keene notes,

in her analysis of Spanish affairs Aileen [Palmer] entirely supported the Communist Party-Popular Front position. She wholeheartedly defended the rights of the central government to dismantle the militia of different political groups and dissolve the spontaneous organs of popular control that had sprung up in opposition to the generals' *pronunciamento*. She was also distrustful, even derisory, towards the Spanish Anarchists.<sup>50</sup>

Keene argues that Aileen Palmer's highly critical views of decentralised popular control 'probably provided a foundation of [her parents] Nettie and Vance's own analyses in Australia of the civil war in Spain. It was a basis from which they wrote their articles and speeches for the Spanish Relief Committee'.<sup>51</sup> The Palmers undoubtedly valued their daughter's opinion, but were also provided with a steady stream of alternative anarchist analyses from Queensland Spaniards. Nettie Palmer's confusion at divisions in the Popular Front is made clear in her diary: 'Reading some papers sent from Innisfail by Torrents: Franco-Spanish, I mean French and Spanish, anarchist – Popular Front news'.<sup>52</sup>

Queensland anarchists were infuriated by the comments of the prominent Anglo-Australian communist, Lawrence Sharkey, after the May Days. Sharkey avowed ‘since the fascist revolt, the Communist Party has tirelessly watched over the unity of the People’s Front, guarding it against the attempts at disruption by the counter-revolutionary Trotskyist P.O.U.M. and the small anarchist section known as the ‘Uncontrollables’’.<sup>53</sup> Sharkey provocatively claimed the war had taught anarchists a much-needed lesson on submission to communist control and ‘the futility of the anarchist conceptions and the correctness of Marxist-Leninist teachings’.<sup>54</sup> His public comments were pointed and Spaniards’ perceived them in the context of their own refusal to accept communist authority.

The Australian leftwing press certainly prioritised the communist position during the May Days. The north Queensland communist newspaper condemned ‘the incitement to murder published in the anarchist ‘Free Youth’ organ under the influence of Trotskyist propaganda’.<sup>55</sup> It further opined ‘that such incitement can only be the work of the enemies of the Spanish Republic, and is undoubtedly inspired by Franco’s notorious ‘Fifth Column’’. The article urged the Spanish government to ‘liquidate...[t]he shady elements who are serving the cause of Hitler and Franco within the ranks of the working class movement’.<sup>56</sup> Since Spaniards relied on the newspaper as their primary source of information, many were disorientated by the reports, which transformed hitherto theoretical differences between communists and anarchists into a public and compelling debate.

Divisions within the Spanish community's response to the May Days often reflected generational difference. Younger Spaniards, such as the Zamoras or Duran, were generally more comfortable with the ACP's priorities. Having spent their formative years in Queensland's poverty stricken north, they struggled to prioritise Spanish issues over pressing needs in Australia. The trend was a common one, and anarchists' children inherited radical views that were often expressed through the ACP. A similar shift was replicated amongst older Spaniards once Franco's victory became clear. There was an accelerating move towards the ACP amongst former anarchists during the Cold War, when the party was recognised as the only vehicle for anti-capitalism.

Communists' condemnation of anarchist 'Uncontrollables' in the aftermath of the May Days drew attention to the different strands of anarchism within the community. Support for anarchism in Catalonia relied on extended personal contacts that had developed within Barcelona's various cohesive suburbs. Support for the revolutionary creed had been fuelled by rapid inflation, immigration and working-class exclusion from institutional politics. Anarcho-syndicalism had developed as an alternative model of trade unionism, in an atmosphere of permanent industrial unrest that has been characterised as an 'undeclared social civil war'.<sup>57</sup> Large numbers of landless labourers also supported anarchism in the southern region of Andalusia. Without experience of trade unions, and in the absence of obvious employers and landlords, southerners developed an uncompromising millenarian vision of social revolution. The tensions between the two strands of thought remained a source of instability within the anarchist movement.



Similar differences in approach existed in Queensland. Catalans demonstrated a greater proclivity for community engagement to prompt social debate, whilst Andalusians endorsed whichever community based action was most likely to generate tangible success. Catalans happily applied for membership of the state's Rationalist Society and the Council for Civil Liberties, whilst the Andalusians eschewed such progressivism in favour of support for renegade strikes and secretive cells. Although such a characterisation risks over-simplification, disagreements developed within the IAS that aligned with regional differences in anarchist tradition.

The two groups were united in their support for anarchist Republicanism, but subtle differences existed in their response to the Civil War. Andalusians frequently characterised Catalan deliberations as esoteric and abstract at a time when more direct action was needed to galvanise public opinion. Torrents and Juan Jordana both viewed violence with distaste, despite their limited participation in the 1909 Tragic Week. They cited Sebastian Faure to argue that society would not be changed through political revolution, but by individuals' ability to perceive the realities of capitalist society.<sup>58</sup> Their answer to clerical obscurantism was education, of the type exemplified by the Rationalist schools and workers' centres established by Francisco Ferrer.<sup>59</sup> A number of Catalan Queenslanders recalled their education in such schools, whilst others had established the first rationalist school in Mataró and continued to correspond with working class centres in Catalonia.

Andalusians were rarely enthusiastic about such progressivism, and preferred to goad authorities to escalate industrial conflict as a means to reveal capitalist iniquity. In 1926, the Patagonian Miguel Martinez defied a union directive that he

return to work following a mill-workers dispute. Instead, he collected explosives that he planned to use to destroy the local sugar mill in order to rally community support.<sup>60</sup> Their enthusiasm for direct action continued during the 1930s when Spaniards protested racist work practices by erecting roadblocks and instigating street protests with local Italian anarchists.

Andalusians also showed a greater propensity to shift to communism than the Catalans. This was in part due to pragmatism, which had been a marked tendency amongst Hispanic labourers in Argentina.<sup>61</sup> Impatience may also have been related to class issues, since proportionately fewer Andalusians owned cane farms. Many distanced themselves from the wealthier Catalans, who had acquired property and workers, whilst continuing to decry the capitalist system. The ACP offered the potential for tangible results, compared to the gradual gains offered by the Catalans' emphasis on emancipation through education.

Communist condemnation of the 'Uncontrollables' made these divisions particularly relevant, as the community struggled to form an effective response regarding the legitimate use of illegal violence. Queensland Catalans were particularly attached to non-violent doctrines, whilst local Andalusians' suggested that legitimate violence could be used to galvanise the working-class consciousness and halt capitalist iniquity. Both groups were conscious of the anarchist traditions of 'Propaganda of the Deed' that legitimated political assassinations. Both had experienced such assassinations in Spain, France and Argentina, and some had been imprisoned as a consequence. Whilst such illegality may have been expedient at the historical moment, Queensland Catalans were disorientated and confused by the

fratricidal fighting between contemporary Republicans. Andalusians were sympathetic to the radical street fighters, but concurred that the wartime situation required unity. All Queensland Spaniards agreed with the anarchist leadership that to allow the fighting to continue would only strengthen communists' dominance further, both in Spain and in Australia.

### Conclusion

The Civil War caused profound trauma to the isolated group of Spaniards based in Queensland. The response exceeded their identification with the Republican cause, and natural concern for friends who remained in Spain. Anglo-Australians' interest in defining issues of Spanish radicalism, led the emigrants to reject their usual pragmatic acceptance of Anglo-Australians' control of public radical discourse. Instead, they used a Spanish model of anarchist community networks to organise their compatriots and attempt to engage the wider public.

Spaniards' actions created a number of ruptures within the community. Those who accepted the prioritisation of Australian issues, and the need for Anglo-Australian help, were ostracised as traitors to the radical Spain of their parents' memories. Divisions also became accentuated regarding interpretations of anarchism, which aligned with regional traditions. Although these tensions were hidden from Anglo-Australian view, they remain significant. The differences reveal the inter-play between ethnicity and migrants' efforts to validate their marginalized political identity in the new homes.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term Anglo-Australian is used throughout to denote a common Anglo-Celtic heritage.

<sup>2</sup> For the exception, see Keene, 'The Word Makes the Man', 311-329.

---

<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Macknade Letter Book, Aug 8, 1907, Noel Butlin Archive Centre, Canberra (hereafter NBAC), CSR Co. Z303-142.

<sup>5</sup> Macknade Letter Book, Aug 8, 1907, NBAC, CSR Co. Z303-142.

<sup>6</sup> Adelman, 'State and Labour in Argentina', 75.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of those who worked in the UK see: Ramon Ribes, interview with author, Nov 27, 2004, Mossman, Queensland; Application for Registration, National Archives of Australia, Brisbane (hereafter NAA B), BP4-3 Spanish Navarro E; Application for Registration, NAA B, BP4-3 Spanish Espinola J; Application for Registration, NAA B, BP4-3 Spanish Cordero D G. For samples of those who worked in France see José Paronella, interview with author, Nov 28, 2004, Kairi, Queensland; Giordano Prats, Police surveillance, NAA B, BP242-1 Q25027.

<sup>8</sup> 'Crónicas escritas en mi estancia en el norte de Queensland, Australia', Torrents, Salvador Torrents Papers, James Cook University Special Collection (hereafter JCU), ST 5-7. For one example of the journeys that brought migrants to Australia via the US and Cuba see Ramon Porta Papers, State Library of Victoria, Manuscript Collection, MS 10568.

<sup>9</sup> 'Conversaciones comentadas sobres el ideal anarquico entres los compañeros de Lyon', JCU, ST 5-13.

<sup>10</sup> Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain*, 36.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Investigation Branch to Home and Territories Department, Feb 16, 1923, Mackay, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A435 1946-4-6645.

<sup>12</sup> Cain, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 60; Report by Boyland of Waterside Workers' Federation, Undated, Innisfail, Queensland State Archives, RSI 13214-1-586.

<sup>13</sup> Douglass, *Azúcar Amargo*, 148.

<sup>14</sup> 'Catholic Spaniard Describes Franco's Bandits', *North Queensland Guardian* (hereafter *NQG*), Sep 2, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Trapp and Vince Cuartero, Interview with author, Aug 31, 2007, Innisfail, Queensland.

<sup>16</sup> Eliseo Zamora, interview with Amirah Inglis, NBAC, Q47-2.

<sup>17</sup> A popular local lawyer, Fred Patterson became Australia's first, and only, Communist member of parliament when he won the Queensland state seat of Bowen in 1944. Menghetti, 'Frederick Woolnough Patterson'.

- 
- <sup>18</sup> Celia Gallego, Undated, North Queensland Oral History Project, Interview ID 599.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Poignant Appeal from Franco Victim', *NQG*, Feb 17, 1939.
- <sup>20</sup> Handwritten notes on Coldicutt, Undated, NBAC, Q 47-2.
- <sup>21</sup> Fernandez-Shaw, *España y Australia*, 320.
- <sup>22</sup> Palmer Diary, Oct 17, 1936, National Library of Australia (hereafter, NLA), 1174-16-18.
- <sup>23</sup> Palmer Diary, Nov 11, 1936, NLA, 1174-16-18.
- <sup>24</sup> Raymond Jordana, interview with Alan Frost, 1984, Innisfail, Queensland, Alan Frost Collection, Tape 2 (by kind consent of Prof. Alan Frost).
- <sup>25</sup> Palmer Diary, Apr 7, 1937, NLA, 1174-16-19.
- <sup>26</sup> Keene, 'A Symbolic Crusade', 143. The following quotation is from Palmer, *Australians in Spain*, 28.
- <sup>27</sup> Innisfail Police Report, Nov 14, 1940, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, A659 1941-1-2088.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Letter from Gordonvale Police Station to Police Inspector in Cairns, Jun 14, 1940, NAA B, BP 242-1 Q18337.
- <sup>30</sup> Letter from Ingham Police Station to CIB Brisbane, Dec 5, 1940, NAA B, BP 242-1 Q25027.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Españoles Residentes en Australia', International Anti-Fascist Solidarity: Australian Section, Unnamed Paper, Undated, JCU, ST 5-17.
- <sup>32</sup> Ray Jordana, interview with Alan Frost, 1984, Innisfail, Queensland, Alan Frost Collection, Tape 2.
- <sup>33</sup> Report of Spanish Relief Campaign, Dec 8, 1937, NBAC, P15-7-2.
- <sup>34</sup> Handwritten notes on Coldicutt film tour, undated, NBAC, Q47-2.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter from Gordonvale Police Station to Police Inspector in Cairns, Jun 14, 1940, NAA B, BP242-1 Q18337.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Notice of Objection, Gaythorne Internment Camp, Nov 3, 1940, NAA B, BP242-1 Q18337.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Españoles residente en Australia', International Anti-fascist Solidarity: Australian Section, Unnamed Paper, Undated, JCU, ST 5-17.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Españoles residente en Australia', International Anti-fascist Solidarity: Australian Section, Unnamed Paper, Undated, JCU, ST 5-17.
- <sup>40</sup> IAS Leaflet, NBAC, Q 47-3.
- <sup>41</sup> IAS Leaflet, NBAC, Q 47-3.

- 
- <sup>42</sup> Letter from 'KC' to 'PTT', Oct 26, 1938, NBAC, Q47-3.
- <sup>43</sup> Letter from 'KC' to 'PTT', Oct 26, 1938, NBAC, Q47-3.
- <sup>44</sup> Letter from G. C. Wickbold to Trinidad Garcia, October 1938, Innisfail, NBAC, Q47-3.
- <sup>45</sup> 'Loyalists Supported', *Argus*, Oct 1, 1936, NBAC, Q 47-2.
- <sup>46</sup> 'Desde Australia', Torrents, *Cultura Proletaria*, Undated, JCU, ST 5-17.
- <sup>47</sup> Raymond Jordana, interview with Alan Frost, 1984, Innisfail, Queensland, Alan Frost Collection, Tape 5.
- <sup>48</sup> Raymond Jordana, interview with Alan Frost, 1984, Innisfail, Queensland, Alan Frost Collection, Tape 5.
- <sup>49</sup> Emilio Duran Memoirs, 115 (by kind consent of Mr Emil Duran).
- <sup>50</sup> Keene, 'A Spanish Springtime', 85.
- <sup>51</sup> Keene, 'A Spanish Springtime', 85.
- <sup>52</sup> Palmer Diary, May 15, 1938, NLA, 1174-16-20.
- <sup>53</sup> 'Rise of Spanish Communist Party', *Worker's Weekly*, Jul 16, 1937.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> 'Anarchist Murder Incident', *NQG*, Jul 17, 1937. The following quotation is taken from the same source.
- <sup>56</sup> 'Anarchist Murder Incident', *NQG*, Jul 17, 1937.
- <sup>57</sup> Kern, *Red Years Black Years*, 4.
- <sup>58</sup> 'Porque somos individuos', Torrents, JCU, ST 5-7.
- <sup>59</sup> 'Mi Anarquismo' Trabajo leído en el Centro Emancipación Anarchiste de Lyon por Salvador Torrents', JCU, ST 5-13.
- <sup>60</sup> He was arrested before he was able to implement his plan. South Johnstone Police Report, July 1927, Queensland State Archives, RSI 13214-1-730.
- <sup>61</sup> Korzeniewicz, 'The Labour Movement and the State in Argentina', 25.

## Bibliography

Adelman, Jeremy. 'State and Labour in Argentina: Portworkers in Buenos Aires 1910-1921'. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993): 73-102.

- 
- Cain, Frank. 'The Industrial Workers of the World: Aspects of Its Suppression in Australia, 1916-1919'. *Labour History* 42 (1982): 54-62.
- Casanova, Julian. *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain: 1931-1939*. Translated by Andrew Pollock and Graham Dowling. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.
- Douglass, William A. *Azúcar Amargo: Vida y Fortuna de los Cortadores de Caña Italianos y Vascos en la Australia Tropical*. Bilbao: Servicio Editorial Universidad del País Vasco, 1996.
- Fernandez-Shaw, Carlos. *España y Australia: Quinientos Años de Relaciones*. Madrid: Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales y Científicas Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España, 2000.
- Francis, Hywel. *Miners against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984.
- Keene, Judith. 'A Spanish Springtime: Aileen Palmer and the Spanish Civil War'. *Labour History* 52 (1987): 75-87.
- '. 'A Symbolic Crusade: Australians and the Spanish Civil War'. In *La Mistica Spagnola: Spagna America Latina*, ed. G. Massa, 141-155. Rome: Centro di Studi Americanistici, 1989.
- '. "'The Word Makes the Man': A Catalan Anarchist Autodidact in the Australian Bush'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 47, no. 3 (2001): 311-29.
- Kern, Robert W. *Red Years Black Years: A Political History of Spanish Anarchism, 1911-1937*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978.
- Korzeniewicz, Roberto P. 'The Labour Movement and the State in Argentina'. *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 8, no. 1 (1989): 25-45.
- Menghetti, Diane. 'Frederick Woolnough Patterson'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.  
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A150669b.htm>. (accessed October 6, 2008).
- Palmer, Nettie. *Australians in Spain*. Sydney: Spanish Relief Committee, 1938.